PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 371

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
2 July—13 July 2001

£70

CAMBRIDGESHIRE
LIBRARIES

Cam Ref

320 (02/02)

ISBN 0 215 65000 X

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP, June 2001

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP

Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP

Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP

Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP

Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP

Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and The Regions—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers, MP

Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP

Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP

Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP

Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP

Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP

Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Williams of Mostyn, QC

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—The Rt. Hon. Patricia Hewitt, MP

Secretary of State for Education and Skills—The Rt. Hon. Estelle Morris, MP

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP

Minister without Portfolio—The Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Cabinet Office—

Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Macdonald of Tradeston

Ministers of State—

Mrs. Barbara Roche, MP

The Baroness Morgan

Parliamentary Secretary—Christopher Leslie, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP

Ministers of State—

The Rt. Hon. Richard Caborn, MP (Minister for Sport)

The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Blackstone (Minister for the Arts)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—

Dr. Kim Howells, MP

Defence—

Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP

Minister of State—

The Rt. Hon. Adam Ingram

Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—The Lord Bach, Dr. Lewis Moonie, MP

Education and Skills—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Estelle Morris, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for School Standards—Stephen Timms, Esq, MP

Minister for Lifelong Learning—Ms Margaret Hodge, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Baroness Ashton of Upholland

Ivan Lewis, Esq, MP

John Healey, Esq, MP

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP

Minister for Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Alun Michael, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Elliot Morley, Esq, MP

The Lord Whitty

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Trade—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean

Minister for Europe—Peter Hain Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Ben Bradshaw Esq, MP

The Baroness Amos

Denis MacShane Esq, MP

Health—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

John Hutton, Esq, MP

Jacqui Smith, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

Ms Hazel Blears, MP

Yvette Cooper, MP

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE— The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs—The Rt. Hon. John Denham, MP

Minister for Prisons—The Rt. Hon. Keith Bradley, MP

Minister for Asylum and Immigration—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Rooker

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Ms Beverley Hughes, MP

Robert Ainsworth, Esq, MP

Angela Eagle, MP

International Development—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Hilary Benn, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—

ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Lord Goldsmith, QC

SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP

ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Dr. Lynda Clark, QC, MP

Lord Chancellor's Department—

LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg, QC

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—

The Baroness Scotland of Asthal, QC

Michael Wills, Esq, MP

Ms Rosie Winterton, MP

Northern Ireland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Jane Kennedy, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
Desmond Browne, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Dawn Primarolo, MP

Privy Council Office—
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Stephen Twigg, Esq, MP

Scotland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—George Foulkes, Esq, MP

Trade and Industry—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Patricia Hewitt, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness—Douglas Alexander, Esq, MP
Minister for Trade—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister for Industry and Energy—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP
Minister for Employment and the Regions—Alan Johnson, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Sainsbury of Turville
Miss Melanie Johnson, MP
Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP

Transport, Local Government and the Regions—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Transport—John Spellar, Esq, MP
Minister for Local Government—The Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford, MP
Minister for Housing and Planning—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
David Jamieson, Esq, MP
Ms Sally Keeble, MP
Dr. Alan Whitehead, MP

Treasury—
PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Dawn Primarolo, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Paul Boateng, MP
ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Ms Ruth Kelly, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
LORDS COMMISSIONERS—
Mrs. Anne McGuire, MP
John Heppell, Esq, MP
Tony McNulty, Esq, MP
Nick Ainger, Esq, MP
Graham Stringer, Esq, MP
ASSISTANT WHIPS—
Ian Pearson, Esq, MP
Fraser Kemp, Esq, MP
Angela Smith, MP
Ivor Caplin, Esq, MP
Jim Fitzpatrick, Esq, MP
Phil Woolas, Esq, MP
Dan Norris, MP

Wales Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Don Touhig, Esq, MP

Work and Pensions—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Work—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP

Minister for Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Ian McCartney, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Hollis of Heigham

Malcolm Wicks, Esq, MP

Maria Eagle, MP

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Luce, GCVO

LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD

MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Vestey

TREASURER—Keith Hill, Esq, MP

COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Gerry Sutcliffe, Esq, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carter

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey

LORDS IN WAITING— The Lord Davies of Oldham, The Lord Grocott, The Lord Filkin, The Lord Bassam of Brighton

BARONESS IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICERS AND STAFF

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Michael J. Martin, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mrs. Sylvia Heal, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Sir Michael Lord MP

CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—
Mrs. Irene Adams, MP, David Amess, Esq, MP, Joe Benton, Esq, MP, John Butterfill, Esq, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Derek Conway, Esq, MP, John Cummings, Esq, MP, Roger Gale, Esq, MP, Win Griffiths, Esq, MP, Mike Hancock, Esq, MP, Jimmy Hood, Esq, MP, Alan Hurst, Esq, MP, Eric Illsley, Esq, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, Humfrey Malins, Esq, MP, Bill O'Brien, Esq, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Bill Olner, Esq, MP, Peter L. Pike, Esq, MP, Mrs. Marion Roe, MP, Jonathan Sayeed, Esq, MP, George Stevenson, Esq, MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP, Mrs. Angela Browning, MP, Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Stuart Bell, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Eric Forth, MP,
SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION —M. R. Jack, PhD

AUDIT COMMITTEE
Mrs. Angela Browning, MP, (Chairman), Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Sir W. R. McKay, CB (Chief Executive), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), Sir Thomas S. Legg, KCB, QC

SECRETARY OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE Mrs. S. A. R. Davies

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—
Sir W. R. McKay, CB, (Chief Executive), G. Cubie (Clerk of Committees, Department of the Clerk of the House), M. J. A. Cummins (Serjeant at Arms), Miss P. J. Baines (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT— R. J. Ware, DPhil

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Sir Nicolas Bevan, CB

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—J. E. G. Vaux

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon A. R. Wright

MEDICAL ADVISER TO THE SPEAKER—Dr. R. Zeegen, OBE, FRCP, MRCS, DObst, RCOG

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Elizabeth Filkin

2 July 2001

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 371**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 2 July 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Members Sworn

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation required by law:

Bill Etherington, Sunderland, North
Robert Jackson, Wantage

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Police Manpower

1. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): How many police officers were serving on 7 June 2001; and how many there were on 1 May 1997. [610]

9. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): If he will call for a report on police numbers in Greater Manchester. [619]

12. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement about police manpower in London. [622]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I last announced the figures on 28 June. There were 125,519 officers in post and, as I announced in the Queen's Speech debate last Wednesday, there were 127,158 officers at the same time in 1997. Numbers nationally have increased by 1,349 in the past 12 months—the largest annual increase for 13 years.

Greater Manchester police has 6,909 officers—an increase of 115 officers on this time last year. In London, comparisons are distorted by boundary changes with Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey; as a result, the figure of 24,878 is 607 down on a year ago, but up by 183 in the past six months.

Mr. Gray: In the run-up to the 1997 general election, the Labour party promised thousands more officers on the beat, but, as we have just heard from the Secretary of State, the reality is that the number has fallen by 1,639 while it has been in office and resignations have increased. Resignations are running at 81 per cent. across the police. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members are not all that good at statistics. Resignations have risen by 81 per cent. That is exactly correct; those are the figures.

In a spirit of helpfulness, may I suggest one way in which the Secretary of State could stop that haemorrhage in the police force? The police in North Wiltshire—a relatively prosperous area—are 30 people undermanned simply because police pay and conditions have not kept up with other pay and conditions in the area, as they are set nationally with the sole exception of those for the Metropolitan police. Will the Secretary of State consider allowing the chief constable of Wiltshire to set pay and

conditions separately for Wiltshire and other chief constables throughout the country to do the same for their forces?

Mr. Blunkett: I am very pleased indeed that, despite the tale of woe, the crime figures show a 9.5 per cent. drop on the previous set of statistics—for which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is deeply grateful. As hon. Members know, we are embarking on a reform package, which will, of course, have to be considered by the police negotiating body in the usual way. I hope that we can consider how to recruit more effectively because the 76 additional officers allocated to Wiltshire in the crime fighting fund review would then be more easily attainable.

Mr. Lloyd: My right hon. Friend's comments about increased police numbers for Greater Manchester will be very welcome, but crime has gone up in the city of Manchester and the issue is right at the top of the agenda.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the case of my 84-year-old constituent, Florrie Birch? She was mugged last week by a young thug, who broke her hip. It took 20 minutes for a glazier to turn up to repair broken glass and it took 20 minutes for an ambulance to arrive. However, it took two and a quarter hours for the police to respond. My constituents tell me all the time that police responses are not adequate. Although we want more policing, we want better-managed policing so that the public receive the service to which they are entitled. Will my right hon. Friend help me and my constituents by responding to that legitimate plea?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is right that we should increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the police. The fact that police numbers in Greater Manchester will rise by next spring to 7,100 will assist, but the management and effective deployment of the force will be crucial.

I am personally sorry for Florrie Birch, and I am sure that the chief constable is also sorry, given the juxtaposition that my hon. Friend described in terms of the service received.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I sincerely congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new appointment, but may I remind him that there is no doubt that the number of police officers in the borough of Barnet has declined sharply while the level of crime has gone up? Does he recognise that, apart from the problems caused by early retirement, the Metropolitan police force faces the specific difficulty that it is unable to stop police officers being transferred of their own will to police forces in other parts of the country? Will he assure me that he is tackling the problem and that he will provide incentives so that police officers do not transfer to other police forces?

Mr. Blunkett: My predecessor as Home Secretary addressed strongly the issue of providing incentives to police officers. An uplift in special payments was made, and that is one reason why the Metropolitan police force is optimistic that it will be able to recruit more than 2,000 extra officers in the forthcoming period. The hon. Gentleman will know from his discussions with Commander Sue Akers that we face a real challenge, and it is one that we must face together.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) spoke about the recruitment difficulties faced by the Met. I represent a constituency that is five miles outside that area, but it has the same crime levels. In contrast to the hon. Gentleman's area, police officers in my area do not receive the extra benefits in terms of pay and costs of travel that Met officers receive. There is a recruitment crisis in areas around London—particularly in areas such as Slough that have high crime levels—and my judgment is that the police negotiating board has not addressed the problem sufficiently seriously. In coming new to this responsibility, will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will take steps to make sure that the board will consider such issues when it discusses police pay shortly?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend knows that I am very familiar with the problems of areas just outside that covered by the Met. I spent four years dealing with similar problems facing teachers.

There is a problem that must be addressed, but it must be considered in the context of the 77 per cent. increase in recruitment and the substantial targets that we have set for retaining and recruiting officers. I spoke about this issue in the debate last Wednesday, when I referred to a target of 130,000 by 2004. I hope that we will be able to exceed that, and I hope that we shall be able to do so evenly, and so ensure that people, wherever they live, receive the policing that they deserve.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Since taking up his new responsibilities, on which I warmly congratulate him, has the Home Secretary asked his Department to make up-to-date comparisons with other countries in north America or on the continent of Europe on the number of police officers per head of population? Even at this early stage, does he have any thoughts on whether the numbers that he is talking about rather optimistically will come anywhere near meeting the requirements and expectations of our hard-pressed city and rural communities?

Mr. Blunkett: We are always interested to learn what is taking place in north America. The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), met a senior police commissioner at the beginning of last week, and it seems to us that effective policing and effective management of policing are as important as the critical issue of raising numbers.

Not only have I made a comparison with north America, but I have compared police numbers in South Yorkshire with other areas of the country. Given its numbers, the force in South Yorkshire is doing a phenomenal job.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in addition to the 83 extra police officers in Suffolk who are being provided by the Government's crime fighting fund, Suffolk police authority is funding a further 100 officers from the council tax, having asked local people whether they wanted to pay a little more to get them? The fruits of that policy can be seen in the

Lowestoft sector of my constituency, where 500 fewer crimes occurred last year than in the previous year. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Suffolk police authority, the chief constable of Suffolk and the Lowestoft sector commander, John Everett, for deciding to do that, and will he commend the policy to other police authorities?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the considerable progress that has been made in London recruitment has been entirely negated by the high number of retirements and resignations, which amounted to 1,100 in the last financial year? What measures is he proposing to improve retention, and is he seriously considering retaining retired officers on a part-time basis?

Mr. Blunkett: I have the facility as an incoming Home Secretary to consider any measures to retain and improve occupational health and prevent seepage from the police force. I am prepared to receive suggestions from hon. Members on both sides of the House and will discuss those with the Police Federation, as I am doing later this week.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): As the Home Secretary told my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) that the number of regular officers is now 1,639 fewer than at the same time in 1997, will he give the comparative figures for specials?

Mr. Blunkett: No, because I do not have them with me. However, I shall happily refer to the right hon. Lady's previous questions to the former Home Secretary so that I can remind her of his answers.

Miss Widdecombe: Perhaps I can assist the Home Secretary. There are 7,500 fewer special constables than in May 1997. Given that there are more than 1,600 fewer regulars and more than 7,000 fewer specials, what comfort can he give to people who suffer from menacing activities? I have in mind the reports in today's newspapers of someone who was harassed literally to death. That person, to whom I referred in the Queen's Speech debate last week, was harassed so often that he put the police number on his "Friends and Family" list with BT. Such harassment occurs daily and makes people's lives a living hell, in particular—although not exclusively—on big estates. As this is likely to be the last question that I ask him from the Dispatch Box, can he give a straightforward explanation of what he will do for people who live in those conditions?

Mr. Blunkett: I am deeply sorry that this is likely to be the last question that the right hon. Lady asks me from the Dispatch Box and I wish her well in whatever guise she takes on in the House.

There is no party political divide on the desire to protect people from the circumstances that were described in this morning's papers. We all want to do that and give people the support that they deserve quickly and effectively. That is why last Wednesday I gave a clear commitment to provide a rapid improvement in the recruitment and retention of police and why, in addition to uniformed police, there are 1,577 additional non-uniformed staff in the police service compared with last year. Those people matter because they improve the management and effectiveness of the delivery of the uniformed service.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My right hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that Gloucestershire has more police than in 1997, but we need a proper debate on the visibility of the police and the effectiveness of the way in which they operate, which is no less relevant to rural areas. More than anything, we need a proper reform of the way in which we fund policing, especially in the light of the previous Tory Government's failure to fund police authorities properly.

Mr. Blunkett: That is absolutely true. It is why the additional money from the spending review, £500 million in the coming year and £300 million the year after, will be good news for everyone who wants us to tackle head-on the disorder, antisocial behaviour and thuggery that make people's lives a misery.

Police Authorities (League Tables)

2. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): What proposals he has to introduce league tables for performance for police authorities in Wales. [611]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): There are currently no plans to publish performance data specifically for Welsh police authorities. However, recorded crime statistics, to be released later this month, will be published in families of comparable basic command units and crime and disorder reduction partnerships. That will allow comparison of local police performance with similar areas elsewhere in England and Wales.

Mr. Thomas: I hope that such proposals do not emerge and that there are no league tables for police performance in Wales. Will the Minister say a little more about the performance indicators that he mentioned? How can they measure non-numerative advances in policing? I think especially of progress in restorative justice and in community policing, such as today's decision not to prosecute people for the possession of cannabis in parts of London, and the steps being taken in decision-led policing, which is increasingly being used in a sophisticated approach to solving crime. How can any performance measures take account of those? Does the Minister have anything to say about the use of performance measures to enhance the retention of police officers?

Mr. Denham: I agree that modern policing requires the effective use of resources, which must be devoted to the right targets to ensure that we are tackling and reducing crime. It is important that performance indicators, which are used, for example, in best value, are capable of capturing a range of different measures of the effectiveness of the police and of reinforcing best practice.

In the near future, we will consult the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities on the indicators to be used in the coming year. The public, who pay for the police service, have a right to a range of useful information about the

effectiveness of the police and our success or failure in the fight against crime, so that they know whether their local police are doing well or whether their performance needs to be improved.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does my right hon. Friend think that it was a sensible use of police time for a Welsh police authority, two years ago, to have prosecuted and subsequently jailed two men for using cannabis, although they were suffering from severe illnesses? That drug is now being decriminalised in parts of London. Is it right that the police are doing the job that we politicians have dodged? Is it sensible to have creeping decriminalisation by postcode? Should we not stop wasting the time of the police, the jails and the courts in prosecuting people for using a drug that is far less dangerous than alcohol or tobacco?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is wrong about the position in London. In Brixton, the divisional commander has made a decision about the use of police resources so that he can prioritise those crimes that do most damage to the community, particularly the peddling of hard drugs. It is not the case that cannabis has been decriminalised or the law changed. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has expressed his interest in the experiment in Brixton and his belief that resources need to be targeted at hard drugs. My hon. Friend knows well that there is a research programme dealing with the potential medicinal use of cannabis or its extracts that is akin to the research for any prescribable drug. We all await the results of those tests.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does the Minister agree that we need league tables for English and Welsh police authorities if we are to spread best practice, as we must? Will he confirm, however, that he cares about the independence of all police authorities?

Mr. Denham: Nothing that has been said by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or any other Minister in this Government has suggested that we should remove the operational autonomy of chief constables. It is quite right that we should publish information showing how well the police service is performing and, through the new standards unit, be able to identify best practice and ensure that it is spread as quickly and effectively as possible across police forces throughout England and Wales.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

3. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): If he will make a statement on the number of antisocial behaviour orders that have been successfully sought since their introduction. [612]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend.

Up to 31 March this year, 214 antisocial behaviour orders had been issued across England and Wales. Thirty-three of the 43 police authority areas have been responsible for their issue. I hope very much that there will be an acceleration in that programme.

Kevin Brennan: Will my right hon. Friend be able to take steps to ensure a much more widespread use of antisocial behaviour orders? Does he share my concern that I have come across many people in my constituency who have been disappointed that the police and the local authority are not making greater use of such orders, which, together with measures to tackle the causes of crime, represent a potent weapon in the fight against crime and disorder?

Mr. Blunkett: *Yes, I do. I am sorry that it looks as* though only one antisocial behaviour order has so far been issued in my hon. Friend's area. I hope that, by examining any suggestions for slimming down the procedures and speeding up the process, we shall be able to persuade local authorities and the police to take them up. Of course, they are civil orders—and were opposed for that reason—as opposed to criminal orders, which are available as part of broader community sentencing.

I read in *The Times* this morning an article that suggested that I was about to abandon antisocial behaviour orders. The article was full of all sorts of other inaccuracies. I want to make it clear that, far from abandoning them, I want to strengthen them and spread them more widely.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Three years ago, when considering the proposals in Committee, I warned the Government that antisocial behaviour orders would be unworkable and over-bureaucratic. Ministers responded that more than 5,000 would probably be made every year. Is not the fact that only just over 200 have been made evidence that this flagship policy has been an utter failure and flop? What will the Government do to stop these orders? They are an absolute waste of time.

Mr. Blunkett: So, we have someone who warned before the orders were introduced that they would be a failure, and who now thinks that, because the procedures adopted are not in line with what he believes, the orders are a failure—even though more than 200 have been issued and only 10 per cent. have failed to achieve their goal, which is a tremendous record compared with other aspects of the application of the law. Other Conservative Members want us to slim down the procedure so that the orders might be used more effectively. I wonder which faction the hon. Gentleman will be backing and which of the candidates for the leadership are for or against antisocial behaviour orders. On the Government Benches, we are wholeheartedly in favour of using them to protect people in the neighbourhoods and on the estates that are bedevilled by crime.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): May I assure my right hon. Friend that antisocial behaviour orders are working—despite what is said from the Opposition Benches? In Dudley, some eight have been issued already and another seven are in the pipeline. They are having a ripple effect in the community. However, there are some technical problems. One is non-appearance by defendants. Cases can of course be proved in absence, but there is a reluctance among the authorities to do so because that means releasing to defendants the details of complainants.

Will my right hon. Friend look at some of the technical problems to ensure that antisocial behaviour orders have a beneficial effect in all parts of the UK?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right, and yes we will.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Like the constituents of a number of Members, some of my constituents—some elderly and others young families—are having their lives made a misery by the activities of neighbouring households. The right hon. Gentleman has, effectively, challenged my right hon. Friends and I on what we would do to deal with such people. The way is to make it easier to have them evicted. The one prospect that really puts fear into those people is that of eviction. No one should be allowed to use security of tenure as an excuse to enable them to continue to terrorise their neighbours.

Mr. Blunkett: One thing that is undeniable is that a considerably greater number of people whose lives are bedevilled by antisocial behaviour by their neighbours come to Labour Members' surgeries—including mine—than come to most Opposition Members' surgeries. That is because the incidence of such crime and nuisance tends to lie in areas of greatest disadvantage, and that is why we are totally committed to doing something about it. I shall co-ordinate plans with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to take whatever steps are necessary—whether using social housing or some other means—to ensure that we get such measures in place. However, simply evicting people, without a court order, would be denounced overnight by the Opposition—and quite rightly, too.

Criminal Assets (Confiscation)

4. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What plans he has to confiscate the assets of serious criminals. [613]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): As part of our manifesto commitment to crack down on crime, we announced the proceeds of crime Bill in the Queen's Speech. The Bill will attack the profit motive that drives organised crime. It will reform confiscation procedures, modernise the criminal law on money laundering, establish an agency with powers to recover criminal assets—including through a new form of civil litigation—extend the provisions for forfeiture of cash derived from or intended for use in crime, and provide for the taxation of criminal gains.

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware that there has been substantial investment in the new Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, which has been welcomed universally by those in my constituency who try to fight drugs. However, a drug knows no boundaries, so how does my hon. Friend envisage his Department's scope in relation to the Scottish Executive in fighting that evil trade throughout the whole country?

Mr. Ainsworth: I can assure my hon. Friend that the proceeds of crime Bill will apply in Scotland as well as in England and Wales. We are discussing its provisions with, and have received full co-operation from, members of the Scottish Executive. That consultation process will continue to make absolutely certain that there are no loopholes when dealing with the purveyors of organised crime, many of whom are involved in drugs trafficking.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The Minister will probably know that in the Republic of Ireland there is a Criminal Assets Bureau dealing with confiscation of such assets. Is he aware that many of those who have dealt with the bureau—myself included—believe that the balance is tilted too much in favour of the bureau? It is very important to establish law that ensures that, if there is to be a confiscation of criminal assets, the burden of proving the fact that they are indeed criminal assets must rest firmly on those seeking the order, and that the standard of proof is a high one. Otherwise, injustice will be done.

Mr. Ainsworth: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has studied the Irish experience, he will know that our country's record on the recovery of the proceeds of crime is not good. Taking into account the different sizes of economies, we recover about a quarter of that which the United States recovers, and about a tenth of that which Ireland manages to recover. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman supports our general thrust, which is to make certain that we bear down on the profits of crime and that we improve our record considerably.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): In my constituency, historically, many problems were sorted out down the pit, but a previous Government shut the vast majority of the pits in my constituency. Can we expect this Government to continue to pursue stronger policies that will lead to the harassment of the harassers and allow ordinary, decent people in my constituency to go about their business in peace?

Mr. Ainsworth: The proceeds of crime Bill is about bearing down on organised crime rather than issues of harassment. I assure my hon. Friend that it should apply underground as well as overground.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I welcome the Minister and his right hon. and hon. Friends to their new posts. Does he recognise that the Government have created a problem for themselves with their proposals, given that the Prime Minister decided that none of the previous Home Office Ministers should continue in their posts, so the entire team was either promoted, moved or fired; and given that the new team of which the hon. Gentleman is a part does not have a single legal qualification among its members?

Does the Minister recognise that Labour's friends among human rights lawyers are already pointing out to *The Guardian* that the Government's only Human Rights Act—that of 1998—will make it difficult for the new Bill to be compatible with that Act? Does the hon. Gentleman recognise also that there is a real issue about confiscating the assets of those who have never been convicted by a criminal court? How does he reckon that he can square the circle between confiscating the assets of those who are convicted and confiscating the assets of those who have never faced a criminal conviction?

Mr. Ainsworth: We will introduce the Bill after the summer recess. I hope that we will have the co-operation of Opposition Members, even if they are legally qualified. We shall obviously seek to ensure that our proposals are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998. I have confidence that we shall be able to do so.

Youth Inclusion

5. **Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): If he will make a statement on the effectiveness of youth inclusion projects in high-crime areas. [614]

The Minister for Prisons (Mr. Keith Bradley): There are currently 64 youth inclusion projects helping about 3,500 hard-to-reach young people in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England and Wales.

We expect the evaluation report in the autumn. Meanwhile, early indications from the first wave of projects, which started in April 2000, are encouraging. They point to reduced crime, development of local delivery capacity and increased local community engagement. Burglary has been reduced by an average of 14 per cent. and criminal damage by a third.

Jim Dobbin: I thank the Minister and welcome him to his new post. Does he agree that it is vital to involve young people in constructive activities, such as the programme called "make a difference", which was introduced by the chief constable for Greater Manchester and which encourages schools to take part in community environmental projects and community security projects for pensioners, to refer to only two examples? There is also the youth inclusion project on the Langley estate in Middleton in my constituency, which does a similar job. Surely this is the way to re-engage young people with communities and to help to reduce youth crime.

Mr. Bradley: I welcome the initiative taken by Greater Manchester police and the fact that the youth inclusion project on the Langley estate has so far attracted about 200 young people—13 to 16-year-olds—in a variety of projects in the area, which I know well as a Manchester Member. The early feedback from the project shows a positive reaction from the young people, the workers who are involved and the volunteers who are also working with the scheme. I hope that we shall be able to extend it in future years, to ensure that we target more young people who are at risk in the community.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I understand that when Home Office Ministers arrived in the Department they were briefed that the two major issues of concern to the public were the amount of violent crime and the amount of recurring crime committed by young people, especially in urban areas. Evidence shows that many of the young people concerned live in areas of high unemployment with few prospects of alternative activity. Police clear-up rates are extremely low, being a quarter or less. The punishments that are normally given to the youngsters involved are noticeably unsuccessful at stopping early reoffending.

On behalf of the Home Secretary and his colleagues, will the Minister make it clear that what the Home Secretary indicated last week will be their policy—that they are willing to engage in a real debate across the parties and more widely about what works in terms of sentencing—and that we shall have an end to Home Office pronouncements by Home Office Ministers that amount to soundbites and gimmicks announced before consultation, which are adhered to irrespective of the weight of the evidence or of how unsuccessful they are?

Mr. Bradley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, while there are briefings in the Home Office when new Ministers arrive, we also brief ourselves from our experience in our own communities. Certainly, from my own experience in Manchester, I am aware that the issue of youth crime is of great importance. I only have to talk to my own constituents to be reinforced in our drive to ensure that we have effective policies, including sentencing policy, for that particular group. I can also repeat the Home Secretary's assurance and offer last week: that everyone in the House, of every party, is welcome to give their views on the matter. We want to develop measures consensually and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express positive views so that we can reflect on them before we introduce legislation.

Young Offenders (Drugs)

6. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What plans he has to ensure that all young offenders with drug problems are identified, assessed and treated for their drugs problems. [616]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): Our aim is to reduce repeat offending among all drug misusing offenders by 25 per cent. by 2005, and by 50 per cent. by 2008. For young offenders in particular, we have introduced a raft of measures to tackle the problem of drug abuse, including a comprehensive drug strategy for young offenders in prison; the Youth Justice Board is extending the drug treatment programmes and services available to juveniles. In addition, we have introduced the drug treatment and testing order, a new community sentence targeted at problem drug users aged 16 and over.

Mr. Borrow: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. In Leyland, in my constituency, there is genuine concern that young people with drug problems who are not classed as young offenders still have to wait far too long to get access to drug treatment; they often have to leave Leyland and go to other places to get treatment. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that local drug services be readily available, both for offenders and non-offending young people with drug problems? I am highlighting Leyland in my constituency, but such problems exist in many areas, which is unacceptable. If the drug strategy on which the Cabinet Office, the Home Office and the Department of Health are working is to be effective, those waiting times need to be speeded up and access to facilities improved.

Beverley Hughes: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend, not least because we want to prevent young people who may be misusing substances from getting into offending. My hon. Friend therefore makes an important point, and I commend him on the interest that he has taken in the issue in his own constituency. Under the 10-year strategy, £153 million has been allocated to young

people's services over the next three years. Only £24 million of that sum is for youth justice; the rest is to be used to develop non-offending specific services for young people. The new National Treatment Agency, established in April, will oversee that development.

My hon. Friend is right: because we recognised the unevenness of provision across the country, the Government took that initiative last year. I can also tell him that, at the very least, a new community drugs team is planned for Leyland, in addition to the Chorley team, which will begin to have an impact soon.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I congratulate the Minister on her appointment. Do she and her right hon. Friend the Home Secretary rule out any possibility whatever, during their tenure at the Home Office, of the decriminalisation of cannabis?

Beverley Hughes: Let me make it clear: in our 10-year national drug strategy, we had a top priority—

Mr. Bercow: Answer the question: yes or no.

Beverley Hughes: I shall answer the question in my own time and in my own way. Our priority is to deal with class A drugs, which do the greatest harm. The Government have no intention of legalising controlled drugs, but we are interested in the experiment in Lambeth and in what it can help us to understand about the effective policing of the drugs that do most damage to our young people.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Does my hon. Friend agree that many young offenders are multiple drug abusers, and that one of the drugs for which there seems to be insufficient detoxification units in London is alcohol? If the Government do not yet have an alcohol strategy ready, will she consider including the abuse of alcohol in the existing drugs strategy?

Beverley Hughes: I agree with my hon. Friend. So far, services for alcohol misusers have concentrated too much on adults and not sufficiently on young people. My hon. Friend will know that, by March next year, the new drug action teams are required to produce plans for their areas to deal with young people's substance misuse across the spectrum of drugs, including alcohol. In the light of those plans, we shall be discussing with the Department of Health what we need to do to put the focus on alcohol misuse. I agree with my hon. Friend that such a focus is necessary.

Police Recruitment (Hampshire)

7. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement about police recruitment in Hampshire. [617]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): Recruitment by Hampshire police has increased in each of the past two years. The force took on 192 new officers in 2000–01, compared with 152 in 1999–2000, and 117 in 1998–99. Hampshire has been allocated 243 recruits from the crime fighting fund over the three years to March 2003. The force recruited 19 CFF officers in 2000–01. The force's latest forecast is that it will take on 121 officers through the CFF in the current year.

Mr. Swayne: The Minister will be aware that crime in Hampshire is rising—it is up by 7 per cent. Notwithstanding what he said, there are fewer police officers in Hampshire than there were at the time of the 1997 election: we are running faster just to stand still. The Minister knows that the recruitment of officers under the crime fighting fund last year had to be deferred to this year because officers of the right calibre could not be found. Does that surprise him, given that a trainee manager at a McDonald's restaurant can earn more than a Hampshire police recruit?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman and I share a common interest in ensuring that Hampshire is successful in recruiting police officers, as we both represent Hampshire constituencies. The Hampshire constabulary was the first that I was able to visit and see at close hand after my appointment to my present job. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this year, which is the first year in which the impact of the new allowances agreed earlier this year will be felt, we will see the increase in recruitment to the Hampshire constabulary that everyone wants. Right across the country, police numbers are going up as a result of the ring-fenced funding—the crime fighting fund—that is going to the police force. Because those numbers are going up, we can be confident that we will achieve record numbers of police officers in England and Wales in the lifetime of this Parliament.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I wish I could share the Minister's optimism, but unfortunately in Romsey we are only too acutely aware of the decrease in police numbers, as we have lost seven officers recently. Bearing in mind the fact that many young police men and women in Hampshire cannot contribute to the police pension fund because they simply cannot manage on the money, and that the chief constable asked for £2,000 a year extra as the Hampshire weighting and that was not given, how will the Minister redress the problems that are not being resolved? Will he take notice of the chief constable of Hampshire?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Lady is also a Hampshire Member of Parliament, and it does not do a great deal for police recruitment in Hampshire to overstate its problems, as she has been doing. The wastage from the Hampshire police service is lower than in any of the other seven forces covered by the new allowance agreed by the police negotiating body. However, I assure the hon. Lady that I am not in any way complacent. Despite those figures, I hear stories and concerns, and I assure her that I will consider carefully whether there are any trends in recruitment or people leaving the force that we should be concerned about, so that we can make sure that we have the best practice in recruitment and retention in place in every police service.

I hope, for example, that in the not too distant future, Hampshire may be one of the areas that benefits from the new starter home initiative aimed at key public sector workers, although that decision and announcement are yet

to be made. We are continually examining ways of addressing the real issues that arise, but let us not overstate the current situation.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities. Does he agree that police morale is at the heart of the recruitment and retention problems both in Hampshire and across the country? Is he aware that there has been a very large increase every year in the number of officers who voluntarily resign from the regular police service and that the number of special constables—which is down by one third since 1997—has collapsed?

Does the Minister not understand why police are demoralised? Does he understand that they are demoralised when they see criminals who have been convicted and sentenced to months of imprisonment released in just weeks? Does he understand that they are demoralised when it takes them a whole shift to do the paperwork for one arrest? Does he understand that the time-wasting bureaucracy of the best value system as it currently operates is wasting police officers' time behind desks when they could be out on the streets doing their jobs?

Mr. Denham: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman about police morale. Whenever I meet front-line officers, I am struck by their commitment to the job that they are doing and by their love for the job. However, the hon. Gentleman was right on one point: front-line police officers express frustration about aspects of their job that prevent them from doing the job of policing as they would like. The hon. Gentleman mentioned bureaucracy. As he will know, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have already instituted a study of the daily diary of police officers on the front line to identify how that issue can be tackled.

Parts of the criminal justice system need overhauling. Changes to the sentencing regime, for example, were being discussed earlier in this Question Time, and we recognise that that issue needs to be tackled. It is also true that front-line officers often feel frustrated with the quality of support that they receive, including the equipment that is made available to them. I simply tell the hon. Gentleman that the commitment is there. We must support police officers. When there are real problems, we will tackle them.

Drug Abuse

10. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If he will set up a royal commission on drug abuse. [620]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I am not in favour of royal commissions and never have been. They are a way of putting off decisions that should be taken by those who carry responsibility for them. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes) said in answering Question 6, we are of course prepared to update and respond to information and advice, including that from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, in developing the 10-year drug strategy.

Mr. Kirkwood: I thank the Home Secretary for that reply. Does he not think that, halfway through the 10-year strategy, this is an appropriate time to stand back and examine the effectiveness of the current drug policy? The most recent independent inquiry was conducted 18 months ago by the Police Foundation, and some of the proposals that are now being implemented in Lambeth were recommended in that report by Ruth Runciman. Those recommendations have only now been accepted by the Government.

The circumstances surrounding the issue are changing almost daily. Last month, for example, *The Guardian* published a compelling series of articles by Nick Davies on the ineffectiveness of the Government's strategy. The Secretary of State may not be prepared to have a royal commission, but does he accept the need for an adult and open forum for discussion so that we can consider some of the consequences of this terrible scourge, including drug/crime links and better treatment for addicts?

Mr. Blunkett: I accept that there is room for an adult and sensible debate that has, as a common cause, the need to deal with the misuse of class A drugs, which bring misery to individuals, families and the wider community. The fact is that 30 per cent. of those who are arrested are found to have taken heroin or crack cocaine. In some parts of the country, the situation is desperate for the families involved. We all need to discuss the issues openly and sensibly, without blunt questions such as "yes or no: are you or are you not?", so that we can have sensible answers that respond to the public need.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): The trials for the medicinal use of cannabis have now entered their third phase, which suggests to me that it is highly likely that evidence will be available shortly that cannabis has medicinal properties. If that is proved to be the case later this year, will it lead to a reclassification of the substance?

Mr. Blunkett: There is a difference between the classification of the substance and the use of the residue in terms of medical application. I shall be interested to see the evidence as soon as possible on the latter point, and to deal with it accordingly.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I agree with the Home Secretary that royal commissions are just a way of playing issues into the long grass—appropriate, perhaps, for cannabis. Does the Home Secretary accept that the issue is becoming urgent? When statutes and penalties that are on the statute book are not being applied on the streets, that brings the law, the police force and, ultimately, this place into disrepute. Should not these matters be brought into line sooner rather than later?

Mr. Blunkett: I liked the joke. I noticed in an article in a newspaper for which I normally have a great deal of time that what is an experiment has been dubbed "chaotic policy". We need to monitor, and we need the police to use discretion without there being a feeling that the whole policy is unravelling. That is part of a sane and sensible debate. Credibility in terms of prioritisation of the use of police time and resources has to be applied on the ground, and it is, day in, day out; not just in terms of wider substance abuse, but in the way in which local communities are policed. Since taking office, I have heard

cries that, on the one hand, we should allow the police discretion and, on the other, that any discretion would somehow dismantle the overall policy.

Antisocial Behaviour

13. **Derek Twigg** (Halton): What measures he plans to introduce to tackle antisocial behaviour. [625]

14. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What plans he has to tackle antisocial behaviour in local communities. [626]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): The Government are determined to tackle antisocial behaviour and disorder and have taken a range of initiatives. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced crime and disorder partnerships, antisocial behaviour orders and changes to the youth justice system.

Derek Twigg: During the general election campaign, the biggest single issue raised with me was antisocial behaviour and nuisance caused by young people, from which the communities around Dundalk road and Our Lady's Roman Catholic church in particular have suffered over the last six months. One of the problems is that some parents—albeit a minority—think that there is nothing wrong with a 12, 13, 14 or 15-year-old having alcohol and being dropped off at a local trouble spot and left there until 11 or 12 o'clock at night. Clearly, there is a problem in terms of community involvement. What initiatives can be taken in this regard? In Widnes, on a number of weekend evenings, there have been only two police officers available to deal with the problems. While we are getting some extra officers in the near future, police numbers need to be increased substantially in areas such as mine.

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend is right, and anyone who has been on the doorsteps in the last month or two will have had the same experience. We all understand the importance of cracking down on disorder and antisocial behaviour. This matter needs to be taken seriously by parents, people in communities and the authorities. My hon. Friend may want to know that, in September, the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 will introduce provisions that will allow public drinking to be banned from particular areas. That will make it a lot easier for police enforcement, because there will not be a problem with local byelaws.

Vernon Coaker: Will my hon. Friend look at the measures that we as a Government can take to put pressure on local authorities to use the powers they have to tackle antisocial behaviour in their communities, in conjunction with the police? In particular, will my hon. Friend look at the powers that local authorities have to do something about antisocial tenants who sign a tenancy agreement that, frankly, as far as Gedling borough council is concerned—and, I am sure, many others—is not worth the paper it is written on, since the tenants continue to have noisy parties, to abuse their neighbours, to have untidy gardens and to carry on in a way that the vast majority of law-abiding citizens find an absolute disgrace?

Angela Eagle: I am not sure that we should have compulsory gardening, much as I would like that. However, we need to take the issue seriously. On 1 October, there will be new housing and land rules that will enable courts to deal with serious harassment more quickly. There is also an issue in the private sector that has yet to be tackled.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Minister appreciate that most people concerned with tackling antisocial behaviour want not new initiatives but more police officers? Since the Labour Government came to office, the Thames Valley force has increased its strength by just eight officers. Indeed, over the past year, the number of officers in the area fell by 37.

I endorse everything said by the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) earlier. There is indeed a serious problem in the Thames valley. May I ask the Home Secretary, through the Minister, whether he will receive an all-party delegation of Members from the Thames valley after the summer recess to discuss the issue? It is not a matter on which any of us wants to make party political points, but there is serious concern about police strength, recruitment and retention in the area. It is no good the Government coming up with more and more initiatives on antisocial behaviour if there are simply not the officers there to enforce them.

Angela Eagle: It is important, when people are having the life tormented out of them by antisocial behaviour, that the police and local authorities take it seriously and take responsibility for dealing with it, ensuring that such behaviour stops. That is where antisocial behaviour orders can be very useful. Clearly, Home Office Ministers will receive delegations from Members who want to present information to them. I am sure that, if the hon. Gentleman gets in touch with my right hon. Friend, he will be on his way to the Home Office—at least, as part of a delegation—after the summer.

Northern Ireland

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on recent developments in Northern Ireland.

As the House will know, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) resigned as First Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly with effect from yesterday. I regret his resignation, and the reasons that brought it about. He has played a courageous part in the process so far and will, I am sure, continue to do so. Under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which implemented the devolution arrangements in the Good Friday agreement, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) automatically ceases to hold office as Deputy First Minister at the same time. Both have provided distinguished leadership to the devolved Executive over the past year or more—a year in which the four parties in the Executive have worked together to tackle real problems on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Under the Act, the Assembly must hold an election to fill the vacant offices of First and Deputy First Minister within six weeks. In the meantime, the functions of both offices can be exercised, but if that period expires without a successful election, I am obliged to propose a date for fresh Assembly elections.

We face a serious and sombre situation in Northern Ireland, but I think that it is right at the outset to recall the progress that we have already made: a new Assembly; devolution of power to a cross-community Executive; new North-South and British-Irish institutions; new protection for human rights and equality of opportunity; new policing legislation; and the first recruitment exercise for the new Northern Ireland police service, on a 50:50 basis. All that is already under way.

This process has, I believe, created the conditions of stability and confidence in Northern Ireland in which economic development is thriving. What we have achieved so far has been the result of efforts by all the parties in Northern Ireland. Of course, we still face many challenges: to ensure the stability and full operation of all the political institutions; to deliver a police service that attracts and sustains support from the community as a whole; and to take further steps towards the normalisation of security arrangements, as the threat diminishes.

Crucially, the basis for progress in Northern Ireland is the implementation of the Good Friday agreement in full, in all its aspects. That requires every party to be committed, and to be seen to be committed, exclusively to democratic, non-violent means. It requires that every party rejects the use of force or the threat of the use of force.

It also means that, as the institutional, social and legal changes set out in the Good Friday agreement are implemented, they must be accompanied by the putting of illegal weapons completely beyond use. In this, of course, we all have a collective responsibility, but some parties have a particular position of influence with the paramilitaries and, under the Good Friday agreement, are obliged to use such influence to achieve decommissioning.

It is because there remain problems in implementing the Good Friday agreement in full, as I have described, that I am here today to report further developments to the House. Over the weekend, we and the Irish Government received a further report from the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, chaired by General John de Chastelain. Both Governments have published the report today and a copy has been placed in the Library.

The report notes that during the past year, the Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Freedom Fighters representatives gave the commission general agreement on methods of decommissioning and supporting issues. It also notes the opening of some IRA arms dumps to inspections by the international inspectors.

Regrettably, however, the report also notes that despite previous commitments and assurances being reaffirmed in good faith, and all the paramilitary representatives wanting to continue to engage with the commission, there has been no decommissioning by the IRA, the UVF or the UFF to date.

The commission reports that the IRA representatives assured it of the IRA's commitment to put arms beyond use, completely and verifiably, on the basis it set out last year. This is, of course, welcome, but I am disappointed that the commission has still to receive answers to the other two key questions—how and when arms will be put beyond use. The simple fact is that the Good Friday agreement needs to be implemented in full.

The people of Northern Ireland want to see a fair and equal society, but they—indeed, as the Taoiseach has made clear, the people of Ireland, both North and South—insist that illegal arms must also be put completely beyond use, as part of the process of transformation. We will succeed only if we all work together to move forward in all these areas.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach said after their meetings in Northern Ireland on Thursday, there is now little time left to resolve the difficulties and obstacles that remain. We are determined to live up in full to our obligations under the Good Friday agreement; but others must do so as well. The agreement involved compromise—even pain—for all sides; it will not work if each side implements only those parts with which it is entirely comfortable.

The overwhelming desire of the people and parties in Northern Ireland is to see Northern Ireland's democratic institutions functioning as intended. They are valued greatly. They want to see them working, not suspended, but on the basis of a total commitment by all to democracy and exclusively peaceful methods.

I expect to be working with the parties, together with the Irish Foreign Minister, this week. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach have stated their clear determination to engage intensively to resolve these issues as soon as possible.

I will not hide from the House the difficulties we face. We have seen, in recent weeks, the dangers when politics appears to be stalling. There have been murderous sectarian attacks. People have been intimidated out of their homes. Young children have been used as pawns in sectarian disputes and, as so often, the police have had to step in, with the support of the Army, to maintain the peace and uphold the rule of law. In the course of so doing, 57 police officers were injured on one day at the

end of May in Portadown, and a further 39 in north Belfast, on the evening of 21 June alone. The security forces have come under attack from a range of missiles, including petrol, acid and blast bombs, and shots have been discharged too.

Nevertheless, Saturday's Whiterock parade in Belfast passed off relatively peacefully. I commend the responsible attitude taken by the vast majority of those on both sides in a very tense situation, as we approach further parades and marches over the coming weeks.

In the coming weeks, all of us must show that it is politics, not violence, which works. After such a long period of division, death and deep pain, it is not surprising that we face difficult challenges. But these hurts of the past impel all of us to find a way through to peace and stability for the future—a way that ensures that the bomb and the bullet are put completely beyond use as a way of solving our problems. This is not a matter of victory or defeat for one side or the other. It can only be a victory for all of us and all of the people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): This is a very bad day for the people of Northern Ireland, but it is an almost inevitable day, because the Government have appeased the men of violence and are now paying the price. I put it to the Secretary of State that the Belfast agreement has not been implemented by the Government. He stated today that the agreement was a deal, but the deal has not been met. Every single terrorist prisoner has been released from jail, yet not one gun nor one ounce of Semtex has been handed in.

Does not the Secretary of State agree that the process started by John Major has been squandered by his Government and his Prime Minister? Would the Secretary of State be good enough to reiterate to the House what his Prime Minister said to the people of Northern Ireland at the time of the referendum? He gave pledges, in his own handwriting, that there would be decommissioning of illegally held arms and explosives ahead of all terrorists being released and ahead of Sinn Fein members of the Assembly becoming Ministers in the Executive. He has let the people of Northern Ireland down.

The Prime Minister has also let down my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). I commend everything that the First Minister has done in terms of moderate Unionism and trying to keep the people of Northern Ireland together. I regret to conclude that he has been right to resign: he had no possible alternative.

Will the Secretary of State look again at General de Chastelain's report? After all this time, without a gun or an ounce of Semtex having been handed in, the general reports to us that the IRA has not spelled out how it intends to put arms beyond use. It is not surprising that the arms have not been put beyond use, because the IRA has got what it wanted: it has got all its terrorists out and Sinn Fein members as Ministers.

I have several questions for the Secretary of State. Assuming that no decommissioning occurs in the foreseeable future, will he bring before the House or before the Assembly an order that excludes Sinn Fein Ministers? They cannot remain as Ministers when those to whom they are inextricably linked have not given up violence and have not decommissioned any of their weapons. Secondly, if it is necessary to reintroduce direct rule, can we have an absolute assurance that there will be no question of increasing the involvement of the Dublin Government in the internal affairs of the United Kingdom? Finally, will the Secretary of State guarantee that there will be absolutely no question that—to obtain decommissioning—the Royal Ulster Constabulary will be further reduced and demoralised or security arrangements put at risk? Those questions need to be answered in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Dr. Reid: It has just occurred to me that I may have made a slip of the tongue and said that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) had resigned his position from the Assembly. I should, of course, have said the Executive, since he remains in the Assembly as leader of the Ulster Unionist party and obviously as an honoured Member of this House as well.

I think that we should distinguish between sound and fury and constructive engagement in a process that all of us—at least those on these Benches and, I think, all in Northern Ireland—still want to succeed. It is important, in so doing, that we should be seen to have kept our side of the bargain, to have acted honourably and to have gone as far as we possibly could, as I believe the right hon. Member for Upper Bann has done, because of his will to meet the circumstances of a peaceful Northern Ireland. I do not think that it helps in that process when a few cheap debating points are thrown across the Chamber.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) may regard human rights incorporated into Northern Ireland society, the equality agenda or a police service that is acceptable to and participated in by the whole community as unworthy objectives that are merely concessions and appeasement to Sinn Fein. I believe that they are good things in a modern democracy. If we are, from a position of moral and political legitimacy, to criticise anyone in this process for failure to meet their commitments, we are better placed to do so if we can illustrate, as this Government can, that we have met our commitments in all these areas.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell spoke of what might happen in the case of exclusion, suspensions or the process falling apart. The Prime Minister, the Government and I are intent not on suspending parts of the agreement or excluding people from it but—because it is the will of the people of Northern Ireland, expressed in overwhelming numbers in a referendum—on implementing the agreement and saying to everyone who has signed up to it that they are obliged, politically and morally, to implement it as well. That is not because I say so and not because the right hon. Member for Upper Bann or anyone else in this House says so, but because the agreement was supported by the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland. It is their will that we are all engaged in implementing.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I think that most people in the House this afternoon will deprecate the grandstanding of the Opposition spokesman. I compliment my right hon. Friend on the very clear and measured tone of his statement this afternoon and of his remarks on television and radio over the weekend. I think that most would share the view that the First Minister's resignation is highly regrettable but also, I am afraid, inevitable in the circumstances.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that Sinn Fein's logic-chopping over the British Government's failure to implement and fulfil every last dot and comma of our

[Mr. Peter Mandelson]

obligations is, frankly, risible in the light of the IRA's refusal even to have a sustained telephone conversation with General de Chastelain's decommissioning body? More importantly, does he also agree that for the coming talks on decommissioning, security normalisation and police reform to be successful, the two Governments must stand together and be equally involved in making a success of these talks? It is very important for the Irish Government to identify themselves strongly with an agreed position with the British Government. Is my right hon. Friend confident that that will be the case?

Dr. John Reid: I thank my right hon. Friend. On behalf of the House, I also thank him for his contribution to the whole peace process.

My right hon. Friend is right to point to the progress made. By definition, a process involves a series of events, some of which are interlinked, and many of those on constitutional issues are utterly interlinked. He is right to point to the fact that progress on the institutional side in Northern Ireland and on the social and legal side in recent years has been, by any standards, monumental: the establishment of the Assembly and of the Executive, and the powers passed to it; the incorporation of human rights—the Human Rights Commission; the equality agenda; and, on policing, the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, the police commissioner and the police ombudsman. There has been a whole host—a plethora—of moves forward.

There is a widely held perception in the whole island of Ireland—not led by me or, indeed, by the House, but by the Taoiseach, the Social Democratic and Labour party, every opposition party south of the border as well as every party north of the border, with the exception, I think, of Sinn Fein, and also expressed by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann—that any movement on decommissioning has not been commensurate with the movement made on other sides. We must all recognise that any agreement has to carry two sides. When people believe that the process is not advancing as it should in all its aspects, we run the risk of losing their support for that agreement. That is what should concern us: with due respect to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, it is not so much his resignation but what it symbolises—the concerns of the people whom he represents about the progress of the process.

As my right hon. Friend said in the second part of his contribution, it is necessary for the two Governments to work together. They have been working extremely closely together, and I welcome the fact that the Taoiseach has recently made his view on the issue plain—in the Dail, in public, and on radio and television: that is, that the decommissioning aspect is vital to the process; that all the parties must be seen to have eschewed not only violence but the threat of violence; and that the democratic process demands that there be further progress in putting paramilitary weapons beyond use.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments about me and for correcting so quickly the little slip that he made during his statement.

Will he confirm that the timing of my resignation as First Minister was determined wholly by the Government's decision to set June as the date for the full implementation of the agreement? Does he remember coming to the House, towards the end of the previous Parliament, with provisions for the extension of the remit of the General de Chastelain commission until February next year? Does he recall the advice that we gave him then—that such renewals should be limited to the end of June? Does he appreciate that it would probably not have been necessary for me to resign had he followed the advice that we gave him then?

The Secretary of State has made reference to the report published today by the Decommissioning Commission. I am sure that he will confirm that a close reading of that report reveals that there has been absolutely no progress whatever by the republican movement in the discussions—brief, or whatever—held during the past few weeks or months. There has been no progress at all in carrying out the obligation in the agreement. During the past few months, I have made frequent references to the failure of the republican movement to keep the promise it made directly to us 14 months ago; but much more serious is its failure to keep the obligation in the agreement. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman recalls that we made that agreement only after we had received assurances from the Prime Minister on the afternoon of 8 April 1998, one of which stated specifically that, in the Government's view, decommissioning had to begin immediately—immediately in 1998. It is more than three years later.

Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that folk in Northern Ireland, across the board—I am not thinking of our own party's supporters or indeed of Unionists generally—will be appalled if, more than three years later, the failure of the republicans even to begin to keep their obligations is rewarded by the Government, by the making of further moves on policing that have already done so much to undermine policing in Northern Ireland? Does he not realise that the only way to see that that obligation is kept is to make it absolutely clear to republicans that they will suffer if they fail to carry out their obligations?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall what my colleague the Deputy First Minister said in an interview yesterday, when he invited the Government to take a lead in the matter and referred specifically to the Government's power to table provisions to exclude? Will the Government also consider what will now happen with regard to the Decommissioning Commission? Two deadlines—22 May 2000 and June 2001—have been ignored by the republicans. What will the Government now do with regard to the Decommissioning Commission's remit, bearing in mind the fact that the legislation has only some six months left to run and that there is now a very great urgency in ensuring that the issue is tackled?

Perhaps the Minister might like to point out the irony that republicans could have sustained progress over the past few months by taking even modest measures, but the situation can now be resolved only by ensuring that the issue is completely dealt with and resolved once and for all, and there is now less than six weeks left to do that.

Dr. Reid: On the last point, I think that most observers would remark that, in the course of the process, when things are done early, in good faith and with good heart, they have a much better effect than if there is a continuing concern and pressure for them to be done, and I take the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. I also take the

point that the Deputy First Minister, as he was yesterday, has drawn to our attention the constitutional requirements and potential as regards exclusion. That is, of course, a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly in the last instance, on a cross-community basis, but I note what he says on that.

All I would say is that we are still committed to making the agreement work. We are still committed to implementing the agreement because my own view is that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland have concerns about the manner in which it is being implemented, but they want it to be implemented and, therefore, to turn away from that would not be to the benefit of any hon. Member or anyone in Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that, at Hillsborough last May, the two Governments anticipated and, indeed, believed that substantial progress would be made on all those issues, including putting paramilitary weapons verifiably and permanently beyond use. That has not been done; it is reflected in the de Chastelain report, and I expressed in my statement deep disappointment about that. What we are now resolved to do in an urgent and intensive fashion is to engage once more with the parties—in particular but not exclusively to address the concern about paramilitary weapons. Of course, if other people have concerns, we have made it plain all along that we will listen to such concerns, but not to the exclusion of actual progress and putting paramilitary weapons beyond use.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is disappointing that, seven weeks after the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) expressed his intention to resign, no progress has taken place in the key areas that could have prevented that from happening? Does he also agree that it is good that the paramilitaries are still talking with the Decommissioning Commission, but that it is not good that deadline after deadline has come and gone and still a small group of paramilitaries, together with some hardliners, stand in the way of creating lasting peace?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept—I believe that it is very important to say this—that it is disappointing to hear Her Majesty's official Opposition apparently mixing up the role of the House with the responsibilities of those same paramilitaries to deliver that part of the Good Friday agreement which it is self-evidently in their hands to achieve, and that it will not be achieved simply by our passing resolutions in the Chamber? In that context, does he agree that the challenge is now for the British and Irish Governments to work together to create the conditions that will generate such public pressure in both key communities in the Province that the paramilitaries will finally realise that, for all their holding on to those weapons, they will not achieve a lasting settlement of interest and benefit to their own communities without finally renouncing control of the tools for war?

Finally, does the Secretary of State acknowledge that if he proceeds in a strategic way and works with Dublin in a public and open fashion with clear and specific deadlines, he will continue to have the support of the Liberal Democrats?

Dr. Reid: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's constructive comments, which—I regret to say—stand in contrast to the contribution made by the official Opposition's Front-Bench spokesman.

Yes, I welcome the fact that the paramilitaries are still talking to the de Chastelain commission and I should also place it on record that I welcome the fact that the IRA has opened up its arms dumps for inspection. That was welcomed by everyone and I do not for a minute diminish the significance of that.

However, just as we are prepared to meet our responsibilities, I ask everyone involved—on either the political or the paramilitary side—to reflect on their responsibilities. Very often, there can be commitment, sincerity and good faith all round, but people can make dreadfully wrong judgments. I do not want anyone to make dreadfully wrong judgments and that is why I share with the House my view that, although the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want the agreement implemented, they have great concerns about the manner in which it is being implemented. I hope that people will reflect on how to use their influence to make sure that what is probably the major concern is addressed. If they do that, they can be assured that every other party, including this Government and, I am sure, the Irish Government, will accept our responsibilities and use whatever influence we have.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Has not the official Opposition Front-Bench spokesman entirely misjudged the position? We should not be entering into a party ding-dong in the current circumstances. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I have agreed with him in the past on several issues and on what developments should take place, but we should be united in directing our attention towards Sinn Fein and the IRA. We should tell them that the time has finally come for decommissioning to take place.

I understand the concerns and arguments of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). He has highlighted the fact that he had nowhere else to go. Therefore, everyone should be behind the demands that are being made and that point should be made as clearly as possible by Conservative Front Benchers as well as by the Government.

Dr. Reid: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. In a liberal frame of mind, the best that I can say about the contribution of the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) is that it was perhaps motivated by frustration and anger at what he sees as a lack of progress on the issue. Frustration and anger, however, are very rarely a good guide to action.

Of course, we must be prepared to be determined to retain the integrity of the whole process and, in that sense, we must be ever watchful that it is implemented in all its aspects. The best way to do that is to maximise the unity of those people who are committed to its success. That is why I was heartened recently to hear that some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann were not exclusive to him. They have been made by people from different traditions and different parties and by people in different countries, such as the Taoiseach and the Opposition parties in southern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): From time to time, the Secretary of State has reminded my party and me that he was absolutely convinced that IRA-Sinn Fein would decommission their weapons. A long time has now

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

passed. Our view was scorned; it was abused in this very House when I expressed it and people said that we had no faith and that we should be prepared to take the leap.

Does the Secretary of State not realise from the tone of what has been said from the Government Front Bench that the heart of this matter rests with putting restrictions on IRA-Sinn Fein in government in Northern Ireland if they do not keep to the terms of the agreement? Sweet words from Bertie Ahern or from anyone else are no use. The IRA will not decommission. Therefore, it must pay the price of not decommissioning and sanctions must be taken against it. I agree fully with the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who made that point.

The Secretary of State must respond to urgent matters that concern the ordinary individuals of Northern Ireland. A serious security situation is arising. Will he assure me categorically that he will not put on the table to IRA-Sinn Fein conditions that will drastically change the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998? Will he also assure me that the watch towers in South Armagh, an area that members of the so-called Real IRA claim to be theirs, will not be demolished, because the people there live in fear of the Real IRA and its supporters?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm to the people of Northern Ireland that the full-time police reserve will not be laid off until security is fulfilled? Will he give them the opportunity, which is in law in the agreement, of an election to the Assembly so that they can say who they want to represent them? Knowing that the Secretary of State has read the hearts and minds of all Unionists, and bearing in mind the fact that the Prime Minister told me not long ago that the vast majority of Unionists agree on that, why does he not put it to the people?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his usual constructive contribution and I shall try to respond to the five points that he raised.

We believe that we have enshrined the Patten recommendations in legislation. If any parties believe that we have not and want to make their concerns known, we shall speak to them. The RUC has undertaken a monumental change in a very professional and very determined fashion. Any organisation would find such a change difficult even without coping with the security situation. However, if someone believes that we have not implemented parts of the Patten recommendations, we shall discuss that with them.

As for the military presence in Northern Ireland, if the threat lessens, we may be in a position to reduce it, but only on the recommendation of security advisers and so that it is commensurate with the threat. The hon. Gentleman might know that discussions on the full-time reserve are under way between the federation and the Chief Constable. They will take a little time and, again, any decision will be made in the light not only of those, but of the security situation.

On elections, it is my intention—so far as it is within my power—to implement the Good Friday agreement, not to suspend or exclude or throw aside sections of it. If we are asking others to implement aspects of it, we should be prepared to say that we, too, aim to do that. I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman that there will never be any circumstance in which we might have to take other action. He understands that. However, it is not my intention to do that. My intention is, as far as possible, to leave those matters with the people of Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman claimed that I had said that I was absolutely certain that the IRA would disarm. I think that he must have been speaking about some other Secretary of State. I have never been absolutely certain of anything in this process. I have exercised my judgment and said that I believe, on the basis of what I heard and the discussions that we had, that there was the will to put paramilitary weapons beyond use. Like any sensible person inside or outside the House, I make my judgments on the basis of evidence. People are beginning to question that evidence. I believe that it is still the will of those engaged in the process to put paramilitary weapons beyond use, but I am merely reflecting a general concern in political parties and the wider constituency of Northern Ireland that there should not be an indefinite time scale for that. It has to be part of the process, and it has to take place alongside the other changes that we are making.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not the case that the IRA's refusal even to start putting its arms beyond use plays right into the hands of those Unionists, such as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), who are totally opposed to the Good Friday agreement, regardless of any form of decommissioning whatsoever?

The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) certainly went over the top. Would not it be useful for the Conservatives to bear in mind the way in which, during the years in which Labour was in opposition, we fully supported the Government on Northern Ireland, even when they were found to be negotiating with the IRA, although there were always denials beforehand? That is the support that a responsible Opposition would give on Northern Ireland matters.

Dr. Reid: I think that we have said enough on that last point. My hon. Friend has made his point, and I shall merely reiterate what I believe to be the essence of the matter. Yes, there are many details to be addressed, and hon. Members have raised them, but the essence of the problem is that the agreement will not work if individual parties pick and choose which parts they are prepared to implement. The success of the agreement depends on its full implementation in all its aspects.

Secondly, cross-community consent and co-operation are at the heart of the agreement. Ultimately, the institutions and the agreement itself are sustained and sustainable only if they continue to command the support of both sides of the community. On the basis of that simple but profound knowledge of the nature of the agreement, I hope that everyone in the House and far more widely will reflect on the role that they have to play in ensuring that cross-community support continues.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Is it not tragic that we seem to have delivered extremist government in Northern Ireland? The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—a man with whom I have not always agreed but whom I greatly admire—has to resign his position, yet representatives of terrorist organisations remain in government, the RUC is being dismantled and terrorists are allowed on to the streets. Is not the reason for all that the fact that the agreement was slightly flawed in the first place? It was not watertight in

requiring decommissioning to take place before prisoners were released, and it does not allow Ministers to be removed from Government without the full agreement of both traditions in the Assembly. Is it not time to start again? In doing so, should we not be determined to place the blame for the situation where it really lies—not with the Unionists but with the terrorists in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: I understand why the hon. Gentleman says what he says, but there is a misunderstanding. He speaks as though the agreement were a sort of legal insurance contract, whereby if the parties to it did not agree, we could take them to court and sue them.

This is an historic agreement—an historic compromise—based on the voluntary participation of people from different backgrounds, with different histories and different pain, although that pain may in a sense be indivisible, and they have come together to try to fit together the pieces that enable such an historic move to be made, but they all do so voluntarily. I can no more dictate to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, as anyone who knows him will know, than I can to the IRA or to the paramilitaries on the other side. I can of course use some sanctions, but, ultimately, we are all masters of our own fate in this matter, and, ultimately, if the agreement is to work, it must do so by the principle of consent. That is what we shall be trying to do during the next few weeks. Of course, in that, there will be benefits for everyone and difficulties for everyone, but if the agreement is to work, ultimately it must be with the full participation of every party to it.

The question is not just one of collective responsibility. Yes, we have collective responsibility but it is also a question of us using our appropriate influence. Just as I have some influence greater than other parties in some areas, so some parties have greater influence over the paramilitaries in that area. Therefore, it is no excuse, in order to avoid the use of our influence, to say that we all have responsibility. Yes, we do, but part of that responsibility is to use our influence in the area where it is most effective.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the process as a result of the Good Friday agreement has largely moved from open war to what one might call bad-tempered peace? Does he feel, like some on the Opposition Benches, that the problem is a shortage of rhetoric and ultimatums or does he agree that we must continue to seek progress in the spirit of the agreement? Will he confirm that, despite everything that we have said today, and despite the concern that we all feel about the deadlock, there is no evidence that any of the parties has turned away from the basic commitment to move towards a Northern Ireland at peace? If we had that impression, that would be the most serious issue of all. Will he confirm that they appear still to be intent on peaceful means?

Dr. Reid: My judgment is that all the parties to the agreement still wish to move towards a Northern Ireland where decisions are made by democratic and peaceful means—yes it is—but translating that into action is not easy, as the events of the past few days have shown. However, I am sure of one thing: the agreement will never be translated into action unless each and every aspect of it is addressed and we avoid one aspect appearing to lag behind the others. It will not work that way because it will not take the broad swathe of the whole community and the two traditions with it. I think that it is as simple as that.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Those of us in the House who want a lasting peace in Northern Ireland will share the disappointment at today's events, of which the Secretary of State has spoken. He also spoke of good faith and of evidence. What evidence does he have of the good faith of the IRA and Sinn Fein in decommissioning weapons? Does he now come to the conclusion that many of us have reached that the IRA and Sinn Fein have no intention of decommissioning weapons and, indeed, probably never had any such intention? If he accepts that view, what will he do about it?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman asked me a very fair question: what is the evidence? The evidence on which I base my judgment is not the psychoanalysis of any of the parties or individuals involved, but what has happened over the past five to 10 years. Many of the things that have happened would have been entirely outwith the realm of predicted possibility 10 years ago.

I would not want to assume that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the cessation of violence by the IRA was of huge significance, but I think that in the history of the past 30 years it was of considerable significance. He may not believe that the decision by the Irish Republican Army to open up its arms dumps was of huge historical importance, but anyone who knows anything about the history of the IRA knows that that was a hugely significant step. Therefore, there is evidence that the people who said that they were committed to going on this journey, as it is sometimes called, did indeed embark on the journey and wish to continue it. That is not the question.

The question is not whether nothing has happened—things have happened—but whether progress has been sufficient. I believe that progress has not been sufficient. Along with accompanying changes on the legal, social and institutional side in Northern Ireland, I believe that there was a commitment to make progress in putting paramilitary weapons beyond use. At the moment, not one weapon has been put beyond use. Therefore, to hold the view that there is evidence about the sincerity and commitment of those engaged in the process is perfectly compatible with believing at the same time that progress has been insufficient.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I can assure my right hon. Friend that his words on the futility of war and blood sacrifice spoken yesterday on the still blood-soaked fields of the Somme, surrounded by the ghosts of the lost generation, resonated far beyond those fields. They stand in stark contrast to much that I have heard in the Chamber this afternoon. When next he hears expressions like "Sinn Fein must pay the price", I ask him to look to the future, not the past. For a more stark and graphic example of the failure of constructive negotiation, he need not look much further than the fields that he saw yesterday.

Dr. Reid: Yesterday's visit to the battlefields of the Somme was a very moving experience, as it always is. One general point and one particular point came back to me. As my hon. Friend says, if there is anywhere on earth

[Dr. Reid]

that exhibits the tragedy of the failure to resolve differences by peaceful means, it is surely the Somme. First, I think that in about 48 hours during the opening of the battle, more than 5,500 members of the 36th Ulster Division died. The second point that came back to me, in historical terms, is that not far from the Ulster Tower is another monument—to the members of the 16th Division who also gave their lives. They were not from Ulster, but from the rest of Ireland. I was there with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann.

It struck me that in those circumstances, pain is indivisible. I am sure that, like me, the House does not want the next generation of young people in Northern Ireland to see more than 300 police officers killed and murdered, 40,000 or 50,000 people injured, and 3,500 families experience the pain of seeing their loved ones killed. We in this country should remember that to achieve commensurate figures for the rest of the United Kingdom, we would probably have to multiply those figures by 35 or 40: we would be talking about almost 100,000 dead. Preventing that from happening to the next generation is the measure of the prize that we can achieve if the process succeeds. I am sure that the vast majority of hon. Members want to achieve that.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I shall not give in to the temptation to follow the bizarre interpretation of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) of the events that led to the first world war. Given the equivocation that so often surrounds matters to do with Northern Ireland, will the Secretary of State tell the House precisely what he means when he talks of putting illegal paramilitary weapons completely beyond use?

Dr. Reid: What I mean is an acceptance of some form of action, under the remit and legislation that has been given to him, by General John de Chastelain.

David Burnside (South Antrim): What precisely does the Secretary of State mean by sanctions? We have yet another deadline: there was 22 May and the end of June, and now we have another six weeks. Will he define sanctions against republicans and rewards for democrats? In the political set-up in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist party, the Democratic Unionist party, the Alliance party and the Social Democratic and Labour party are purely and 100 per cent. committed to democracy. Other parties—Sinn Fein-IRA and loyalist paramilitary parties—still adhere to terrorism, violence and the threat of violence. In six weeks' time, what sanctions will he impose on terrorist-related parties and what reward will he give to the democrats in Ulster?

Mr. Reid: I said that a range of sanctions are open to all the parties and to the Government in a number of instances. One of the sanctions was raised yesterday by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann and the Deputy First Minister, and that was exclusion. The issue is not whether sanctions are hanging about but whether it is sensible and productive to use sanctions to exclude people from the process. I have made my view known, and it is that I am committed, as are the Government, not to suspending, excluding or putting people or parts out of the process, but to implementing the full agreement.

If the full agreement can be implemented, it will create a peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland. Also, it is exactly what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in overwhelming numbers. I am concentrating on that. What sanctions might be available in what hypothetical situation should perhaps be considered when such a situation arises. At present, surely we should all be ascertaining what can be done to implement the full agreement, and thereby maintain the full support of the full community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the main causes of concern in Northern Ireland has been the on-going process of concession to the IRA and Sinn Fein, with little or nothing in return? That is accepted on all sides.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept also that further concessions to the IRA and Sinn Fein as part of any fudged settlement on the question of terrorist arms would further increase alienation of the Unionist community and lead to further political instability in the long run?

All decent and right-thinking members of my constituency share the right hon. Gentleman's abhorrence of the attacks on the police that have taken place in my constituency, to which he has referred. However, they want assurances that the police will be present in sufficient numbers to protect them, that reforms such as reducing the number of police, as suggested by Patten, will not take place, and that police numbers will be maintained, with the police being strengthened, and not demoralised and decimated as proposed by the Government under the Patten reforms.

Mr. Reid: First, the hon. Gentleman seems to think that anything that has been agreed and already implemented arising from the agreement is somehow a concession. I do not accept that these things are concessions. Most constitute a major move forward in creating a new, open and democratic Northern Ireland, and should be seen as such.

Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman is asking me—if we leave the word "concession" aside—whether I realise that there is concern in Northern Ireland about how things have been implemented, with some things being implemented faster and more substantially than others, the answer is that I do.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman asked me about policing. The intent behind a police service that is participated in and accepted by the broad swathe of Northern Ireland society is to create the conditions, along with the rest of the agreement, where we do not have the sacrifices that had to be made by members of the RUC, with more than 300 deaths, and we do not have the widows who have been left—at the very least, not in the same numbers.

In implementing the agreement, I will listen carefully to my security advisers, including the Chief Constable. The operational capability of the RUC and then the Police Service of Northern Ireland will be of paramount importance, not least because that is what the people of Northern Ireland as a whole want. Catholics as well as Protestants are murdered. They are burgled and their cars are stolen. I want to see operational capability, but above all I want to see a Northern Ireland where the ultimate sacrifices that had to be made by so many in the RUC do not have to be made by the next generation.

Orders of the Day

Homelessness Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.29 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I hope that the whole House will agree that losing one's home, and the security that goes with it, is one of the most harrowing experiences that anyone can face, and that the possibility of homelessness is often related to other life problems. Frailty brought about by old age, the breakdown of a marriage, drugs and mental health problems simply compound people's anguish.

Earlier today, I spent some time at the Passage day centre in Victoria, and I should like to pay tribute to the remarkable work of Sister Ellen and her team of staff and volunteers. They not only provide the basics of food and clothing to homeless people but help them to find jobs, rediscover their self-confidence and their families and tackle their addiction to drugs and alcohol. If ever there was a justification for righting past wrongs—which the Bill seeks to do—I heard it from some of the people whom I met this morning.

I met many people for whom the changes to be brought about by the Bill will make a genuine difference to their lives; those changes cannot come soon enough. I spoke to an ex-service man who, because he did not get the help that he needed when he left the forces, has been homeless ever since. I met someone else who, as a child, was in care; for him, the help given by the Passage, although welcome and essential, was too late. He needed help when he first had difficulties to prevent him from needing help now and from wasting years of his life.

The principal aim of any decent society should be to support those in need in practical ways and when the need arises. Local authorities fulfil that role when they carry out their homeless duties. Every week, authorities, social landlords and voluntary bodies demonstrate practical compassion in helping individuals and families to manage the trauma of being without somewhere that they can call their own home.

Members on both sides of the House know that the present system is far from perfect; the Government are determined to improve its operation. A demonstration of that commitment is the fact that the Bill—the first one to be introduced after the election—will offer hope and protection to some of the most vulnerable groups in society.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his new position. He referred briefly to mental health. Does he accept that a high proportion of people who are out on the streets are suffering from mental health problems and that that has something to do with the policy, followed by successive Governments, of closing institutions where people with mental health problems could find refuge? Has he consulted his colleagues in the Department of Health about whether joint work by the two Departments can help people in that situation?

Mr. Byers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations on my appointment. Perhaps for the first and last time in this Parliament, I agree with the points that he made. The record of care in the community and the way in which we dealt with people with mental illness do not do credit to previous Administrations of both political persuasions. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the need for joint working between housing authorities, local authorities and authorities that have specific responsibilities for people with mental illness. I shall talk a little bit about joint working arrangements later, but I certainly endorse the broad thrust of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The Bill will enable local authorities to offer stronger protection to vulnerable families and individuals who find themselves homeless. It will lead to more effective strategies and services, both to help homeless people and, crucially, to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. It will help to ensure that everyone has the opportunity and choice of a decent home. The measure should not be seen in isolation. It is not a one-off, but part of a wider housing strategy set out in our housing Green Paper and in last year's policy statement entitled "The Way Forward for Housing".

Our homelessness measures are complemented by a massive increase in investment, which will be crucial. The investment includes doubling the Housing Corporation's budget for new affordable housing, which will amount to an extra £872 million being made available for that purpose; a target of 100,000 new or improved homes for low-cost rent or ownership over the next three years; doubling the programme of affordable housing in small rural settlements; and increasing resources for local authority investment from £750 million in 1997–98 to £2.5 billion by 2003–04.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, and I congratulate him on his appointment. He referred to affordable housing and the sum that would be given to the Housing Corporation to increase the stock of affordable housing available. What does he think affordable housing is, and what should it cost? One of the biggest problems is deciding what affordable housing means. I would grateful if, as a new Secretary of State, the right hon. Gentleman could give the House his view.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman will agree, I think, that the worst thing would be for us from the centre in London to impose a blanket view for the whole country on what constitutes affordable housing. We need flexibility, allowing local areas to respond to local need and local rents. That is the approach that I want to adopt, to ensure that people are not priced out of good accommodation because of the amount that they can afford to pay. That will involve a range of new initiatives that need to be taken. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have been examining housing benefit in particular and the role that it plays. A range of levers need to be pulled to make sure that people have a genuine choice. A little later in my opening remarks, I shall say something about that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: There is competition, I see. I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on being appointed Secretary of State.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

On choice, may I ask him to reflect for a moment on the situation in London, where the very high prices of houses and of land mean that there is little development to create affordable rented housing? Will he look again at the planning guidelines under section 106 agreements to ensure that, in all sites of whatever size, at least half the properties are developed for affordable rent, either by housing associations or by the local authority, in order to provide poorer and average-income Londoners with some chance of being able to stay in their city?

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words on my appointment. I understand the difficulty that is particularly felt in London, although similar pressures exist in other parts of the country. They come about because of a lack of investment over a number of years. We are beginning to put that right, with the investment that will be made over the next two to three years. There are, I believe, opportunities to use the planning process with far greater imagination than in the past, and I am conscious of the debate that is going on in London and elsewhere about the need for some gain from planning along the lines that my hon. Friend describes.

I have reservations about putting a specific figure on the amount that needs to be achieved, but we must work closely with the relevant authorities to expand and extend the amount of affordable homes for rent or other types of tenure that are available in London and other parts of the country.

I give way now to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter).

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment, and on mentioning the fact that problems exist not only in London but in areas such as Weston-super-Mare. I shall write to him with information about our particular problems. Having seen the right hon. Gentleman operating in the Department of Trade and Industry, I am very hopeful that he will be able to tackle those problems. Specifically, has he taken on board the very severe problem across the country of the number of, and the difficulty in releasing, empty properties?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. From my reading of the brief so far, I think that various steps will have to be taken to ensure that empty properties, of which there are a staggering number, are made available for those who are in great need. I shall say something a little later about what we can do specifically about private landlords, with whom there is a particular problem in some parts of the country. There may also be a specific problem in seaside towns that will have to be dealt with. One of the lessons that I have learned is that it is wrong to take the view that one size fits all. We have to build a system with local flexibility. Consequently, the role of local authorities, which are the bodies with housing responsibilities, will be particularly important.

A major part of the £2.5 billion that we are making available will be used for major repairs to the council house stock, making more council properties available for use. Taken together, our proposals and the investment that we shall put in place will bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010, improve the supply of affordable housing in areas where need is greatest and promote sustainable home ownership and a healthy private rented sector. We believe, however, that we need statutory measures in addition to that investment. That is why we are debating this Bill today.

The Bill will particularly help families with dependent children and individuals who become homeless or face the threat of homelessness through no fault of their own. Our proposals will strengthen the homelessness safety net, promote a more strategic approach by local authorities to preventing and managing homelessness and encourage local authorities to offer more choice to people applying for social housing. In doing that, the Bill will achieve the following objectives: first, it will protect the most vulnerable in our society; secondly, it will promote greater housing choice; thirdly, it will help to create sustainable communities; and, fourthly, it will tackle social exclusion.

One of the most important changes that we want to accomplish with the Bill is to channel much greater effort into preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. That is our key priority. Our proposals will require local authorities to adopt a more strategic approach to tackling the causes of all forms of homelessness and to preventing its occurrence.

The Bill's first three clauses will require local housing authorities to review the position of the homeless in their area and to create a comprehensive strategy, involving all the key bodies, to prevent people from becoming homeless and to ensure that adequate resources are available to those who might become homeless. There will have to be close co-operation between housing authorities, social service authorities and, as the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) said, health authorities.

The housing authority will have to consult widely. It will be expected to talk to registered social landlords and to other voluntary and statutory agencies that have a key role in tackling the position of the homeless. All the key players will be encouraged to work together to assess the extent and the causes of homelessness, to identify the most effective solutions and to ensure that adequate accommodation, advice and support are available to those who need them.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new role and on taking the first Bill through this Parliament. Does he agree that one of the key problems in rural areas is hidden homelessness—people being driven out of rural areas because of a lack of accommodation? Can we ensure that the other layers of local government—especially parish and town councils, which have a vested interest in keeping younger people in their communities—are engaged in the process, as they will be so important in allowing us to overcome hidden homelessness?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I thank him for his kind words on my appointment. He is right that the needs of rural areas are often hidden and are not exposed or publicised to the same extent as some of the derelict areas in our conurbations. That is why it is particularly important for those of us in responsible positions to ensure that their needs are not overlooked.

The measures that we are proposing to increase the amount of housing in rural settlements will begin to make a difference, but I take the point made by my hon. Friend

the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew). If we are talking about genuine partnership and about people working together, housing authorities and district councils must consult parish councils to make sure that the specific housing needs of rural communities are not ignored. He is also right to stress that in ensuring that a community can thrive and develop, the provision of housing to the younger generation to ensure that they are not forced to leave rural communities will become increasingly important in the months and years ahead.

The Bill also strengthens the existing safety net by providing a number of amendments to and repeals of the provisions of the Housing Act 1996. The Bill will ensure that all applicants who are unintentionally homeless and have a priority need are secured suitable accommodation for as long as is necessary until a settled home becomes available for them. This is an important change and one that will bring real benefits. To achieve this, the Bill will remove the current rule that prevents an authority from doing more than provide advice and assistance if other accommodation is available locally in the private sector.

Clause 6 will remove the current two-year limit on the main homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation. The 1996 Act gives authorities the discretion to continue to accommodate beyond two years, but their statutory obligation to provide assistance ends at that point. That gives homeless households cause for great uncertainty about their future and about whether they will continue to have a home. That needs to go; under this Bill, it will.

The Bill will also remove the restriction that prevents authorities from using their own housing stock to discharge their statutory obligations and to provide short-term accommodation for homeless people for more than two years in three. This is unhelpful and bureaucratic, and it limits local authorities' flexibility to secure adequate short-term accommodation. As the law stands, when a local authority decides to exercise discretion to continue to accommodate beyond two years a household that has been accommodated in local authority housing, the authority must secure alternative accommodation from another landlord—at a cost—uprooting the household in the process. This is red tape and bureaucracy and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will be pleased that we are cutting it. The measure, which we will do away with, creates delay, is costly and is disruptive. Under the Bill, it will come to an end.

The Bill will make an number of important changes to the current legislation to strengthen the protection available to homeless people. Clause 10 will provide stronger protection for those at risk of violence. It will make clear that applicants who would be at risk of violence or who would face serious threats of violence if they remained in their current home must be treated as homeless by the local authority. At present, it is at the discretion of individual authorities to decide whether a threat of violence means that it would not be reasonable for someone to continue to live in that same property.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. My cup runneth over at the thought that one so great as he should be willing to draw on my advice. It would be very helpful if he would flesh out the way in which statutory teeth will be given to the Government's welcome intentions towards the victims of domestic violence. Will he confirm that people will not only not be obliged to return to the homes in which the violence was committed or threatened but will not be obliged to return to the area where they are at risk?

Mr. Byers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words on my appointment. I am pleased that his cup runneth over—although I know that it is a very small cup—and I shall try even harder, because I am pleased to confirm that his broad point is covered in the Bill.

Many of us will have come across exactly this problem in our constituencies. An example was given to me by Shelter, which I am pleased is warmly supporting the provisions in the Bill. Shelter recently assisted a pregnant young woman living in a small privately rented flat who had suffered persistent racial harassment by a neighbour, culminating in her being physically assaulted and the police being called.

Despite evidence from the woman's GP of the distress that the harassment was causing her, and its potential impact on her pregnancy, the local housing authority insisted that it was reasonable for her to continue to live where she was, and would not accept that she was homeless. The Bill will ensure that that could not happen again and that others suffering such violent harassment will, in future, be dealt with as homeless.

Mr. Hancock: When we discussed this element of the Bill in the previous Parliament, in which it failed to get through all its stages, the issue of violence was raised. We never got a satisfactory answer on who was to arbitrate on whether a case was genuinely one of violence. On large council estates, there are often allegations of threats of violence, but the local authority says that it cannot accept them as true until there is proof—that is, until someone has been assaulted or the police have become involved. If we are placing that responsibility on local authorities, we have to have a clear definition of what proof would be needed to justify someone's being moved on grounds of violence.

Mr. Byers: First, let me stress that local authority decisions can be reviewed. This will be a fruitful matter for discussion in Committee. Hon. Members will be aware that the Government intend to issue guidance to cover all such matters, on which we will want to consult. I know that guidance has been discussed at some length, and I am waiting for the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who I understand is a real anorak on this issue, to intervene.

Mr. Bercow: All Liberals are anoraks.

Mr. Byers: There is a great danger of my agreeing with the hon. Gentleman yet again.

Clause 8 will make it clear that applicants can ask the housing authority to review the suitability of accommodation that is offered to them without having to take a risk that the homelessness duty might be brought to an end as a consequence. That is important, as it will correct a serious weakness in the provisions of the Housing Act 1996, compounded by a recent judgment in the Court of Appeal in the case of Alghile *v.* City of Westminster, which seriously undermined the position of

[Mr. Byers]

homeless applicants. As the law now stands, following the Alghile judgment, applicants cannot both accept an offer of accommodation and ask for a review of suitability. If they want a review, they must refuse the offer. The 1996 Act provides that the duty to assist them as homeless comes to an end if they refuse that offer. So homeless applicants have to take a serious gamble if they wish to ask for a review of the suitability of the property that they have been offered.

The Bill will put that right, and we intend clause 8 to come into force as soon as the Bill receives Royal Assent. Applicants will also be better placed when they wish to appeal to the county court against a decision on homelessness. The Bill will give the court the power to extend the 21-day period for making an application where there is a good reason for doing so.

The court will also have the power to require an authority to continue to accommodate an applicant pending such an appeal, where that is necessary to ensure that the individual concerned can continue to pursue the appeal. It is obviously right for the greatest protection to be available to families and other vulnerable groups with priority need, but the Bill also strengthens the duty to provide advice and assistance for those who become homeless unintentionally but do not have a priority need. Authorities will have greater flexibility to assist that group, through a new power to secure suitable accommodation for them.

As I have said, the Bill will ensure that local authorities offer everyone in priority need who is unintentionally homeless somewhere suitable to live until they obtain a settled home.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am not clear what new duties local authorities are being given to provide accommodation in the private sector. Local authorities have a finite amount of their own housing stock and housing association stock. Is the Secretary of State saying that local authorities will now have a duty to help people find suitable accommodation in the private rented sector? Will he flesh out a little further what new obligations local authorities will have? There is a danger that the Bill will raise applicants' expectations, but that those expectations will be unfulfilled.

Mr. Byers: I want the local housing authority to work in partnership with the private rented sector. There are now some good examples of that happening, and it is benefiting individual tenants, but I am also mindful of the fact that in some parts of the country that partnership is not operating. We need to send out a clear message from Government that we expect people to work together with a real sense of partnership—and some of the investment to be made available will benefit the privately rented sector as well as the local authority sector.

We shall not solve all the problems overnight. As hon. Members know, the number of people who are homeless or in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has increased, so there are real problems that we have to tackle. I believe that the Bill, combined with the additional investment that is coming through, will begin to make a real difference—but that will not happen overnight, or even in a matter of months; it will take years to remedy the problems. However, improvements are taking place, and if people can work together—in particular, if local authorities can work with the private sector—we shall begin to see real improvements.

The private rented sector has responsibilities as well, and must recognise that it has a role to play. Increasingly, housing difficulties are resulting from problems being caused in certain parts of the country by landlords who fail to discharge their responsibilities. I am thinking in particular of those who receive housing benefit directly from social security offices, but do not pay proper attention to the condition of the buildings for which they are responsible.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): As ever, my right hon. Friend has my good wishes. On that point, will he recognise that there is nothing in the Bill to reinforce good practice in the private rented sector by, for example, introducing at last the licensing of houses in multiple occupation, or including the proposals for registering all private landlords in defined areas, which were in the housing Green Paper?

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words on my appointment. He makes an important point about houses in multiple occupation and he is right to say that we have clear commitments in that area. During the lifetime of this Parliament, I am confident that measures will be introduced through this House. However, we can take some steps now, and we will do so by improving the provisions that are currently available.

My hon. Friend raises a second point about houses in multiple occupation that goes beyond the powers we currently have. We had a welcome opportunity to discuss that point on Friday, when he drew my attention to the need to consider the introduction of licensing schemes for private landlords generally, which will tackle some of the issues that have arisen in various parts of the country.

I had the opportunity to consider the point over the weekend, and I can inform my hon. Friend that later this year my Department will issue a consultation document on proposals to give local authorities in such areas powers to introduce licensing schemes for private landlords generally. I hope that that will tackle some of the issues about which my hon. Friend is especially concerned. I hope that when that consultation document is published we can have a debate on the right way forward and reach a solution for which we can legislate, if necessary, to tackle a growing problem that is affecting far too many areas.

The Bill includes measures to give improved rights to new applicants for local authority housing and existing tenants in the social sector who are seeking a transfer. It is, however, vital to ensure that the measures we introduce cannot be abused by those who would seek to disrupt communities through antisocial behaviour. People who are unsuitable to be tenants because of a history of unacceptable behaviour will not benefit from the provisions of the Bill. Clearly, someone who has a history of causing deliberate and serious nuisance to neighbours, and who has refused to reform in any way, would be regarded as unsuitable to be a tenant.

The Bill will also encourage local authorities to introduce letting schemes that give new applicants—and existing tenants who wish to transfer to another property—more say in choosing where they live.

Jeremy Corbyn: On the question of disruptive and antisocial tenants, it is a given that nobody wants antisocial, disruptive or racist tenants living next to them, but the problem is that by removing any option of housing from such people, their children end up with foster parents or in care. One could be creating a greater social problem in the future in order to deal with a more immediate problem. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a strategy of more intensive support and intervention might be more useful than his approach?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out that we need an integrated approach, and we must always take into account the needs of children in particular. As on most issues, it is a question of striking the right balance. Most hon. Members will understand the need to protect a community from the disruptive and antisocial tenant, to keep communities together. I have seen in my own constituency communities being blown apart because of the actions of just one or two people. Communities that have lived together for years have been wrecked by the conduct of one or two people, and I am not prepared to put at risk those solid and sound communities by looking after the needs of one individual when the needs of the whole community should be taken into account. Early intervention may be able to assist an individual to reform and change the way in which they conduct themselves. I agree wholeheartedly that that should be the emphasis of many projects from my Department and across Government.

Mr. Hancock: The Secretary of State referred to giving greater choice to people in existing properties who wanted to transfer. I am fascinated by the concept of choice being offered by authorities such as mine, given that the options available for transfer in Portsmouth, a densely populated urban centre, are at present limited. How will such a choice be offered?

Mr. Byers: I hope that in a few years' time, if I am answering on housing matters from this Dispatch Box, we will have changed the situation, with more investment in housing resulting in such choice being available. I am the first to accept that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, probably like mine, there is currently no such choice. However, in this area above all, the status quo will not be an option. Great problems are being created and we have to move change through.

The Bill is about looking forward, not looking back. It looks forward to the housing needs that require to be met, and to investment. I want people to have a real choice. I accept that it is not available at the moment—we have to build to ensure that it will be.

Most of us in the Chamber would not accept simply being told where to live. We will not provide all the choices that everyone will want, but providing a choice will make a real difference to the whole debate. We should not reduce our ambitions or our vision. The Government are taking actions that make a real difference.

When I was at the Passage this morning, I talked to people who had benefited from the work undertaken by the rough sleepers unit. The number of people sleeping rough has fallen by more than a third. In 1998, almost 2,000 people slept rough. Last year, that number had fallen to just over 1,000, and we are well on the way to meeting our target of only 620 people sleeping rough by 2002, which will be a real improvement.

One of the most disturbing things that I saw when I took over this brief was that the number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation had increased dramatically. The bed-and-breakfast unit was established by the Minister for Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), when he was responsible for housing. It came into being in May this year. Its remit is to reduce within two years the number of households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, particularly those with families and young children.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): My right hon. Friend must be getting a bit weary of all these congratulations, but I should nevertheless like to congratulate him on his post. I also thank the Minister for Local Government, who answered the Adjournment debate that I secured on bed-and-breakfast accommodation when he was responsible for housing matters. Will the taskforce be looking at the introduction of targets and at reducing the numbers of young children who are living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation with people who have severe mental health problems and alcohol and drug dependency problems?

Mr. Byers: Congratulations are fine. I have learned that one can never have too many of them.

Mr. Bercow: Enjoy it while it lasts.

Mr. Byers: It does not last very long, as the hon. Gentleman says.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One way to judge genuine progress is by tangible improvements. It is probably right for the taskforce to come forward with targets once it has looked at the situation. I will draw its attention to my hon. Friend's points.

There is a real challenge to be addressed. Those of us who have seen at first hand the often appalling conditions in which young people in bed-and-breakfast provision are having to grow up regard that as simply not acceptable in the United Kingdom of 2001. We can do far better. Now that the unit is set up, we will be expecting it to do great things and give real dignity to mothers, fathers and children who live in frankly unacceptable accommodation.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: Only if there are congratulations attached.

Mr. Waterson: I was saving those for later, but if the right hon. Gentleman is so desperate for congratulations, let me congratulate him. I shall not congratulate him, however, on the explosion of the number of people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. He did not quote the figures, but they have gone up from 4,000 to nearly 11,000. Does he agree with Shelter, which says that the current crisis-driven approach to homelessness is

[Mr. Waterson]

not working? That sounds like coded language for setting up another unit, another taskforce, and crowning another tsar or tsarina.

Mr. Byers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations on my appointment.

I am not a great one for tsars or tsarinas, but the hon. Gentleman makes a serious point. I do not regard the present situation as acceptable, as regards either the number of people who are homeless or the number who are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That situation has come about owing to a lack of investment for several years for which both parties carry responsibility, but we are beginning to see a difference.

I have outlined a twin-track approach: investment is going in, backed up by the provisions in the Bill. That will make a real difference. I accept the criticism; none of us can take pride in the current situation—we must move together. The Bill will be important in beginning to ensure that we can tackle the difficulties.

Before I conclude, I want to refer to one more important group: those former members of the armed forces who find themselves homeless at the end of their service. The Government have set up a veterans taskforce to tackle the issues facing those people, who include the most vulnerable—those who are homeless, sleeping rough or in ill health. In 1998, the social exclusion unit report on rough sleeping found that between a fifth and a quarter of all rough sleepers had served in the armed forces. In response, the rough sleepers unit has been working with the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces and the ex-service benevolent sector to ensure that the best advice, practical assistance and support are given to the people who leave our armed forces and end up sleeping rough.

The work of the taskforce will continue during coming months. We aim to report by the end of this year and we look to the taskforce to propose measures to complement the RSU's effective strategy to reduce rough sleeping to as near zero as possible. I hope that all Members will agree that people who have given service in our armed forces deserve that support, advice and assistance.

Taken together with the Government's sound economic policies, our substantial increases in capital investment in housing and the wider policies that we are pursuing following last year's housing Green Paper, we can make a real difference for the people of this country. The Bill will make a real difference to tackling homelessness. It will provide protection for the most vulnerable, dignity for the distressed and the security that comes from having somewhere that people can call home. For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

5.12 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I begin properly by welcoming the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to his new position. I also welcome the new Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) and pay a passing tribute to the Minister for Local Government. The right hon. Gentleman has finally been unchained from the housing oar in the Government galley; I hope that he will enjoy his time in local government.

Speaking for myself and, I hope, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), we shall try to make the Committee stage as little like the film "Groundhog Day" as possible and find some new things to say. The Opposition broadly welcome the Bill; indeed we did so in its previous incarnation as the second part of the Homes Bill during the previous Parliament. The measure will of course receive proper scrutiny in Committee—as is right—but we wish it a fair wind. We are not alone in wanting to discuss several detailed points in Committee; organisations such as Shelter and the Local Government Association have also flagged up some issues that will need debate.

It is a remarkable U-turn that this monumental—if we are to believe the Secretary of State—measure was not even mentioned in the Queen's Speech but is the first Bill of the Parliament. We welcome that. It must be a real testament to the right hon. Gentleman's power and influence in the higher echelons of the Government.

Ms Oona King: I take the hon. Gentleman's mention of remarkable U-turns as a declaration of his acceptance of compassionate conservatism. Does he agree, therefore, that the then Conservative Government's decision to remove the protections that we are now reintroducing was indeed as pernicious as it turned out to be?

Mr. Waterson: We believe in housing policy that actually works—whether it is called "compassionate" is neither here nor there.

I wonder whether the Secretary of State took the trouble to mention that the measure could have been put on the statute book before the general election when he was hobnobbing with Sister Ellen et al this morning. The reasons for not enacting it are clear. First, there was the Government's insistence on linking in the same Bill such measures and compulsory seller's packs—issues that had no natural connection at all. We made it clear in the previous Parliament that we opposed that measure and that we did not broadly oppose these provisions. Secondly, the Government did not allow enough time for the measure to be debated in the House of Lords before Dissolution.

Let us be clear that it is entirely the Government's fault if we have to re-run such debates in the Chamber and in Committee, and that it is also entirely their fault if people are being disadvantaged in housing terms by the fact that the measures are not already on the statute book because of the Government's arrogant insistence on continuing with the measures on compulsory seller's packs.

I should like the Under-Secretary to confirm in her reply whether the Government have now abandoned the policy of introducing compulsory seller's packs, and that we shall certainly hear no more about them in this Parliament.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but in the last hour I have received a parliamentary answer in which I am assured that the Government appear to have every intention of pressing ahead with seller's packs. Does the hon. Gentleman share my dismay that it appears that the Government still intend to attach criminal sanctions to them, which would be disastrous?

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that extremely informative intervention. In that case,

I have my answer, and it is very depressing not just for those who buy and sell houses, but for those involved in surveying and the legal aspects of buying and selling houses. However, it is certainly true, as the hon. Gentleman will remember, that we spent more time in Committee considering seller's packs under part I of the Homes Bill than we did discussing the issues in this Bill. No matter; I must move on, having made it abundantly clear that if the proposals on compulsory seller's packs reappear in any guise, we will continue to oppose them as ferociously as possible.

I join Shelter, the Local Government Association and several others in broadly welcoming the proposals in the present Bill. We welcome the emphasis on prevention, rather than cure, in housing problems; the wish to achieve greater flexibility and more strategic approaches by local authorities, which many of them welcome; and the move towards choice-based housing allocations where workable and appropriate. I think it fair to say that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock)—who is leaving the Chamber, but may be coming back—touched on a useful point. It is almost possible to draw a line across the country: in some areas there is an over-supply of social housing, and in others—my constituency is a good example—people still have to wait a long time, on average, for housing to be allocated. I am pleased to say that because of my oiling up to the Minister for Local Government, who then had responsibility for such issues, my constituency has been included in the pilot scheme for what the aficionados call the choice-based Delft system of housing allocation.

Mr. Foster: So has Bath.

Mr. Waterson: I understand that Bath was included, too. That was obviously a technical oversight. Unlike the Liberal Democrats, the Conservative party is not in coalition with the Government, but it is none the less nice to be included without having to give anything in return. We shall see how things turn out on the ground, and it is important that the proposal is considered on a pilot basis. I do not know whether Portsmouth has been included, and now we may never know, as the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South seems to have made his final exit from our proceedings.

Partly as a result of previous debates, there are some good measures in the Bill, including the provisions for the right of review of decisions on eligibility and priority for housing. The Bill also contains provision for the strengthening of the duty on local authorities to provide advice and assistance to non-priority homeless people. Hon. Members on both sides of the Committee considering the previous Bill were concerned about that, and I am glad that it is being considered again. Perhaps it is a good illustration of why Bills should come round more than once. As the Secretary of State mentioned in his opening remarks, the Bill also provides for greater recognition of the special needs of those fleeing racial or other forms of violence.

It is right but hardly surprising that the Bill has the strong support of the Local Government Association. In its excellent briefing, it points out that its report "No Place Like Home", which was published in December 1999, contained 37 recommendations. A number of them have surfaced in the Bill. The association is a strong supporter of the idea that authorities should have a

"more strategic multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness, and rehousing homeless applicants".

It is in favour of strengthening the safety net but, above all, the important issue for local authorities is to have flexibility in approaching such issues.

The Bill seeks to abolish the duty to maintain a housing register. Members of Parliament know the extent to which artificialities have crept in to the administration of housing registers. Well-informed applicants know how to build the right number of points to get towards the top of the list.

The Secretary of State touched on an issue to which we shall have to return in Committee. The problem of antisocial neighbours—the so-called neighbours from hell—united members of the Committee considering the Homes Bill. Antisocial neighbours cause intractable problems of the kind about which we learn from our mailbags and in our constituency advice surgeries. Wherever they are housed, some families and individuals will always create problems; whether by their simple failure to pay rent, by their behaviour towards neighbours or by their simple unwillingness to maintain their home and keep it in good order.

That issue has been flagged up by the Local Government Association, which says that

"it is important that local authorities retain an element of discretion over the use of their own stock . . . It would be perverse if an applicant who is evicted for anti-social behaviour or racial harassment then has a right to be offered other council accommodation".

It points out that, during the Committee stage of the Homes Bill, the Government said that they were willing to amend that Bill to give authorities the right to refuse to allocate accommodation on the ground of unacceptable behaviour.

We all shared the concern about having the policy of blanket refusals that some authorities operate, but the Local Government Association adds:

"The definition of unacceptable behaviour as that which would enable a local authority to obtain a possession order is fair."

The association refers to the matter of review, which was another matter of concern in Committee.

Different views are taken on the issue of neighbours from hell. In its most recent briefing, Shelter repeats a point that it made during the Committee stage of the previous Bill. It is concerned that

"some local authorities may use the framework set out in the Bill to deny people in need access to social housing in unjustifiable circumstances."

The Green Paper made it clear that that should occur only in exceptional circumstances, but there is a potential problem if local authorities operate a harsh or unbending policy in their areas. Shelter also commends the changes that have been made to this Bill on the issue of review, but it flags up its wish to return to some of the technical issues involved. I am sure that it will have the opportunity to do that.

A separate but important problem arose in Committee. It became clear that some authorities allow homeless applicants as little as 24 hours to make up their minds about a final offer of accommodation. I do not think that

[Mr. Waterson]

that happens in my area, but it strikes me as a rigorous policy to enforce. Shelter is flagging up the need for homeless people to have a minimum of three days to consider such an offer, and I shall table an amendment suggesting four. On a practical level, it is unreasonable to expect people to have so little time in which to make a decision that will affect their happiness and comfort for a long time.

I agree with the Secretary of State on one thing: the Bill should be seen not in isolation but against its proper background. The general election proved several things, including the fact that only one in four of the electorate thought it worth while to support the Government, who have rightly sought to play down any triumphalism about that victory. However, the Government have a second chance to deliver on their promises on a range of public services and social issues, not least, on housing and homelessness, on which they have a truly dismal record.

We do not draw any comfort from the appointment as Minister for Housing and Planning of Lord Falconer, fresh from his success with the dome, and whose only direct experience of the housing market was probably when he shared a flat with the Prime Minister. We look forward to his contributions to our debates on housing in the next few years. However, it was the Prime Minister who, in an interview with *The Big Issue* a few weeks ago on 3 June, said:

"We have to do better . . . I accept we need to do more"—

and that after four years of a Labour Government who did little, if anything, to tackle the issues. No wonder Shelter commented:

"During the election, a lot of attention was given to improving education and health services. We hear much less about the thousands of families stuck in grotty B&Bs . . . The current crisis-driven approach to homelessness is not working."

In 1996, the Prime Minister also promised that Labour would

"do everything in our power to end the scandal of homelessness, to tackle the spectacle of people sleeping rough on the streets and to end the waste of families sleeping in bed and breakfast accommodation."

However, the Government's figures show that homelessness in England soared by 8,000 in the past three years. The latest figures, contained in a Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions press release of 15 June, show that homelessness priority acceptances in England rose from 102,410 in 1997 to 110,790—nearly 111,000—by the end of 2000. In addition, the number of homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has risen from just over 4,000 households in the first quarter of 1997 to nearly 11,000 in the first quarter of 2001.

The Secretary of State was fair and right to be defensive and embarrassed about those figures and to say that no one would defend them, but the Government have had four years to tackle those problems. As those statistics have risen inexorably, the gap between rich and poor has widened since 1997. Figures show that 100,000 more children and 700,000 more people are living in poverty than in 1997. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation had this to say:

"since its election, the Government has introduced over a hundred policies designed, at least in part, to tackle problems related to poverty and social exclusion. But as our report shows, the problems continue unabated."

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Joseph Rowntree report and many of the reports on poverty and inequality that have been published in the past year are based on statistics that are two years out of date and predate almost all the significant anti-poverty initiatives such as the working families tax credit, this year's children's tax credit and many other measures? He paints a deeply misleading picture by implying that those figures reflect current circumstances.

Mr. Waterson: I am fascinated by that intervention. Those are the only figures by which we can work. I would be interested to know whether the hon. Lady genuinely feels as a result of her experience of looking after her constituents—which I am sure she does well—that things are getting better rather than worse. That is certainly not my impression from my constituency. However, I am happy to bow to her if she believes that things are getting better.

Mr. Bercow: Given that the Secretary of State reiterated the need for a healthy private rented sector but that the 85 changes to the housing benefit regulations since 1997 have consistently militated against that and have stifled the growth of the sector, does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State needs urgently to speak to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to ensure that the housing benefit rules are clear, simple and intelligible and work in the interest of landlords, tenants and taxpayers?

Mr. Waterson: As usual, my hon. Friend makes a penetrating point. Housing benefit regulations are almost impossible to understand, whether one is a claimant or a landlord. How many landlords in the private sector have been put off by delays, or have ended up out of pocket because of those delays or because of bureaucracy and the often inefficient administration of the housing benefit system?

We heard a lot about empty housing from Labour in opposition. However, under this Government the amount of empty council housing in England has risen by 7 per cent., from more than 81,000 empty dwellings in April 1997 to more than 87,000 by April 2000. That development would not be so worrying if it were not taking place against the background of an enormous fall in the amount of social housing being constructed under this Government, which has plummeted compared with the amount built under the Conservative Government. Between 1993 and 1996, more than 150,000 new dwellings were built by local authorities and registered social landlords. Between 1997 and 2000, only 95,500 were constructed. The amount of new social housing built under this Government has already fallen by 37 per cent. Yet organisations such as Shelter estimate that we need 100,000 new units of affordable homes a year over each of the next 10 years.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Shelter several times. He must be

aware of its research showing that 26 per cent. of English authorities that transferred their stock found it less easy to house homeless people after the transfer. I asked him a question during the Committee proceedings on the Homes Bill, and I did not receive an answer. It is groundhog day, so I ask it again. Is it still Conservative policy to transfer all council housing as quickly as possible? It is important to receive an answer to that question this evening, as council tenants are rather nervous about the Conservatives' proposals.

Mr. Waterson: I apologise profusely if the hon. Gentleman feels that I did not answer his question in Committee. One of the wonders of the Government's legislative programme is that such opportunities come round time and again. If I do not answer his question to his total satisfaction now, I am sure that he will be placed on the Standing Committee and we can do it all over again.

The hon. Gentleman must have peeked at my notes, because I was about to discuss large-scale voluntary transfers. Not only are large-scale transfers still our policy—in due course, we would transfer all council accommodation, with consent—but it is worth reminding him, although I am sure that he does not need reminding, that they were a Conservative policy in the first place. It is fascinating that, although the Government have failed in all sorts of respects, their flagship housing policy has been to adopt and put into high gear the Tory policy of large-scale transfers. Indeed, the figure had reached about 500,000 units by the time of the election.

Like me, the hon. Gentleman might have stumbled across the written answer on the subject the other day from the new Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Northampton, North. In response to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), the Under-Secretary announced the names of 27 local authorities that will proceed with 32 transfers of all or part of their housing stock. She went on to say that

"the programme will involve over 328,000 dwellings in large scale voluntary transfers over two years, generating capital receipts of over £1.1 billion for the authorities."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 10W.]

Dr. Iddon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waterson: I will of course give way, although I hope that the hon. Gentleman will answer my question in intervening. Does he commend the adoption and success of a Tory policy, or is he against what his own Government are doing?

Dr. Iddon: There is a difference. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would answer a second question. At least we give the tenants the right to vote on the proposals. It is my understanding that, were Conservative policy to be adopted, council housing would be transferred not only as quickly as possible but without tenants being given the right to vote. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us the real situation?

Mr. Waterson: I thought that I made it clear in Committee, but I shall do so again on the Floor of the House: we do not believe in taking away the need for the consent of tenants, but want to encourage, if anything, a quickening of the pace of the programme. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has grasped the fact that if, on top of what happened over the past four years, the policy continues under the present Government, there will be hardly any council housing left by the next election. When the Conservatives storm to inevitable victory in four years' time, or earlier if this Government collapse under the weight of their own rhetoric, the problem or challenge or opportunity will no longer exist.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Does not the difficulty for the Conservative party reside in its definition of tenants' consent? On the introduction of the policy in the dim, dark recesses of Conservative government, it then averred that tenants who did not vote were automatically voting yes.

Mr. Waterson: I would still love to know whether the hon. Lady, like the hon. Gentleman, agrees with her party's policy of speeding up large-scale transfers.

Glenda Jackson: It is about consent.

Mr. Waterson: She must take that up with the current Minister responsible for housing. Even if she thinks that such Conservative policy is flawed in some details, it is going full steam ahead under this Government. We commend them for that; we support it. They will not receive any criticism from us for carrying on with it. Our only criticism would be that it would be nice if they occasionally found some of their own policies in this field.

I should like to touch on another issue that was debated in Committee: the effect on social accommodation of housing asylum seekers, which seems particularly to be a problem in London. We discussed in Committee the comments of the Association of London Government's housing panel, which pointed to the increase in asylum seekers as a "significant contributory factor" in rising homelessness. The London Research Centre took a similar view. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister in reply whether the Government are taking that into account, particularly in the London context, in their policies on homelessness.

The Minister touched on the issue of houses in multiple occupation and the licensing system. It is as well that he did, because not only did that feature in the Labour party's 1997 election manifesto but the most recent manifesto repeated the pledge to do something about it. However, this Government have not introduced any such legislation on the matter, and this Bill does nothing to address it. There has been a chorus of disappointment and criticism from bodies such as Shelter, asking why on earth the Government are not tackling the issue. If I understood the Secretary of State correctly—I hope that I am not misreporting him—there will be a consultation document later this year. That sounds as though it is some way off and that any legislation is even further off.

It is important to make it clear that we as a party will continue to support effective action on rough sleeping. The initiative relating to people discharged from the forces is extremely important. Anyone who knows anything about homelessness has known for years that a very high percentage of those discharged from the forces cannot, for various reasons, cope with running their own lives outside a structured environment. I am sure that that important initiative is bearing and will bear a great deal of fruit.

[Mr. Waterson]

Will the Minister who replies to the debate confirm that it is still the Government's policy to wind up the rough sleepers unit when it has met its targets and to devolve its responsibilities, powers and funding to local housing authorities?

In their first term, the Government fell far short of meeting the expectations of those involved in social housing and homelessness; they have even fallen short of their own promises and rhetoric. The time for delivery is now. The Bill is a start, but it is only a start.

5.41 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on their new appointments. Assiduously arguing the importance of housing and of preventing homelessness has clearly ensured that the Bill is the first that the House considers after the long debate on the Queen's Speech. When I was campaigning in the general election, I found that homelessness was an issue of particular importance here in London. At this point, I should declare an interest: I am a member of the Mayor of London's cabinet and his adviser on homelessness.

One point that the Bill brings to the fore is that the prevention of homelessness is not exclusively a question of bricks and mortar. The multi-strategy approach inherent in the Bill will prove vital in tackling homelessness, which is particularly prevalent in London. It will also ensure that rough sleepers who can be persuaded to come in off the street are kept off the street. I pay tribute to the Government for funding the rough sleepers unit initiative and to the work that that initiative has done in London. It is entirely possible that the unit will reach its target of reducing the number of people who have nowhere to sleep other than the pavements and shop doorways of this great capital city by two thirds by 2002.

In the London context at least, the number of rough sleepers pales into insignificance when compared with the number of those who are deemed to be "hidden homeless". The most recent assessment puts the number of hidden homeless as high as 160,000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), mentioned the number of people in temporary housing and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The most recent figures for London show almost 48,000 families in temporary housing and almost 8,000 people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The issue is clearly of enormous importance, but there is little point in any Government—certainly not a radical, reforming Government such as ours—attempting to tackle homelessness unless they also tackle the other basic problems that deny the citizens of this country equal opportunities: poverty, ill health and the inadequacies of our education system. I should point out to the Conservatives that it was they who left us to tackle those problems. I found it incomprehensible that the hon. Member for Eastbourne should ask why the Government had not solved the problem of homelessness in their first four years. He neatly side-stepped the real issue, for which he should have been apologising in spades. Conservative Governments, after almost two decades, left us with appalling problems, not least in social housing.

When the Conservative Government came to office in 1979, London boroughs were building affordable social housing at the rate, on average, of 15,000 units a year. When Labour came into office in 1997, I believe that only one property had been built in the Greater London area by a local authority. That was the direct result of Conservative Government policies. There was no mention of the number of families who became homeless because of Conservative party economic policies when they lost their houses because they could no longer keep up with the mortgage payments.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the Bill looks to the future, not the past. It behoves us as a radical and reforming Government, with a clear commitment to the idea of affordable social housing, to learn from the disastrous mistakes of disastrous Conservative Governments and place, as the Bill clearly does, housing at the top of the agendas of local authorities and the Government.

Poor housing creates ill health. It reduces the ability of young children to learn. It can affect the ability of people to re-skill themselves and therefore to earn for themselves and their families a decent living wage. Housing is essential in delivering on other major strands of social reform, which is the Government's clear commitment.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) made the salient point that many people who are homeless are suffering from mental illness. The point was accepted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in terms of the multi-agency approach to tackling and preventing homelessness.

When local authorities begin to set in train their homelessness strategies, I sincerely hope that they will not regard the approach as being limited either to the housing officer or to the director of social services. There must be links with health departments, and in many instances they should go much broader than the remit of a local authority. There should be links with basic education, with further and higher education and with the many programmes that are already being put in place by the voluntary sector that relate to affording homeless people meaningful occupations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred this morning to his visit to the Passage and to Sister Ellen and her remarkable band of volunteers. Their work is extraordinarily valuable. I feel confident that he would not wish to say that the Passage was the only place in London where sterling work is being done.

Only this morning, I visited one of the hostels run by St. Mungo's, which is situated in Kingsway. Programmes at that hostel are designed to help many young people to develop skills. They were not given the necessary encouragement or the straightforward training to develop skills when they were at school. Of course, they were at school under a Conservative regime. It is hardly to be wondered at that they left school with so few skills to enable them to create a life for themselves in the wider world.

By taking a multi-agency approach, we can begin to tackle a problem that no nation as rich as ours in the 21st century should have to face. However, we do have to face it, and the multi-agency approach is right. The clear commitment given by the Government and the vast amounts of money being poured into the creation of social housing are the way forward. We will not be able to

transform the situation overnight and no single agency can tackle the issue. However, if we accept that all the agencies must work together, with a clearly defined goal to eradicate for ever poor housing and, certainly, homelessness, much can be achieved.

That will be achieved only by central and local government working together, by the public and private sectors working together and by the statutory and voluntary sectors working together. Again, in the London context, we hope that local authorities will be able to involve the private rented sector in a continuing relationship that will ensure that families are taken out of appalling bed-and-breakfast accommodation. No child should have to sleep next door to someone who is severely mentally damaged or suffering from drug and alcohol abuse, where the only division between them is not even a lath and plaster wall but often something that a violent fist could easily come through. It is no use pretending that that can be achieved and that affordable housing for all can be provided unless there are careful partnerships, and careful understanding by those who decide where people will live. There must be genuine consideration of who the neighbours are.

We have heard much about neighbours from hell. Every hon. Member could cite a constituency case involving a neighbour from hell—*[Interruption.]* Not everybody lives next door to a Member of Parliament; hon. Members should not be quite so quick to castigate themselves. The issue can certainly be complicated. For example, what does a local authority do when people who own their own property object to people who are moved in next door because they have been harassed on the ground that they do not like the colour of the incomers' skin? The local authorities with which I have dealt are clear that they will not tolerate or indulge that kind of malice by neighbours.

There are other cases in which, for example, a woman has to move from her home because of domestic violence. However, that means that her children have to move from their local school and she has to move away from the supportive circle of friends and family. Quite often, she has to move a considerable distance. In one case, which I have mentioned in the Chamber before, the perpetrator of domestic violence was prevented from going within a certain distance of his partner and her family. However, his brothers took over the job and decided that it was their duty to harass and even physically attack my constituent. The issue involves many complex matters.

Tony Baldry: One thing that concerns me—and I declare an interest as a lawyer—is that it is now practically impossible for many of our constituents to get access to the courts. In the case to which the hon. Lady referred, it would be possible, as it was in the past, to get an injunction at the county court to restrain individuals themselves, their agents or servants that would have prevented the brothers from taking such action. I suspect that hon. Members on both sides of the House, who see constituents at their surgeries, find increasingly that vulnerable, inarticulate people are obliged to represent themselves in the county court in eviction and other proceedings and, not surprisingly, find it difficult.

Glenda Jackson: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but I can look only at the example of my own local authority; no such individual would be without some form of advocacy if he or she were in that situation, as there is close working between the authority's relevant bodies. However, I do not claim that all local authorities are such shining examples.

I am a believer in short, sharp speeches in the Chamber, and the hon. Gentleman has brought me neatly to my final point: we must not lose sight of the fact that the most vulnerable people in our society can be some of the most unpleasant, difficult and, in some instances, the most violent and hardest to reach. They can be the most obdurate and they dislike and fear authority in any shape or form; they are not the easiest people to deal with. However, it is surely our responsibility as a civilised society to ensure that, in any strategy proposed by a local authority or consortium of local authorities, the needs of those people will be considered and, in future, adequately met. Otherwise, there will simply be a revolving door of people being taken off the streets, put in the wrong kind of situation, denied the right kind of social interchange and going back on the streets.

I shall end where I began by welcoming the commitment that is symbolised by the Bill being the first of the Session to be debated on the Floor of the House; I wish it well in its passage.

5.56 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I join a large number of hon. Members who have already congratulated the Secretary of State in the knowledge that he will bring a certain flair to his post. It was clear from his speech that he has a genuine interest in this issue. I also welcome the new Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble); I hope that she enjoys her new brief.

I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). Interestingly, the Secretary of State began his contribution by referring to his visit this morning to the Passage and the work of Sister Ellen in helping homeless people. In doing so, he drew attention to the very point highlighted by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate: the Bill, by itself, will not solve all the problems of homelessness. It is important to recognise that homeless people rarely need only a roof over their heads; they need a wide range of support, often for problems related to unemployment, marriage breakdown and, as others have said, mental health difficulties and drug and alcohol abuse. It is vital that we continue work that will ensure the development of the inter-agency activities to which the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate referred.

The Secretary of State was right to draw attention to a number of issues that need to be addressed if we are to begin to tackle the serious problem of homelessness that we still have in this country. I was delighted that he referred to the urgent need to increase the amount of social or affordable housing; at least he recognises that that there is a continuing problem concerning the need to tackle the significant number of empty houses in this country. It is a disgrace that there are more than 100,000 homeless households, yet a staggering 750,000 empty properties in this country. I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that he will look at measures to address that. I am also delighted that he will start to look, albeit rather belatedly, at the promise in the 1997 Labour manifesto to develop measures for licensing schemes for houses in multiple occupation.

[Mr. Don Foster]

Those measures are all welcome, but the Bill does not seek to deal with them. It is important to recognise that we must not only address other measures but look at those that will impinge directly on the Bill. In particular, we must consider the Bill alongside the proposal to extend the categories of homeless people who, in future, have to be supported by local authorities. As we know, that package is likely to include 16 and 17-year-olds, care leavers and people who are vulnerable as a result of violence, harassment or an institutionalised background, including, as has been said, ex-service men and women.

I note that a consultation document on those new categories was published at the end of last week, with a consultation end-date of 21 September. I hope that when the Minister replies she will assure me that copies of that document will be made available in the Library. Perhaps she will also tell us when she expects the new categories to come into force. That will be an important measure, which we welcome, and we hope that it will be introduced as soon as possible.

I am delighted by the Bill. Like other hon. Members, I am pleased that it is the first Bill in the new Session. Perhaps that is a sign that housing will have higher priority in the work of this Parliament than it has had in recent years.

I was somewhat surprised by the frequent references of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to the work of Shelter. He rightly praised to the skies the work that Shelter has been doing for years, but I remind him that one of Shelter's long-standing concerns is the fact that the previous Conservative Government's Housing Act 1996 repealed measures introduced by my late hon. Friend the Liberal Member of Parliament, Stephen Ross, in his Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Nevertheless, if there has been a U-turn—a conversion—that is welcome.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said that on topics such as housing Liberal Democrats sometimes tend to be anorak-like. On this occasion, I am afraid, I may prove him right. Having said that there is much in the Bill that I welcome, I acknowledge that there is still scope for improvement. In the measure's first outing, in its earlier guise of part II of the Homes Bill, a number of Liberal Democrat amendments were accepted in Committee. I am delighted—indeed, my cup runneth over—that the Government saw fit to incorporate in the Bill several elements that we proposed last time round, but which they rejected at that time. Nevertheless, further work is necessary in some areas.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Given that he is now a self-proclaimed anorak, and notwithstanding the importance of the availability of public finance for good housing, will he tell the House what assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the rules on the use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses on the size of interest repayments on local authority debt?

Mr. Foster: To save the House time, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave about three months ago to an identical question.

The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) referred to widespread concern about the impact of the rather large number of stock transfers that are taking place. Reference was made to the Minister's recent announcement that 328,000 properties are to form part of the second wave, bringing to 580,000 the total number of properties that will have been transferred. The hon. Gentleman is no doubt well aware that with a number of large metropolitan areas such as Birmingham and Sheffield planning to go down that route, it is likely that by 2004 registered social landlords will be the main owners of social housing.

My concern, which I expressed in Committee when we discussed part II of the Homes Bill, is that in the proposed legislation there is not a strong enough relationship between local authorities, which have responsibility for homelessness strategies, and registered social landlords, which will have the majority of the properties. As the Minister knows, the Government made it clear in the housing Green Paper that they intended to impose further requirements on RSLs and their relationship with local authorities; the Government spoke of a mechanism to ensure that.

During the passage of the previous Bill, I moved an amendment to try to improve that relationship. The Government assured me that that was not necessary, as the Housing Corporation would have more teeth. On the strength of that assurance, I was prepared to drop the argument. I followed up with a series of parliamentary questions about the Government's promise that the Housing Corporation would be able to ensure that registered social landlords worked constructively with local authorities. The answers left me somewhat disappointed.

I had hoped to receive confirmation that the Housing Corporation would strengthen its statutory housing management guidance. I was told that a new draft would be available in May, but so far that has not happened. However, in the draft that has been produced, there is considerable cause for concern.

The draft refers directly to the responsibility of registered social landlords to work with local authorities, but I can tell the Minister that that reference is very low down on the list of priorities, and that there is no sign of a performance indicator to monitor the circumstances in which RSLs refuse to accommodate households nominated by local authorities.

The Secretary of State mentioned my concern about guidance, and I certainly am concerned when guidance is weak. I prefer the legislative framework to be used, rather than guidance. If the guidance before us is the only guidance that there will be, I do not believe that it is strong enough to ensure that vital relationship, as more and more local authorities go down the stock transfer route.

The Minister may be able to persuade me not to introduce amendments to the Bill if she can assure me, first, that the Housing Corporation will give further consideration to increasing the priority attached to working with local authorities; secondly, that she will consider persuading the Housing Corporation to introduce a performance indicator in the code of practice; and, thirdly, that she will guarantee that there will be wide consultation before the guidance is approved.

There is another aspect of the Bill in which the guidance may be too weak. We have heard much about neighbours from hell, and it is right that that should be discussed. The hon. Member for Eastbourne pointed to

the tension inherent in the issue. We want to ensure that local authorities do everything they can to assist homeless individuals and households, but we want them to retain the right to refuse to assist people who have consistently failed to maintain good standards of behaviour or to pay rent on time. There is a huge tension between the two objectives.

Glenda Jackson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that rent is not being paid on time in some London boroughs because the housing benefit system is in such an appalling mess? That is one area in which there should be multi-agency working. Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions should be speaking to their counterparts in the Department of Work and Pensions to get the problem sorted.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Lady is absolutely right about the nature of the mess, and some of us have long waited for the Government to propose reforms of the housing benefits system. There is, however, an additional problem. Some local authorities have "out-sourced"—privatised—their work to address the issue. In just the past week, one local authority became so fed up with a privatised organisation's way of addressing the issue that it had to bring the service back in-house. As the hon. Lady said, it is so difficult to address the issue because it encompasses so many other aspects of local authorities' and other agencies' work. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it is possible to address the issue in isolation or to out-source it.

Jeremy Corbyn: I agree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's comments on housing benefit and the need to bring it in-house to enable a multi-agency approach. Will he therefore contact Liberal Democrat-controlled Islington council and advise it to discontinue the contract with ITNET that it wrongly signed rather than extend it for another four years?

Mr. Foster: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am already in discussions on that very point with various authorities of all political parties that have taken that route and are increasingly encountering difficulties with the contracts that they have signed. I shall continue that dialogue.

Glenda Jackson: May I strongly recommend that the hon. Gentleman recommend that those local authorities contact the London borough of Camden, which has received two citizens charter awards for the efficiency of its housing benefits system?

Mr. Foster: I shall certainly bear that point in mind.

We must ask whether the Bill properly addresses the difficult issue of the conflict between ensuring help for the maximum number of people with homelessness needs and trying to ensure that local authorities have some discretion about who they help. Ministers plan to address the issue primarily in guidance, but I do not believe that guidance alone will work. Perhaps the less-emotive issue of the suspension of people with rent arrears can best illustrate why I believe that.

The guidance says that the exception of such people should be the exception rather than the rule. Nevertheless, the Government's own research has demonstrated that 29 per cent. of authorities that disqualify housing register or transfer list applicants because of arrears have absolutely no documented rules specifying the circumstances or debt level that should trigger exclusion or suspension. Moreover, 63 per cent. of authorities that have such policies regard any debt level as sufficient grounds for exclusion or suspension, so, although such a policy is not within the spirit of the Government's own Green Paper or guidance, one is being operated. If Ministers wish to persist in using guidance as the only tool to tackle the problem, that guidance will have to be considerably strengthened.

I should like, finally, to mention three or four small matters where I believe that further change is necessary.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that people with arrears should be eligible for transfer? As he said, local authorities tend to try to persuade people to balance their books.

Mr. Foster: I have some difficulty with that intervention. I think that the hon. Gentleman and I would agree that an authority should be able to decide not to provide support to some tenants, such as in some cases of anti-social behaviour or persistent rent arrears, but such a decision should be taken only in extreme cases. The Government's own research has shown that, in many cases, some local authorities have used any rent arrears, even a single instance of rent arrears, as a justification not to house. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees with the Secretary of State that other means of providing support to such individuals or households should come first and that the prime concern should be to meet the housing need of that family, not least for the sake of any children.

There have been welcome changes in the review process for those who are concerned about a local authority's allocation decision, but as a result of the various changes that have been introduced there is an inconsistency in the process. A review may be based on two aspects of the process: the determination on eligibility for support, and the priority given to individuals who are deemed to be eligible.

The procedure at the eligibility stage—dealt with in clause 13 in proposed subsections (9) to (11) of new section 160A—places the onus on the local authority to notify the applicant of his or her right to a review. Rather bizarrely, however, clause 15(4), which deals with the priority point, turns the process on its head by placing responsibility on the applicant to request information from the authority on his or her review. Given the nature of those whom we are seeking to assist, it seems sensible that the same procedure should apply to both parts of the review process by placing the onus on the local authority to notify the applicant.

Mr. Hancock: Is there not another aspect of the review process? Although a property may have been allocated, a local authority will not have discharged its responsibilities until the applicant has been informed of his or her right to a review of the suitability of accommodation. That is a new provision. Does my hon. Friend believe that local authorities will be able to cope if the right of suitability is exercised in all cases?

Mr. Foster: As the Secretary of State admitted earlier, given the shortage of high-quality temporary

[Mr. Foster]

accommodation, that is clearly going to be very difficult. Currently, 75,000 people are in temporary accommodation. I would love the legislation to include provisions on the suitability of temporary accommodation and requiring local authorities to continue to provide accommodation in the review period. If a person does not have access to accommodation, it would be very difficult for him to exercise fully his right to ensure that the review had been conducted appropriately.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne rightly raised the issue of the minimum period allowed when a final offer is made. In the previous Parliament, when the Committee was considering the Homes Bill, I gave various examples of local authorities that had given people less than 24 hours to accept a final offer. Although all the Committee members accepted that that was unacceptable, the Government were unwilling to accept an amendment proposing to allow applicants a minimum of three days to reflect on whether to accept a final offer. I very much hope that the Government are prepared to think again on that issue.

I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to discuss particular aspects of the Bill, but the most important point is that the Bill has the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House, all organisations working in the homelessness sector and the local government associations. It is therefore incumbent on us to give the Bill a speedy passage, to ensure that it can begin to provide the additional help that homeless people desperately deserve.

6.20 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in such an important debate, and I add my congratulations to my right hon. and hon. Friends on their appointments.

It is a great honour to represent the people of Alyn and Deeside in this House and, equally, to follow such an excellent Member of Parliament as Barry Jones. Barry represented the seat for 31 years and was the very model of a good constituency Member of Parliament: dedicated, hard working and always available to the people of Alyn and Deeside.

During the election campaign, I was struck by the number of people whom Barry had helped personally. It was not just what Barry had done for Alyn and Deeside, but what Barry had done for them. I am sure that if it had not been for Labour's years in opposition, Barry would have achieved high office in this country. I am sure also that the House will join me in wishing Barry well as his service to the people of Wales and the rest of Britain continues in the other place. I have been told on many occasions that Barry will be a hard act to follow.

As a new Member of Parliament, I recognise that the political institutions of Wales have changed and that the Assembly now plays an important role, particularly in respect of education and health. I look forward to working with our AM, Tom Middlehurst, on these issues.

In preparation for this speech, I took the opportunity of using the resources of the Library and found out what my predecessors, Barry Jones and Eirene White, had said in their maiden speeches. I also found that Barry was followed in his maiden speech by another new Member—the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who has just left the Chamber, probably because he has other more important issues on his mind.

Both Barry and Eirene talked at length about a constituency dominated by the steel industry at Shotton, then our largest employer and with the whole community reliant upon it for its livelihood. It is with great sadness that I cannot talk in such terms today. Only last week, we had further job losses at Shotton and yet another part of this once great industry fell to the vagaries of the marketplace. For those who remain, we recognise that there is a long fight ahead. Above all else, we now have to ask the company to look to the long term and not to react to short-term market movements.

The industry's employees have shown their commitment with improved productivity and flexibility. We now need a similar commitment from Corus. However, I welcome the ISERBS package, which will help redundant steelworkers to train for the future. It is not just industry that suffers, but whole communities in Shotton and Connah's Quay: the shops and other businesses that are supported by the steel community. This is too often forgotten.

The debate today is about homelessness and housing need. We need adequate social housing but, equally, we need stable communities, jobs and security. In 1980, Alyn and Deeside suffered terrible job losses in steel production and there were few opportunities for the men and women who lost their jobs. Thankfully, we are no longer reliant on just one industry for our livelihoods.

The British Aerospace facility at Broughton is a shining example of what can be achieved, and is now recognised as a world leader in aircraft wing production. With the building of the new large aircraft, the A380, Broughton will employ more than 6,000 people. It is a matter of great credit and vision that it was this Government who supported the venture, which I am confident will go on to have great success. Airbus is competing in a difficult market, but Airbus is winning through. My predecessor campaigned long and hard for Airbus, as he did for Raytheon when it looked as if that company would shift production to America. I am pleased to say that that factory is now doing well and plays an important role in the community.

There are many other successful businesses in Alyn and Deeside, including Toyota, which has recently expanded production of engines at its plant. My constituency also contains a farming community, which, although spared foot and mouth, finds itself struggling, as does the industry as a whole.

The House may have noticed that my accent is not one of a native of north Wales. As a new candidate and Member of Parliament, however, I could not have asked for a warmer welcome for me and my family from the people of Alyn and Deeside. I must make special mention of Ivor Roberts MBE, who has worked tirelessly as a county councillor for Buckley and as agent for Barry Jones and me.

My confidence during the campaign was put to the test, surprisingly, after the result. On Friday, I bought a copy of *The Chronicle* election special and was somewhat alarmed by the headline "Tory triumph". Had it been a dream? Was this now the nightmare? Thankfully—although not for the people of Cheshire—the headline was

referring to the Cheshire county council elections. Underneath, in much smaller writing, there was something about another Labour landslide. I breathed a sigh of relief.

While my constituency is doing well and continuing to increase its industry and employment, there are still areas of social deprivation and great need. It is often in constituencies such as mine that those problems go unnoticed, particularly by those outside the community.

I am always concerned when I see empty properties. They are not only wasteful, but they bring down an area, sap morale and deter people from moving into the community. It is important to note, however, that these properties are not necessarily council owned, and that shop properties in particular are owned in the private sector. We must get such properties back into the system as quickly as possible. If we do not, it will be very difficult to reverse the trend.

I believe that, in the main, if people have access to decent housing, they will respond accordingly, taking pride in their property and the community around them. Like all hon. Members, I receive many letters from constituents regarding housing issues, but that is a positive thing. It is when people cease to care that we have a problem. It is our task to ensure that councils and housing associations have the resources to meet the aspirations of the people.

6.27 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on his commendable maiden speech. As he said, his predecessor Barry Jones was much liked in all parts of the House. I suspect that we would all agree that had Labour not been in opposition for 18 years, Barry would almost certainly have served on the Treasury Bench at some point. He was a good friend and it is good news that he is now in the other place, or soon will be. It is always a mystery how people are spirited there. They are gazetted, and are given such wondrous names that one has to catch up with who they are.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside's speech was a model of a maiden speech and I look forward to hearing from him in the future. He will discover that he and other colleagues will get ragged incessantly by English Members of Parliament who are concerned that Wales, and indeed Scotland, seem to get a disproportionate amount of the UK cake, notwithstanding the fact of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. However, all that is for another day.

I am conscious that today is a day on which one should not make long speeches, because I see many hon. Friends who wish to make their maiden speeches. Many of them are as knowledgable as—if not far more knowledgable than—me on the subject of housing. My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne)—who I hope will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—was a special adviser to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) and me when we were Environment Ministers.

For a long time, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) was a special adviser to the Conservative group on Oxfordshire county council. There is considerable expertise on the Conservative Benches and it is significant that so many of my hon. Friends wish to make their maiden speeches on this subject. That demonstrates the commitment that the Conservatives have had to housing since the time of Disraeli, and our belief in one nation.

This is obviously a very worthy Bill, but it is difficult to work out what will be different in housing policy once the Bill is enacted.

Clauses 1 to 3, which are the main thrust of the Bill, require local authorities to develop a positive, proactive homelessness strategy, but I suspect that most local authorities already do that. Certainly, Conservative-controlled Cherwell district council in my area has long had such a strategy. Its initiatives include a "move on" policy, to allow the—mainly young—people living in supported housing who have demonstrated an ability to live independently to move into permanent social housing.

The council participates in a countrywide scheme with the drugs action team and other statutory and voluntary organisations to provide housing for individuals who have successfully tackled their drugs misuse, facilitating their rejection of drugs and possibly an offending life style. A registered social landlord, with the council's support, has sought funding from the Housing Corporation for the development of emergency accommodation for single homeless people, with day care provision.

We are setting up a women's refuge in Banbury. The council, working with the community mental health trust, is providing some flats in the new social housing in Bicester for people with a mental health problem, and a similar scheme is being developed for new social housing development in Banbury.

I am sure that the Government would welcome all those initiatives. We have had a large-scale voluntary transfer in Cherwell, where people were given a choice of staying with the district council or going to a housing association, Banbury Homes. As part of the strategy, Banbury Homes, too, has some excellent initiatives. It has a scheme whereby 19 young people aged 16 to 25 reside in a foyer in central Banbury. To qualify for one of the eight bedsits or 11 flats, they have to agree to some form of education and training.

The foyer scheme has led to many young people not only finding decent housing but taking up educational opportunities that they would otherwise have missed. One youngster said:

"If I hadn't come to the Foyer I wouldn't even have known about the Prince's Trust . . . I wouldn't have got the encouragement and support I've been given. They don't just stick you in a flat and say 'get on with it'. They're with you every step of the way . . . The Foyer has opened windows and doors of opportunity that I never imagined were possible."

Banbury Homes provides a safe and secure environment at Cotefield house, where vulnerable families are given the support and encouragement that they need to rebuild broken lives. It is of especial benefit for people fleeing domestic violence.

Banbury Homes also runs a north Oxfordshire tenancy support project, helping both its own and Cherwell district council's tenants to deal with financial and social problems that are making it difficult for them to maintain their tenancies. There are about 650 tenants in Cherwell with significant rent arrears, and the project is designed to help them, because, as Banbury Homes says, those arrears are often just a symptom of other underlying problems. It tries to link them to the various support services to help tackle the root causes.

[Tony Baldry]

Banbury Homes runs a rent deposit guarantee scheme, which has helped about 600 people to find accommodation in the private rented sector by guaranteeing a deposit. The tenant benefits and the landlord is given some security.

Housing authorities such as Cherwell district council are, quite properly, doing everything that the Government want them to do. What more is to be required of them? Is it intended that the Bill should seem to be doing more than it actually does? Clause 5 covers the

"Provision of accommodation for persons not in priority need who are not homeless intentionally".

It is designed to get away from a points system. Cherwell district council is already away from a points system and into bands.

The reality is that it is very difficult to get council accommodation in Cherwell—I suspect that this is true everywhere—unless someone is a high-priority case. Cherwell has about 2,000 families on the housing waiting list, and about 200 vacancies a year in social housing. For the vast majority of families who apply to the council, the only route is into private rented accommodation, with the support of housing benefit. Those people are concerned that they are then deemed to be adequately housed and cease to be anything approaching a high-priority case.

I welcome clause 11, which makes it easier to appeal to the county court, because it was ridiculous for tenants or those concerned about their housing to have to appeal to the High Court, especially as it is increasingly difficult to get legal aid. That put access to justice beyond many people's reach. Clause 8 was introduced on similar grounds. I welcome all those worthwhile tidying-up provisions, but it is unclear how the Bill will make it easier for people to have access to affordable social housing.

What does the Bill do that responsible authorities such as Cherwell district council, in conjunction with housing associations such as Banbury Homes, are not already doing? Is not the danger that the Bill will give the impression that the Government are seeking to do something on which they cannot deliver, and that it will raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled?

I do not make this as a party political point. Recent research carried out by Cambridge university suggests that 80,000 to 85,000 new affordable homes are needed each year to meet extra demand, and that we are currently providing only about half that number. Providing such homes is an incredibly expensive exercise, not least at a time when it is increasingly difficult to find land on which local authorities or, more realistically, housing associations can build.

By the judicious demolition of five pairs of postwar prefabs in the centre of Banbury, Banbury Homes is creating 16 new two and three-bedroom homes. Such an initiative requires the most enormous amount of delicate negotiation with existing tenants, planning authorities and the Housing Corporation, which provides the funding.

I ask the Minister, in her wind-up, to make clearer to the House, in a couple of sentences, what the Bill will do that responsible local authorities and social landlords are not already doing. How will it improve people's ability to move into social accommodation, and what real changes will it make to people's lives? If the Bill does not make real improvements, although it may give the impression of doing something, it will not deliver very much.

6.40 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I congratulate the new ministerial team on their appointment and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on his maiden speech, which demonstrated a powerful commitment to his constituency. He also paid a moving tribute to his predecessor, and in particular to the efficacy of his efforts with his casework. I wonder whether, now that he no longer has a constituency of his own, my former hon. Friend might be interested in a little outsourcing; I am sure that I could come to an arrangement with him.

We have heard contributions from both sides that have shown a clear consensus about the underlying principles of the Bill, especially the requirement for local authorities to develop homelessness strategies alongside their housing strategies, the emphasis on prevention and the development of choice-based lettings.

I also welcome the ending of the arbitrary requirement for local authorities to provide accommodation for two years only. Although that rule was more often breached than practised, it none the less sent out an unwelcome message to homeless people and others in housing need that the Government were not prepared to put their housing needs centre-stage, or to recognise the vulnerability that accompanies homelessness.

It is a great credit to the Government that they have reintroduced the Bill into the House so quickly, and I hope that we will be able to give it a swift passage. However, the sky over the Liberal Democrat Benches seems to be darkening with anoraks, and I think I hear the sound of distant thunder—so I shall be relieved when we have been able to see the Bill through and put it into action.

The election campaign was a sobering experience for me in that it revealed housing need. In the four previous years, housing issues were by far the most frequent and serious of all the casework problems that I experienced, but in the campaign I found to my surprise that in dealing with the people who had found their way to my surgery, I had not necessarily been dealing with the worst housing problems. Behind almost every third door that I knocked on—certainly in the needier parts of my constituency—I found yet more cases of housing need.

I therefore welcome the opportunity to set the Bill in the context of the issues of housing supply that have to be addressed. Over a number of years, and under different Governments, there has been an unsustainable fall in the supply of affordable and social housing. In places such as London and the south-east, and in some other parts of the country as well, we are reaching a crisis point in the provision of social housing. Something must be done to tackle that problem.

Of course, I welcome and appreciate the fact that there has been a dramatic increase in housing investment through the comprehensive spending review. That is working its way through. Unlike the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), I do not look back on the past four years of the Labour Government as a dismal record. The money has been increasing, and housing has moved up the ladder of political importance, with the targets being set—within the framework for ending child poverty—for reducing the number of children being brought up in substandard housing.

Particular emphasis has also been put on improving the condition of the housing stock. That is welcome, but that emphasis addresses the needs of some parts of the country

more than those of others. There is no doubt that some parts of the country have a real problem with the chronic substandard quality of their accommodation. However, the problem that areas of low demand, often in the north, are experiencing are not the same as those that face London and the south-east. It is now time to shift—or rather, to balance—the emphasis towards addressing those needs.

Between 1995 and last year, the number of new lettings by councils and housing associations fell from 51,650 to 36,100. Therein lies the problem: until we reverse that decline in letting we shall go on having to deal with all the problems of unmet housing need outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

Unfortunately, and in parallel to that, the provision of private rented accommodation for families on low incomes has been halved. There are several reasons for that, and they all have to be dealt with. One reason is the absolute chaos that faces people in private rented accommodation when they make a claim for housing benefit. There is no doubt about that, and it has been mentioned before.

My local authority of Westminster privatised its housing benefit service using Capita, and the system went into free fall a little over a year and a half ago. Although the volume of cases in arrears has now fallen substantially, scarcely a day goes by when I do not find yet another case of someone receiving a notice seeking possession, or even being evicted, because of non-payment of housing benefit. Private landlords, unlike registered social landlords, simply will not stand for that.

That is definitely one of the reasons, but it is not the only reason—another reason is London's economic success. Landlords who five to eight years ago, during the slump in the housing market in the mid-1990s, were renting to families on lower incomes and housing benefit, no longer need to do so. They can rent their property at the higher end of the market and receive a substantial private rent. The whole nature of the private rented accommodation market has changed.

In addition, property that was being used as hostels for homeless families and others in need is now being converted to backpackers' hostels, and used for other purposes connected with the tourist trade. The supply of that form of accommodation has now almost dried up. One of the great challenges that we face, alongside that of increasing the supply, is making good that shortfall in private rented accommodation and giving people an alternative, particularly those who move in and out of London on a short-term basis for work and other reasons.

The drop in such provision is unsustainable, and is doing vast damage to our communities and incredible damage to the individuals who, as a result, have to go through the hell of living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate discussed some of the conditions in which people are living.

Two years ago, the Dixon inquiry into the conditions that led a severely mentally ill man to kill a young policewoman in east London, revealed what pressure cookers the bed-and-breakfast hostels and hotels are turning into. Families with young children are living next door to people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties, and the pressure under which they live leads to further mental stress, emotional breakdown, the breakdown of relationships and many related problems.

Geraint Davies: As the chair of the London boroughs housing committee in a former life, I know that, as my hon. Friend is saying, bed and breakfast is not only completely socially unacceptable but economically ignorant. Obviously, the cost of keeping people in bed and breakfast is much higher than sustaining them in affordable housing. Does my hon. Friend not agree that the Bill provides extra rights for homeless people and gives extra duties to government to provide more affordable housing, which is desperately needed in London today?

Ms Buck: I agree with my hon. Friend, particularly about the economic illiteracy of bed-and-breakfast accommodation; it is now estimated that we spend £150 million in London alone on it. That is mad. It is not only bed and breakfast that is economically illiterate, but temporary accommodation, too—although I do not say for a second that we shall be able to deal with all that overnight. We are now housing about 50,000 families in London in temporary accommodation, in some cases leasing back former council flats for which tenants would have been paying £80 or £90 a week in rent, whose rent is now £1,000 a month.

Housing benefit frequently picks up the bill, and although families would like to be able to be free of benefit and go to work, they cannot do so because the cost of their rent traps them in welfare dependency. If we are to consider temporary accommodation instead of bed and breakfast as a medium-to-longer term solution to housing need, we will need a new deal that is specially targeted at families in temporary accommodation to enable them to overcome that benefit barrier to work.

The term "temporary accommodation" has become something of a misnomer, because we are talking about interim accommodation. People in temporary accommodation such as a leased flat stay for five or eight years—as long as many people would expect to stay in a social tenancy.

The Government can and should do much to tackle the problems that I have mentioned, but local authorities must not be let off the hook. We need a multilayered approach to the problem of homelessness. The two local authorities that my constituency covers—Kensington and Westminster—have, at best, a chequered record in securing affordable housing from partnerships with the private sector under section 106. Better-performing councils, such as Hammersmith and Fulham, have been able to secure more than 50 per cent. of development on private land for affordable housing, and that is considerably to their credit.

In south Westminster, we recently had to look to an intervention from the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone; fortunately, he managed to raise the contribution from the developer from £850,000 to £2.5 million. That goes to show what can be achieved when the clear political will exists. Westminster has made progress—I congratulate the council—because instead of requiring 25 per cent. of new development to be affordable housing, it now requires 25 per cent. plus a further 5 per cent. to be made available to key workers. However, that welcome change has

[Ms Buck]

required some pressure from the Mayor. I support the Mayor's initiatives on housing and, as a member of his housing commission last autumn, I welcome the strategies to boost the supply of accommodation set out in its paper, which were advanced in the spatial development strategy.

When we discussed the Homes Bill in the previous Parliament, I tabled a probing amendment, which was not reached because of lack of time, to set targets for a reduction in the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. In response to a parliamentary question that I tabled, we had the announcement of the establishment of the bed-and-breakfast unit, which is a great step forward. It is the single most pleasing action the Government have taken on the issue of housing recently, because the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation has no place in the 21st century. We cannot allow families with young children, and other vulnerable people, to spend more than the shortest period, in emergencies, in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It damages their health and relationships and severely disrupts children's educational performance. Strategies aimed at tackling social exclusion cannot work effectively so long as thousands of families can expect to spend months, and sometimes years, living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

With so many strategies, one substitutes a focus on a particular problem—in this case, bed and breakfast, but it also happened with rough sleepers—for an eye on the bigger picture. In this case, that is housing supply. Overcrowding and the loss of privacy in hostel and hotel accommodation is a critical problem, but it is no worse than the loss of privacy and overcrowding that an increasing number of households experience under existing social and registered social landlord tenancies. In the weeks before the election as I went around my constituency, I met hundreds of families—some already known to me—living in levels of chronic overcrowding that are nothing short of a scandal.

Unfortunately, although the Housing Act 1996 expected local authorities to give due preference to overcrowded households, the legislation on which that definition is based is now 70 years out of date. There is an urgent need to bring up to date the framework of overcrowding legislation to enable local authorities properly to reflect the duties they owe to all households seeking accommodation, especially larger family units, which do not get the priority they need.

One family I met—I could easily have chosen 99 others—living on an estate in Westminster, had seven people, ranging in age from two to 35, sharing a small two-bedroomed flat that the council has, technically correctly, assessed as not overcrowded until the nine-year-old turns 10, when, with the charm that characterises so much of our legislation, he ceases to be half a person. We cannot be serious about a system that allows a family of seven living in a small two-bedroomed flat to be defined as not overcrowded. However, the statutory overcrowding legislation, based on the conditions that prevailed in the 1930s, gives no incentive to local authorities to give due priority to larger households.

One problem that arises, as we increasingly shift our housing stock from council-owned to registered social landlord accommodation—whether through supply or transfers—is that larger family units cannot be moved out of their present accommodation into an alternative that is technically not large enough for their requirements. So, my family of seven, who would technically require four or five-bedroom accommodation, cannot be moved to a housing association property with three bedrooms, even though that would significantly relieve their housing pressure, because the rules do not allow that. The extent of that problem is now so great and so entrenched across London that there is a real risk that tens of thousands of overcrowded families will be trapped in local authority accommodation with no prospects of moving. That is unacceptable.

I warmly congratulate the Government on bringing back the Bill, on all the action that has been taken and on the investment that has been made to tackle housing issues. However, there is much more to do, and I would welcome an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Government have fully accepted the need for two housing policies, and not just one.

The needs of large areas of this country, especially Birmingham and further north, which have poor-quality estates where nobody wants to live, are completely different from the needs of areas of high demand. On some estates—I know that there are exceptions—we might need to tear down unwanted housing and investigate social and economic regeneration strategies. So long as we have a single housing policy mindset, as I fear still exists at official level, we will not satisfy the needs of communities in low-demand areas or the desperate bottled-up housing needs of communities such as those in my constituency. We expect a consultation paper soon on housing capital allocations, which will be an opportunity to demonstrate that those different needs are being addressed and balanced. I assure my hon. Friend that we will watch developments closely.

I wish the Bill good speed. It is welcome for homeless families, but we now face the huge challenge of delivering for those hundreds of thousands of families, especially in London and the south-east, for whom overcrowding is a daily nightmare.

6.59 pm

Mr. Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on his excellent maiden speech, and wish him well during his time in the House. It is a great privilege to be called to make my maiden speech in this important debate on homelessness, a subject very close to my heart.

I speak as the first new Member of Parliament for South-West Bedfordshire since 1970. It is with great humility that I take the place so honourably occupied in this House by Sir David Madel for the past 31 years. David was respected and liked by hon. Members on both sides of the House for his constructive and courteous contributions in the Chamber. He is a true gentleman, in the finest meaning of that word. He embodies, for me, so much of what is best about conservatism. He is kind, conscientious and compassionate, and his heart is in the communities that he has so faithfully served for the past 31 years. He and his wife Susan have been unfailingly helpful to my wife and me since my selection. No tribute to David would be complete without mention of his faithful secretary, Jill Burge, who so loyally supported him throughout his time in Parliament.

All elections are full of drama, passion and intense debate, but they also have their lighter moments. There was the time when my intrepid mother-in-law, canvassing hard for our county council candidate and me in Houghton Regis, passed through the security gates of a house only to find them locking behind her. The picture the press missed of her rescue by a fire engine would no doubt have graced several local front pages. Rumours of my collusion with the householder are wholly without foundation.

Just after the election, my speech at my first branch event was rudely interrupted by my five-year-old daughter falling in the goldfish pond during the finale. I was under the illusion that it was new Members of Parliament who were supposed to make a splash in their constituencies.

South-West Bedfordshire is a varied, interesting, dynamic and beautiful constituency. It includes the three towns of Leighton Buzzard, adjoined with Linslade, Dunstable and Houghton Regis, 17 villages, the renowned Whipsnade wild animal park and the London gliding club. The majestic Dunstable downs, with the massive lion carved deep into the chalk, dominate the southern skyline. Much of our countryside is stunningly beautiful. I encourage right hon. and hon. Members to come to South-West Bedfordshire to enjoy our historic towns and attractive villages as well as our tourist attractions.

I would also encourage any entrepreneurs to come to south-west Bedfordshire to expand or locate their business. We have huge advantages in that we are only 40 miles north of London with excellent transport links from Euston and King's Cross, and the M1 and Luton airport are close by. Our towns have preserved their historic character and we can offer a wonderful quality of life in our surrounding countryside.

I wish to raise several matters of concern to my constituents. Leighton Buzzard and Linslade have a significant number of commuters and it is vital that Silverlink retains access to the fast line to London. I also trust that it will not be too long before a new police station, with sufficient officers to man it and with its own cells, is provided for the town. That would mean that police officers would no longer be taken off the streets as they transport those arrested to the cells in Dunstable.

I shall be pressing Ministers to provide a minor injuries clinic in Leighton Buzzard. I shall also be watching teacher numbers very closely at Vandyke and Cedars upper schools to ensure that the pupils in those two fine schools receive the education they deserve.

Dunstable and Houghton Regis need two bypasses very urgently. A full north-south bypass for Dunstable is the first priority, so that the A5 no longer goes through the middle of the town and so that residents, as well as the children in the 11 schools close by, can have an improved quality of life. The extension of the Leighton Buzzard southern bypass from the Thorn turn to the M1 is also urgently needed to relieve congestion on roads not built for the traffic volumes that they are experiencing. I will also be looking to ensure that there is more visible policing in Houghton Regis, and that the town has a bank of its own as a matter of urgency.

I would like to see the reopening of the Luton to Dunstable railway, which the people of Dunstable have requested in poll after poll. In time, I would like the line to run all the way from Luton Airport Parkway to Leighton Buzzard, thus linking Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable with Milton Keynes and Birmingham all the way through to the airport. I firmly believe that, if reopened, many of the branch lines axed by Dr. Beeching would be huge assets to the community they served.

Dunstable and Houghton Regis supply car components to many companies. I am sure that I am not alone in the House in wanting Ministers to be driven in British-made cars. I was somewhat surprised recently to see a Minister arrive in New Palace Yard in a large Mercedes. Could he not find a British-made car? I can recommend several excellent Vauxhall models made by some of my constituents. Indeed, why do not our police and other public bodies just buy British-made cars? When was the last time we saw the French police drive anything other than French cars? The same applies to the German police. Let us back our workers with the public purse in the same manner.

I am delighted that my constituents can enjoy cheap air travel from Luton airport, but serious issues of accountability to local people, over whose homes aircraft fly, need to be addressed. Aircraft are frequently "vectored off" the agreed flight paths to fly over the homes of many of my constituents. In motoring terms, that is the equivalent of a bus cutting across the village green to save a few minutes' journey time. I find it unacceptable, as it causes repeated aircraft noise over my constituents' homes that could and should be avoided.

The siting of mobile phone masts close to people's homes is also causing anxiety to many of my constituents. Although I welcome the usefulness of mobile phones and the jobs that the industry creates, I feel strongly that we should not enjoy this technology at the cost of causing distress to those whose homes, hospitals and schools are next to the masts.

I have already spoken of our beautiful countryside, maintained by the farmers who are the custodians of so much of our rural landscape. I am, however, horrified at the amount of fly tipping that spoils our roads and lanes. This has got worse since businesses were charged for using municipal tips. We must make the disposal of waste convenient, accessible and free so that we eradicate this eyesore. There should be far higher fines for offenders, and rigorous enforcement of the law by the police to deter people from engaging in this dangerous and unsightly practice.

My motivation for aspiring to become a Member of this House is my Christian faith. It is my wish to see the Conservative party become the party for the poor and disadvantaged. My inspiration hails from those great giants, William Wilberforce, and the poor man's earl, Lord Shaftesbury. We need to draw deeply on their example of perseverance to put right the ills of the present day. Chief among those, in my view, are the pain and suffering caused by family breakdown. Juvenile delinquency, educational under-achievement and homelessness are so often the direct results.

Over the past few years, it has been my privilege to help raise funds for homeless charities, not least the Passage, which the Secretary of State mentioned in his opening remarks. I have raised funds by collecting sponsorship for sleeping rough myself, and I intend to continue doing so. There is a great need for money for charities helping the homeless, as homeless advice centres run by First Place Housing in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard closed last July as they failed in their bid for further lottery funding. Surely charities helping the

[Mr. Andrew Selous]

homeless are among the most worthy recipients of lottery funding. They should not have been denied resources in that way. Lottery funding priorities need to be reviewed to ensure continuing support for such causes.

Many homeless people come from an institutional background, be it local authority care homes, prison or the armed services. Although all homeless people are equally deserving of support, I feel strongly, as a former soldier, that those who have been prepared to die to protect their fellow countrymen and women deserve special recognition. Surplus Ministry of Defence accommodation should be used for ex-service personnel as they reorientate themselves to civilian life. I applaud the first steps taken along those lines by the Government last year, but much more needs to be done. It was encouraging, however, to hear the Secretary of State talk about the veterans taskforce.

One of the major causes of homelessness is young people leaving home when their parents split up and they are made to feel unwelcome by new spouses or partners. The "Cost of Family Breakdown" report produced last year for the all-party family and child protection group estimated the cost at about £15 billion. The total could be double if indirect costs are included. Expenditure on marriage preparation and enrichment is money well spent from the public purse if it saves public expenditure later on.

In Italy, a nation which has significantly higher unemployment than the UK and regional variations as pronounced as any in Europe and where a third of couples divorce within five years of marriage, homelessness is almost unknown—be it in Milan, Rome or Naples. The Italian sense of family solidarity means that 50 per cent. of 25 to 29-year-olds live at home, whereas the average age of leaving home in the UK is 22. Italians are also more willing to let children return home when times are hard. Any moves to encourage similarly accommodating British social attitudes would be most welcome.

It is the greatest honour ever bestowed on me to be an advocate for my home constituency and to be able to contribute to debate that will shape our nation's future. In particular, I look forward to following the progress of this important Bill, which my party is pleased to support.

7.12 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I congratulate both the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on making their maiden speeches in this auspicious debate. I hope that their interest in housing will continue throughout their time as Members.

Labour Members who have an interest in housing waited a long time for housing Bills to appear on the agenda of the previous Parliament. When they finally did appear, one never escaped the other place and the other got shot down there. In his comments earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) blamed Labour Members for the demise of the Homes Bill, but if the Conservatives had wanted the Bill to come back from the House of Lords and the homelessness agenda to become law, they could have achieved that. I blame them for delaying the measure in the other place.

I was not called to speak on Second Reading on the Homes Bill so it is a great privilege to be called to speak in this debate. I have been in politics long enough to remember the impact of a television documentary that is frozen in the mind of people of my generation—"Cathy Come Home". That programme spurred on the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, mentioned by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). Those of us involved in housing at the time were extremely proud of that legislation, which for the first time placed a duty on local housing authorities to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need.

After 18 years of successive Tory Governments, however, the provisions of the 1977 Act had been significantly watered down by various pieces of legislation. We have to remind Opposition Members that, during those years of Tory government and caused by their housing policies, the number of homeless people doubled to an astonishing 139,000 in 1992. Admittedly, even under the Tory Government, the number fell from that high figure, but even under the Labour Government, the current figure is more than 100,000. Ministers have accepted that that is still far too high.

I was a member of the housing committee in Bolton for 21 years and its chairman for 10 years—from 1986 to 1996. It was my passion for housing that made me seek election to this place at the last-but-one general election. When I became chairman of the housing committee, I made a commitment that we would put homelessness at the top of the housing agenda of the Labour group, and we did so.

At that time, there was little provision in Bolton. An ancient former children's home was used as a hostel for families and there was a newly built Salvation Army hostel. Women's refuges were becoming important: women suffering domestic violence could escape to Fort Alice. Since the early 1970s, Bolton has had an excellent housing advice centre—currently in a different, much improved location in the town centre. The staff work closely with everyone involved in housing, including the best of the private landlords in Bolton who have particularly helped to rehouse non-priority homeless people.

Hon. Members have already referred to a difficulty that deters private landlords from accepting homeless people who are in receipt of benefits—the significant delay in the payment of housing benefit. That is caused not only by such things as the implementation of the housing benefit verification framework, but by a collision of that policy with best-value policy.

The number of priority cases accepted as homeless in Bolton averaged about 1,000 during the 1970s and 1980s. The number has fallen to about 800 cases at present—although of course that remains too high.

There have been changes. More single people present as homeless in Bolton, although fortunately the number of families—especially those with children—presenting as homeless has fallen significantly. That is probably because Bolton is not short of accommodation; the problem we face is one of quality rather than quantity. Our need is for increased investment in regeneration, especially in the private sector.

Significantly, the complexity of the accepted cases has increased. That is an important point. It is not uncommon for officers to deal with cases that include issues not only of domestic violence but of drug or alcohol misuse and child protection. As a result, the amount of multi-agency work required at present is much greater than it was in

the past. For example, Bolton has a borough-wide multi-agency strategy to deal with domestic violence. The council has produced an excellent directory of services, which is readily available throughout the borough.

The importance of dealing with the causes of homelessness as well as homelessness itself cannot be stressed too highly. Bolton has adopted a homelessness strategy that involves not only all the statutory agencies but all the voluntary sector agencies. The Catholic Children's Rescue Society and the Manchester Methodist housing association have set up mother and baby units in various parts of the town. Irwell Valley housing association runs a short-stay hostel for women—Fleet house.

In addition to the Salvation Army hostel, Manchester Methodist housing association runs a hostel for men. The Carr-Gomm Society provides accommodation in flats in a large house for vulnerable people with special problems. MIND manages a small number of flats for people who have experienced serious mental illness.

When I became chairman of Bolton's housing committee, I discovered that bed blocking had become a real problem in our short-stay hostels. Consequently, we established a special needs and resettlement team, which finds permanent accommodation for the homeless and supports vulnerable tenants in that accommodation. Many of the homeless have previously been in the armed forces or come from backgrounds in care of one sort or another—prisons or local authority placements.

Another problem faced by homeless people is the provision of furniture. Sad to say, the Benefits Agency is not always helpful to homeless people, so Bolton Community Transport picks up unwanted furniture, refurbishes it and makes it available, at modest cost, in a showroom in the town centre. The Salvation Army performs a complementary role.

Many private landlords require an up-front payment not only for the rent due but as a breakage deposit if the accommodation is furnished. One of my proudest achievements as chairman of the housing committee was setting up Bolton Bond Board, which helps homeless people into such accommodation. It will be 10 years old shortly, and I recommend those local authorities that have not implemented a bond board in their area to do so.

Bolton council has researched the provision of a French-style foyer scheme, but after consulting potential users it has decided to adopt the dispersed-foyer concept instead. The Bolton accommodation, support and education project—BASE—manages 22 properties for 43 people from a prominent location to the north of the town centre. It is an innovative partnership between the local authority, various voluntary sector organisations and the North British and Portico housing associations. As the name implies, it is a housing-plus scheme, offering advice across the board, as well as accommodation.

The Bolton young persons accommodation support scheme—BYPASS—also has a shop-frontage presence, but to the south of the town centre. That innovative scheme not only provides help and advice on accommodation and other issues at a drop-in centre, but offers a creche, a coffee bar, a clothing exchange scheme and laundry and bathing facilities for those without a permanent home of their own. For many years, it has also provided an advocacy service for scores of young people who have left the local authority's care.

The most difficult group to deal with are the single young males, many of whom are often involved in alcohol or drug misuse, and whose lives are usually chaotic. In addition, some of them are mentally ill. After talking to many of those people in the centre of Bolton, I became convinced that we must deal with one of the commonest causes of sustained homelessness—substance misuse—in a holistic way.

I have to tell the Government that the way in which the cases of Ruth Wyner and John Brock have been dealt with—especially the aftermath of those cases in which section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was strengthened—has made it much more difficult to include that group of people socially, and I implore the Government to talk again to the professionals and to think again.

Ironically, drugs are also available in our prisons, but we make no attempt to close them down or to take any action against the management of those institutions for allowing drugs to be used on those premises. Why, then, should even housing associations, often involved in some of the housing-plus schemes that I have referred to, now be afraid of providing housing and opportunities for some of our previously socially excluded citizens? We must be prepared to go the extra mile to rehabilitate drug addicts back into society, and we should applaud those people who work with them in a voluntary or a paid capacity; we certainly should not persecute them.

I welcome all the commitments to dealing with homelessness that the Government made during the previous Parliament, as well as those that they are making in the Bill—for example, the inclusion in the priority need group of 16 and 17-year-olds and those leaving care, prison or the armed forces. I welcome the clause that will prevent a local authority's duty towards the homeless from being discharged through the use of assured shorthold tenancies in the private sector.

I welcome the requirement for all local authorities to provide adequate housing advice not only to those homeless people in priority need but to all those who do not have a home. I welcome, too, the recognition that those suffering from racial harassment or domestic violence are also in priority need.

I was very pleased that the housing Green Paper referred to regional difficulties. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) has already referred to the fact that there are great differences between the north and the south. In fact, differences exist in each region. My hon. Friend is right to ask the Government to consider localised housing policies, rather than having a national housing policy. Certainly, that is the way in which the Government are moving.

I realise that what I am about to say is not politically correct, but it makes no sense to continue to operate the right-to-buy policy in areas of greatest demand—Greater London and rural villages. I know how popular that policy has been, and I have never criticised those who have exercised their rights, but that does not make the policy right, especially in the light of this debate. Is it any wonder that public sector workers are difficult to employ in London and that so many people have to spend so long in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, when former council properties are still being sold at discounted prices

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

then re-sold at unbelievable prices? I implore the Government to review the right-to-buy policy in those extremely high-demand areas.

The clause that will provide a new duty to allocate temporary accommodation for unintentionally homeless people that is brought to an end only when the applicants have been provided with settled accommodation will have little impact in towns such as Bolton, but it will have a great impact in areas of high demand. The clause will end the insecurity faced by many homeless people and restore the recognition that homeless people need long-term solutions.

Many local authorities will welcome the greater flexibility offered under the Bill to develop their allocations polices. I am very pleased that my local authority is one of the 27 that the Government have chosen to try initiatives such as the Delft proposal, and I look forward to the outcome of the pilot scheme.

I am happy to recommend the Bill to the House. Its enactment will meet another of our 1997 manifesto commitments: local authorities will provide unintentionally homeless people in priority need with temporary accommodation until they are provided with settled housing. I hope that housing will remain high on the Government's agenda throughout this Parliament.

7.26 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this debate. I, too, should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) on their maiden speeches.

To have been elected to represent the constituency of Huntingdon is a great privilege; it has an ancient and famous history, to which I shall return. I feel honoured to have been chosen by my constituents to follow such a distinguished predecessor as Mr. John Major, whom very many Members will remember with respect and affection.

John Major served the House and his constituents for some 22 years, and his party for very much longer than that. In government, he achieved an outstanding, hardly matched record of public service, having been, in succession, a Government Whip, a Social Security Minister, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister.

John Major is a perfect gentleman—a man of immense charm and warmth who is kind and dedicated to public service. As Prime Minister, he proved himself a true statesman: on one hand, showing courage and determination in his conduct of the Iraqi conflict and, on the other, displaying his qualities as a peacemaker in his relentless pursuit of a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland. He was also a hard-working constituency Member who, despite his national responsibilities, dealt with his constituents' concerns with great efficiency and the minimum of fuss and self-advertisement.

In Huntingdonshire, John Major is regarded with the very highest respect and admiration. His standards of public service, integrity and decency will be a tough act for me to follow, but I believe that they present the best example to all new Members. Indeed, I shall be very satisfied if, after 22 years of service, I have the same relationship with my constituents as John had with his.

The Huntingdon constituency—with its four market towns of Huntingdon, Godmanchester, St. Ives and St. Neots, with their connecting artery, the Great Ouse river, together with some 40 related villages—has a distinguished and ancient past, not least in being the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell, who was elected as Member for Huntingdon in 1628. That Parliament was perhaps the most crucial in moulding the British system of parliamentary democracy that we have today. It was a time when the champions of civil rights and parliamentary liberties addressed how the law could be on the side of individual liberty as much as on the side of authority. Of course, it was the Parliament in which Members physically held down the Speaker to assert the right of the House to control its own Adjournment. I do not think that that could happen today, but one can only wonder what the reaction of the 1628 Parliament would have been to such things as the Government's proposal to restrict the ancient right against double jeopardy.

As to Cromwell's contribution to the 1628 Parliament, I managed to find his rather unimpressive maiden speech—indeed, his only speech in that Parliament—in which he attacked a bishop for popery at St. Paul's Cross. Clearly, inclusiveness was not on the agenda in 1628.

The Huntingdon constituency is a place of immense variety of business sectors and living environments. There is the established agricultural sector. Although it has so far been spared the horrors of foot and mouth disease, it has none the less suffered all the decline in income and the unemployment that has blighted that sector of our economy in recent years. Defence, too, is an important local employer. With four air bases and many thousands of British and American service personnel living in the area, issues relating to the proper funding of our armed forces are frequently mentioned to me.

Huntingdonshire, as part of the Cambridgeshire administrative area, has one of the highest numbers of self-employed people and small businesses in the country. That includes manufacturing but it increasingly includes self-employed consultants and new economy start-ups drawn to establishing their businesses in the so-called silicon fen. Larger technology-related companies are also basing themselves in the constituency and the healthy and welcoming business environment that we have is something that I shall continue very much to encourage.

Also important to the local economy and local quality of life are the shops and pubs of the villages as well as the retailers and markets of the market towns. I mention them in particular because all too often they are overlooked, with the result that, over the past 30 years, business and retail policy has prioritised cities or out-of-city retail sites very much to the cost of our market towns. It seems to be increasingly the case that market towns are targeted for new housing and, in the towns of Huntingdonshire, there is barely a cul-de-sac that has not been opened up for new development in recent years. That creates the risk of towns being turned into dormitories for people to sleep in and then leave to work in the surrounding cities.

Market towns were developed to be destinations, not dormitories—destinations for townspeople and surrounding villagers to work in and to sell their produce

and buy goods. To lose sight of that and to believe that market towns can just keep building houses with no ill effects would be a grave error. Indeed, it would be as great an error as was made by planning policies over the years that led to the depopulation of many of our nation's inner cities, with the subsequent disastrous impact on businesses and balanced social environments that ultimately resulted in displacement and homelessness.

Furthermore, such an error would cause us to ignore the reality of changing life styles in this country. Indeed, one of the most striking events of the general election campaign in 2001, compared with 1997, was the physical presence of people in their homes during the working day. In 1997, I mainly found retired people or housewives at home during working hours but this year, in home after home, I came across employees and the self-employed working from home.

I believe that that trend will dramatically increase in coming years and it will involve a return to a village and town-based life rather than a commuting life. To that extent, it is vital that we proactively maintain and improve local shops and public services in our towns and villages so as to avoid the essentially reactive measures that have been and are still required in many of our inner cities.

What is needed is a balance. Growing areas need more housing, of course, but, at the same time, that housing needs to be fairly dispersed around the country—not just dumped in the south of England. Cambridgeshire has been ordered to build 4,000 new homes each year for the next 15 years, and that is about three times more building than the county has had in the past 10 years. The impact of that will be abundantly clear to anyone who lives in Huntingdonshire: more concrete, fewer green fields and, importantly, even more pressure on public services.

When we talk about a balanced approach to new housing, it is also vital to bring public services into the picture. Hinchingbrooke hospital in Huntingdon is well loved and admired for its quality of service and yet—mainly due to the increase in population and the resulting increase in health demands—its waiting lists have grown in each of the past three years.

Again, although our local schools provide an excellent education service to our children, the fact remains that local secondary schools, particularly in the St. Neots area, are bursting at the seams, but Cambridgeshire has still not been taken into the area cost adjustment. That means that our pupils receive up to a third less funding than children in surrounding counties. Again, the increase in population has meant that we have fewer police per head of population than anywhere else in England.

Huntingdonshire has one of the fastest-growing populations in the country. Indeed, when David, now Lord, Renton was last elected as its Member in 1974, the constituency had roughly the same number of people as now but it was double the geographic size. It prospered greatly during the time of John Major and that happened because a balance was maintained. For all the new housing, public services were expanded, businesses flourished, roads were built and school places were increased.

I speak for the Huntingdon constituency, but I am sure that my concerns will be shared by many Members with rural or market town constituencies. Of course we need housing, and more affordable housing, not only to deal with homelessness but to assist local areas to keep their local workers and to give their children the chance of living close to their families.

Somehow, however, I do not see a balanced and integrated approach coming from the Government and from this Bill. Reducing homelessness is a sound objective, but it cannot be an isolated one. It needs to be considered in the context of the effects of displacement and the maintenance of stable communities. It needs to have regard to the maintenance of public services, the need to increase business opportunities and jobs in the affected areas and the need to address local people's sensitivities. It needs to allow local authorities to have a strong input rather than simply be dictated to from Whitehall.

To deal effectively with homelessness will require even more than examining the impact of building thousands of new homes in the south. It will also require a much more careful assessment of why homelessness happens in the first place. Why are people moving en masse from the north of our country to the south? Why has the number of homeless people increased to 110,000 and the number of homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation from more than 4,000 in 1997 to almost 11,000 now, while, at the same time, the number of empty council properties now stands at 130,000 properties, of which 90,000 are in the midlands and the north?

The Bill aims to require local housing authorities to put together a strategy for tackling homelessness in their districts, and the Government describe that as solving the problem at its roots. Of course, that assumes that the homeless in any one area originate from that area. However, as any London social services department will say, hardly any of the homeless come from the borough concerned. They are mainly from out of town or asylum seekers.

To that extent, I suggest that although the Bill will certainly deal with some of the problems involved with homelessness, it fails to address the key strategic issues at national level. Surely, before mandating yet more thousands of homes in Huntingdonshire and the rest of the south of England, we should address inner-city deprivation and the need to fill up empty council houses, not only on a local basis as envisaged by this Bill, but through a system of co-ordinated national allocation. Indeed, the Government accepted this principle for asylum seekers and I would be interested to hear from the Minister why that approach should not be adopted for the homeless.

Additionally, we need to appreciate that there are 620,000 empty properties in the private sector. If some of those homes could be brought back into use, the problem of homelessness could quickly be solved. The Bill will require housing authorities to assess the problems of empty homes but it will not solve the problem—to do that will again require action from the top.

In particular, there should be tax incentives for residential letting and developers should be encouraged to redevelop existing sites rather than build on more green fields. At the moment, developers pay zero VAT to build on green fields but they pay VAT to refurbish in an inner city. The position needs to be equalised. Furthermore, it needs to be appreciated that the red tape and regulations involved in refurbishing for letting purposes has stifled the affordable homes end of the private lettings market. The regulations require a thorough review.

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

The Bill will go some way to clarifying the position of the homeless at a local level but what it will not do is solve the national problem.

7.39 pm

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I congratulate the hon. Members for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on three outstanding maiden speeches. They were excellent.

It is a great honour and privilege to speak in the House, representing Strathkelvin and Bearsden. The constituency is the gateway to the Campsie hills north of Glasgow and a large part of it follows the Forth and Clyde canal. It is an area of difference and diversity in which traditional industries, especially engineering and mining, have been in decline. It would be convenient to relate that to the period 1979 to 1997, but it would be untrue because the decline has been occurring for much longer than that.

Like other maiden speakers, I pay tribute to my predecessor. Sam Galbraith served in the House from 1987 to his election to the Scottish Parliament. He served with distinction and was held in the highest esteem and affection by fellow MPs and staff. He entered the House after a brilliant career as a neurosurgeon. His hard work and commitment has been costly to his health and well-being. I am certain that hon. Members will join me in wishing him well.

Over the years, Strathkelvin and Bearsden has continually changed in size and shape. Many Members of Parliament have had responsibility for various parts of the constituency. Hugh McCartney, Margaret Bain, Norman Hogg, Dennis Canavan and Sir Michael Hirst all served with distinction and are held with the highest regard in the area. Indeed, I was driven to distraction by people in one village who delighted in telling me, rather pointedly, that no one could match my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). He had served them 10 years earlier, but they thought that no one could replace him and still had fond memories of a good MP.

My right hon. Friend will forgive me for saying that the most famous MP was Tom Johnston, a leading member of the Independent Labour party and an MP for periods in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. He was born and educated in Kirkintilloch at the heart of the constituency. He was chairman of the first municipal bank, a gifted writer and went on to change the face of post-war Scotland.

Every MP who has represented the constituency will respect and honour the memory of Thomas Muir of Huntershill. As a parliamentary reformer, he supported the French revolution, which was not a popular cause, and was inspired by Thomas Paine's "The Rights of Man", published in 1791. When charged with making seditious speeches and circulating "The Rights of Man", he conducted his own defence. Muir, who was an advocate, said:

> "I am accused of sedition and yet can prove by thousands of witnesses that I warned the people of that crime, exhorted them to adopt none but measures which were constitutional, and entreated them to connect liberty with knowledge and both with morality."

Thomas Muir was sentenced to 14 years and transported to Australia. After 14 months in Sydney, he was rescued by the United States of America and later died in France in 1798 at the ripe old age of 33. Today, Thomas Muir of Huntershill is a familiar name to thousands in the communities of Strathkelvin and Bearsden and throughout Scotland. Indeed, there is a thriving Muir society of lawyers and advocates.

Strathkelvin and Bearsden values its past, but looks forward to a prosperous future. We accept that diversity is a way of life, and are interested in looking to the past and future. Unemployment is falling monthly. Before the general election, there was a 38 per cent. reduction over the previous four years. Today, there are plans in Kirkintilloch for a new health centre, supermarket, swimming pool and town hall. We hope that 1,000 new jobs will be created in that £39 million development.

The Forth and Clyde canal flows through the constituency and has received major investment. I hope that those millions of pounds will attract new boats and visitors to the canal and new cyclists to its towpaths, allowing them to enjoy the beautiful countryside. Our small and medium-sized companies are striving to become more successful with the assistance of their hard-working employees. The community is well served by a strong local press, which always ensures that there is a distinct local voice to challenge all politicians when necessary.

The printed word plays a central role in Strathkelvin and Bearsden. We boast of having HarperCollins publishing, which distributes books to cities, towns and villages not just across the United Kingdom, but all over the world. We are also proud of Omnia Printing, which takes J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter from Bishopbriggs in the constituency to Boston and Brisbane. It introduces Hogwart's school of witchcraft and wizardry to millions of children—and, dare I say it, adults—and helps those children to rediscover the joy of reading, which cannot be a bad thing.

The diversity that we strive for is a familiar story. We want a blend of tourism and enterprise, and to build a strong local economy. We want everyone in our constituency to share in any improvement that might come along, and we want social inclusion to be a reality for all constituents, which means tackling homelessness. In Strathkelvin and Bearsden, a correct and proper emphasis has been placed on dealing with homelessness at its early stages when young people are thinking about making themselves homeless, perhaps because of family circumstances. Project 101 offers advice to young people about the seriousness of homelessness and the problems that they would face. We want to continue that work.

As a new Member, I have interests in international development, employment rights, transport and, of course, homelessness. My constituency has active churches, all of which are interested in third-world issues of debt relief and international development, which are close to my heart. During the general election, I canvassed one voter who, hearing of my interest in Africa and similar issues, said, "Do you not think it would be a good idea to go and feel at first hand what it's like in these countries?" I said that it certainly would and that I would be prepared to go for a few days to which she said, "I was thinking more of four or five years." I put her down as undecided.

On a serious note, I welcome our leading role in reducing debt and encouraging development. It is a tremendous honour to be in the House and I shall try to engage with all constituents.

7.47 pm

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): It is a relief to be called now because it allows me to speak in the Welsh Grand Committee tomorrow and to address several issues that relate to my constituency.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) on his maiden speech. His obvious knowledge of and affection for his constituency will stand him in good stead. I also congratulate the hon. Members for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) on their maiden speeches.

When I stood for selection as a candidate and for election as a Member of Parliament, I made it clear that my affection was for one constituency only. It is a bit like proposing marriage, the main difference being that marriage needs a unanimous decision whereas a majority decision will do for election. The good people of Brecon and Radnorshire rarely elect Members with a large majority: we come on probation. My majority, which is in the hundreds, is the second largest in that constituency in the past 20 years. I understand the temporary nature of the contract, but I give notice that I will apply for an extension.

The people of Brecon and Radnorshire have always elected good constituency MPs. The one that I first remember is Tudor Watkins, a traditional Labour Member of Parliament. He was as well-respected in the hill farms of Radnorshire as he was in the industrialised Swansea valley that was his home. He fought hard to get electricity into those farms. Every year he was given the work programme of the South Wales electricity board, which listed those farms that would get electricity next year. He would then travel to the farms and tell the people how hard he was working to get them electricity, and when they got it he was doubly rewarded by their support. He was a very good constituency MP and a man of high principles.

Tudor Watkins was succeeded by Caerwyn Roderick, who had a deep well of generosity and humanity that allowed him to respond to constituents' problems with great magnanimity. He, too, was a very good constituency MP, and a dear friend of mine.

Before the boundaries of the constituency were changed, which made it less favourable for the Labour party, it was won by a Conservative, Tom Hooson. He was one of the Hooson tribe in mid-Wales who were all political, but of different persuasions. John, a friend of mine, was Labour; Emlyn, whom many hon. Members will know, was the Member for Montgomeryshire for many years, and Tom was the Tory. He was a gentleman and a gentle person, and he is remembered with enormous affection in the constituency. Tragically, he died while in office, halfway through his second term. That, of course, led to a by-election. The Liberal Democrats fought it with all the fury that rises in them at by-elections, and Richard Livsey was elected. He held the seat at the next general election.

Richard Livsey, to whom I shall return in a moment, lost the seat in 1992 to another Conservative, Jonathan Evans, a very able Member of Parliament and a liberal, progressive Conservative. He still holds true to policies that some of the present members of the Conservative parliamentary party find difficult. He has gone on to sunnier and more exotic climes in the European Parliament. It is interesting to note that at one time I was Jonathan Evans's landlord. He was an excellent tenant, but he had one complaint about me as a landlord, which was that I went round the constituency delivering leaflets that said that he did not live in the constituency. As I said, he was an excellent tenant, but he very rarely occupied the premises, and I still stand by the leaflets.

In 1997, Jonathan Evans lost the seat to Richard Livsey, who was my immediate predecessor. The constituency is the largest in England and Wales, but he managed to fill it completely. He was known in every street in every town and village, and he was well-respected and highly regarded. His loss is enormous. Many new Members have said that they have a huge gap to fill, and I can say the same.

The constituency extends from the coal measures in the south, through the limestone escarpments, to the massive red sandstone blocks of the Beacons and the Black mountains, which comprise the Brecon Beacons national park. That is, of course, the most beautiful, wonderful national park in England and Wales, and I say that without any bias whatsoever. I see Labour Members present who represent other areas of that park. The hidden jewels in my constituency, and indeed in Wales, are the northern parts of Breconshire and Radnorshire, which not many people see. All new Members have been advising people to take holidays in their constituency, and I have told our tourist operators to write to every Member of Parliament, asking them to come to the constituency, because it is so big that even if they all came at once they would not stand a chance of bumping into one another.

The general election was fought against the background of unprecedented social and economic doom in the constituency. Several years of decline in manufacturing because of cheap imports and difficulties in exporting had led to job losses from Ystradgynlais to Knighton, Llandrindod Wells, Rhayader and Presteigne. Those jobs will be difficult to replace, and on top of that we have been affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. As a farmer, I know the stress of getting up in the morning and not knowing what one will find.

My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) recently experienced the tragic circumstances of the coroner presiding over three inquests in which it was found that farmers had committed suicide because of the stress that they were under. A worker on my farm, who has been with me for 30 years, recently suffered a stroke, partly due, I am sure, to stress and to not knowing what would happen next. My thoughts go out to all the farmers in the constituency who have suffered culls, whether their animals had the foot and mouth virus or whether the cull was contiguous. I think also of other farmers who, because of the restrictions on them, cannot move or trade in livestock and find themselves in financial difficulties. Being continuously strapped for cash puts huge pressure on them.

On top of that, tourism, which is a major employer in our area and one of the largest businesses, is being completely run down. I took the time this weekend to meet two groups of tourist operators, who said that unless a package is made available shortly to tide people over the lean winter months many existing businesses will not be there in the spring to make use of all the promotion that will occur in future. It is a sad time when so many businesses, in which people have worked so hard and invested all their money and time, see that they have no

[Mr. Roger Williams]

future, not because of mismanagement or bad investment but because of something that happened out of the blue and for which no one could plan.

Homelessness is not just an urban issue, and I am pleased that many of the Bill's clauses address the problem in rural areas. Homelessness occurs for many reasons. One of the key issues for farming and other small businesses is that, sadly, when a business is lost, often a home is lost too because it has been put up as a guarantee for the bank. As a Member of Parliament and a councillor, I have often dealt with those situations.

We must tackle the need for affordable housing in rural areas. Somebody asked for a definition of affordable housing. Many people in rural areas aspire not only to be tenants but to be property owners. Properties in national parks and other designated sites are very attractive to people who live outside the area. We must find a way, through the planning system or another means, to ensure that property is available not only for rent but for ownership.

Members come to the House bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, with lots of enthusiasm and many ideas for improving the lives of their constituents and people throughout the nation. I recently read the maiden speech of a farmer who came from mid-Wales, Geraint Howells, in which he said he sought reform of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ensure that the interests of farmers and consumers would be better looked after. I hope that new Members will achieve their aims more quickly than Geraint Howells did—he made that speech in 1974.

7.59 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Maiden speeches are coming thick and fast, and they have made this debate even more pleasurable than it would otherwise have been. I congratulate all those who have made their maiden speeches tonight. I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams). There was a nice vein of gentle humour in it, but he also dealt responsibly with serious issues such as debts in farming and the present crisis caused by foot and mouth disease.

I was pleased that the hon. Gentleman paid such a generous tribute to his immediate predecessor. Richard Livsey was not so quick on his feet by the end of his time here, and he and I had offices over at Millbank. Many times, I enjoyed a good conversation with him while walking between the offices and the House. The hon. Gentleman said that the electors of Brecon and Radnorshire have enjoyed a long line of good, hard-working constituency MPs, and in him they have the makings of another.

I should like to declare a non-pecuniary interest as honorary president of a voluntary sector charity, the Bethany project, which provides accommodation for homeless people in Stafford.

It is a pleasure to be able to take part in this debate and to welcome this measure to help homeless people. It will be the first Bill to be given a Second Reading in this Parliament. It is a slight oddity that it was not mentioned in the Gracious Speech, but I put that down to the dexterity and skill of my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State. Like others, I welcome him to his post and congratulate him on it.

What I like about this Bill is the way in which it restores the value of dignity to this area of public policy—restoring to people the dignity of a shelter, of a home of their own. As many Members have said, the Bill keeps a manifesto promise from not just a few weeks ago but 1997. In the same two manifestos also came the promise to license houses in multiple occupation. I look forward to an early start by the Government on keeping that promise, too.

I am particularly pleased that the amended Bill—it represents part II of the previous Homes Bill—contains a new duty on local authorities to adopt a strategic approach to dealing with homelessness. It is an excellent idea, but requires resources. Many have mentioned the resource of other agencies—registered social landlords, some private sector landlords, social services departments, health authorities and, particularly, the voluntary sector—but local authorities will need the ability to spend money to meet their strategic aims and to borrow enough money to invest in housing stock.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the scourge of empty homes. It is a sad fact that, in England every year, about seven homes stand empty for every one household recognised by councils as homeless. I commend to hon. Members the ten-minute Bill that I introduced in the previous Parliament, the Empty Homes Bill, which attempted to deal with the problem. Sadly, my Bill never saw the light of day as an Act of Parliament, but this Homelessness Bill offers the opportunity to take up some of its measures. For example, my Bill suggested that local authorities should be under a duty to adopt a strategy to deal with empty homes, and that fits nicely with the requirement in this Bill for local authorities to adopt a strategy to help people to avoid homelessness or to meet need when people are homeless.

I would like the Government to explore the ideas in my Bill of giving local authorities more financial instruments—principally, the ability to deal more creatively with council tax charged on empty properties. It is vital that the Government give local authorities greater powers of compulsory purchase to be able to deal with the regeneration of areas where properties are standing empty. That would help to meet the need of homeless people by filling empty properties.

Another strategic issue of which it is important the Government do not lose sight as they consider this Bill is the interaction of housing benefit and homelessness. Several hon. Members have commented on the matter already. Some have commented on the inability of some local authorities or the private companies to which they have passed the duty to administer housing benefit; others have commented on the difficulties of detecting fraud and the requirements placed on local authorities to investigate and verify claims before they can make payments. Throughout that time, people are under the risk of losing their homes for non-payment of rent.

The parts of the Bill that I welcome include the long-term approach to meeting the needs of homeless people, and especially the emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. I also like the suggestion that there can be more support for homeless people of lower priority, such as single people. I should like local authorities to be

encouraged to develop the offer of housing-focused interviews, in the same way as we now have work-focused interviews for those who are seeking to claim benefit. I also like the emphasis in the Bill on quality of service.

I want help to get through to all those who are in need of housing owing to homelessness or the threat of it. For those who are hard to reach, I hope that local authorities will have full regard in their strategies for the help that can be given by social partners who are doing the work already. For those who are hard to help—those who are unable to speak for themselves or put their case effectively—I hope that all authorities are able to develop a systematic approach to offering advocacy services.

I also agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, about the involvement of registered social landlords in developing a homelessness strategy. They will not merely be major providers of accommodation for homeless people. They have a wealth of experience, alongside that of local authorities, in tackling day-to-day housing issues, and they have much to offer local authorities in developing strategies for dealing with homelessness.

I want to emphasise that, as other hon. Members have said, none of the fine words in the Bill and the strategies that will follow will be of much use if there is not an adequate supply of affordable housing in which people can live. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned Cambridge university research suggesting that there is a need for 80,000 to 85,000 new units of affordable housing a year. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) mentioned the Shelter figure of 100,000 units of affordable housing every year for the next 10 years.

Those figures have meaning to most people around the country because they see people waiting in overcrowded circumstances, bed and breakfast, temporary homes—or no home at all—for homes to be provided for them. Hard though local authorities work to meet that need, they simply do not have an adequate amount of housing. Tackling such problems will take a determined effort over the next few years, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear at the beginning of the debate. I look forward to watching that determined effort take shape and to delivering the fruit of it as a home and the dignity of a shelter for every citizen of this country.

8.7 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I should like to start by complimenting the hon. Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) and my hon. Friends the Members for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) and for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) on their maiden speeches. I must also, of course, compliment the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons), who mentioned that his constituency had continually changed in size and shape. My constituency seldom changes in size or shape. Indeed, I do not believe that it has done so since the early 19th century, although it is getting a little further from France every year.

I am not the sort of Conservative who is known for wearing his compassion on his sleeve, but I am passionate about public service—or, should I say, the better delivery of essential services?—including education, health and housing. I greatly value my experience of working with Governments of both political parties. I worked with the former Conservative Government on the improved delivery of health and social security and with both Conservative and Labour Governments on education, most recently in helping the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) to deliver his policies in the London borough of Southwark, a failing local education authority, which was required to privatise the management of the education service. That was a great privilege.

Today, I am here not to talk about myself, but to say a few words about my constituency, which is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in the country. Today, London is only a little overcast, but even when the rest of Britain is battered by gales, our island basks in the sunshine. Its charms are well known to yachtsmen, walkers and cyclists. I occasionally say that it never rains on the Isle of Wight, but that is a slight exaggeration. In fact, it seldom rains on the Isle of Wight.

The island is famed for Osborne house, Cowes week and Parkhurst and other prisons. Incidentally, I should like to compliment the island's prisons and, for the benefit of the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), put on record the fact that they are driving down drug abuse within their walls. Some aspects of the island are less well known: for example, it is one of Britain's biggest producers of garlic—indeed, we export garlic to France. There is a garlic festival each year, which I commend to hon. Members. There, one can sample not only garlic bread and garlic mushrooms, but garlic beer, garlic honey and garlic ice cream. I strongly recommend them.

We also have Britain's biggest collection of dinosaur remains, as illustrated by the recent BBC programme "Dinosaur Island", but the best collection of dinosaurs on the island are the former Liberal Democrat councillors who now run the island from county hall. They have stopped using the name Liberal Democrat—perhaps as a result of certain setbacks earlier this month—and now call themselves something else. They frequently call for less Government intervention and direction in the way in which local authorities are asked to deliver their services, so it was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) ask for far more detailed intervention and guidance, as well as for that guidance to appear on the face of the Bill. They speak with forked tongue, those Liberal Democrats.

We are fortunate to have our own highly successful and effective media on the Isle of Wight. I must be the only Member of Parliament to have his own local newspaper, radio station and television station. The most recent addition is Angel Radio, which boasts that it never broadcasts news or timechecks, but only music first recorded before 1959.

It is appropriate that I should speak on the Homelessness Bill, because the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 was piloted through the House by my distinguished predecessor but two, Lord Ross of Newport. The Act caused local authorities nightmares, but provided a lifeline for many people in need. Local authorities have learned to live with the Act, and the improvements and changes made to it since it became law, to provide a far better service for homeless persons. Lord Ross's successor was Barry Field: it was a great loss to the island when he was forced to retire on grounds of ill health shortly before the 1997 general election.

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

My immediate predecessor was Peter Brand—a general practitioner and local councillor for many years before his election to Parliament. He fought the 1997 election on the slogan "Put a doctor in the House" and this year's election with "Keep a doctor in the House". It is a testimony to his qualities as a general practitioner that islanders preferred to put a doctor in the surgery. I thank him for the care he gave the island in his four years as its Member of Parliament. I am grateful.

I also thank Etty McKinley of the island organisation People Off the Streets. She drew the Homes Bill to my attention at a public meeting during the general election campaign and asked whether I would support it if it were reintroduced. I had to reply that it would depend on which parts were reintroduced, so I am glad that the Government have dropped the more controversial elements—at least from the current version of the Bill—and that the Opposition will have the opportunity to support most of the proposals. I also congratulate Etty on her effective work when undertaking the homeless persons count on the island at the time of the recent census. It is most important that we have accurate figures on homelessness which, as many hon. Members have mentioned, is not confined to large cities.

Solving the problem of homelessness does not require a massive housebuilding programme—my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon has already made that specific point. The Deputy Prime Minister's proposals for 8,000 new homes, half of them on greenfield sites, were deeply unpopular on the island. Housebuilding is not the right cure for homelessness. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire said, we must work to prevent homelessness, especially by supporting family structures, because most youth homelessness is a result of broken families.

When dealing with homelessness, we must have proper priorities for the allocation of housing. The system must be seen to be fair to those who already live in a particular area. The genuine local connection rule should be sustained and, if possible, strengthened. It is not a genuine local connection with the Isle of Wight to have been on the island for a few months picking tomatoes. It should be a requirement that people claiming that they are homeless—or, for that matter, those claiming jobseeker's allowance—demonstrate that they have not moved from an area of low unemployment to one of high unemployment, such as my constituency. I welcome the commitment to flexibility that the Secretary of State made in his introductory remarks. I hope that that commitment extends to enabling local authorities to arrange the genuine local connection rules so that they suit local circumstances.

Let me flag up a few of the issues that I intend to raise on behalf of my constituents in future weeks and months. The Isle of Wight is an area of high unemployment where average income is less than three quarters the national average. It suffers from being separated from the mainland by sea and not receiving proper recognition from the Government in terms of funding. The island suffers because of the failure of the recently introduced police control centre at Netley to pass messages on to police stations on the island; I want something done about that.

I also want more work to be done on the cost for individuals of crossing the Solent and on the use by Wightlink of Wootton Creek. Wightlink is one of the ferry companies; it is the major user of Wootton Creek as well as the harbour authority, which must give rise to a unique conflict of interest. I want clarity about the future of Osborne house: the closure of the King Edward VII convalescent home at Osborne was greatly and deeply regretted on the island. I want there to be clarity about the future use of that wonderful resource. I want the Government to fund the rebuilding of the main road from Ventnor to West Wight through the St. Laurence Undercliff, which slumped seriously following recent rains.

All those are objectives that I intend to follow up on behalf of my constituents during my time as a Member of Parliament. I am proud to represent Isle of Wight and thank the House for this opportunity to speak.

8.18 pm

Mr. Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on making his maiden speech, and all those who have made their maiden speeches this evening. We have shared the trepidation of sitting here, waiting to do them. I have gained some insight into the Isle of Wight: I knew nothing about its garlic fields. However, I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) intends to take his holiday on the island, so perhaps, as one islander to another, he will be able to help with some of the transport difficulties that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight described.

I am pleased to be called to make my maiden speech during a debate that deals with social housing, on a Bill that will introduce measures to strengthen local democracy, require agencies and stakeholders to work together and reinforce the recognition of the link between housing, health and social exclusion. In Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, about 8,300 households are in council housing, 1,400 in registered social landlord accommodation and 20,000 in private housing. The condition of housing is often worse in Wales than in any other part of the United Kingdom, so housing is one of the most important issues facing our communities as we struggle with the problems of deprivation left to us by years of underfunding and neglect. More recently, we still struggle with the effects of nearly two decades of the near economic war that was waged on our communities. That is something that we do not forget and will not forgive.

We do not need lessons or crocodile tears from across the Floor about these social issues. However, we are determined to move on and to move our communities on. It is in that spirit of change that I see my election as the first Labour Member of Labour's second century in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

In taking up that mantle, I am humbled by and pleased to pay tribute to my predecessors. I do so not only to Ted Rowlands, whom I have recently succeeded, but to Keir Hardie, the first Labour Member to be elected in what was then the constituency of Merthyr and Aberdare, and the first leader of the Labour party. I pay tribute also to S. O. Davies and the other Labour leaders from Wales, on whose shoulders I hope to stand and in whose tradition I hope to follow.

Like Keir Hardie, I am a socialist and a trade unionist—a trade union official. I recognise the power of the links between organised labour and the party that we have

helped to form. These are links that some would pervert, some would like to destroy and some to usurp. Keir Hardie stood for a minimum wage, the enfranchisement of women, minorities and oppressed people, reform of the House of Lords and devolved government. He was an internationalist. He was a man with a faith in and a concern for a civilised and humane society. After 100 years we have just begun to realise some of these aspirations. We still have a long way to go, and I am pleased to continue my part in that work.

In preparing my maiden speech, I was fortunate enough to discuss some of the shared history that I have with Mr. Speaker. I knew that Keir Hardie had two half-brothers. I did not know that both of them later became Labour Members. David Hardie became the Member for Rutherglen; and George, or Georgie, Hardie became the Member to represent Mr. Speaker's constituency of Springburn in Glasgow, later to be followed by his wife, Agnes, another trade union activist, who remained a Member until 1945, an important year for the Labour party.

It was in 1945 that Keir Hardie is said to have reappeared in Abercynon. It was part of a seance. As well as being a christian socialist and a temperance campaigner, he had been active in spiritualism. He is said to have reappeared in July 1945 to give his benediction to the then new Labour Government. I have no reports of anything similar from Nos. 10 or 11, but it is early days yet.

The serious message is clear. The work started and continued by the Hardie family informed then, and still does today, the work of the Labour party and of all people of good will. I do not claim to follow Hardie's spiritualism, and I certainly cannot claim to follow his temperance, but my maternal grandfather did.

Like my predecessors, I am influenced by both the ideas and the organisational responses of Keir Hardie, and he remains a touchstone for us. The *Merthyr Pioneer* summed up the position when it said on the death of Keir Hardie that

"the member for humanity had resigned his seat."

It is that tribute that brings me to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Ted Rowlands. He was a Member first in 1966 for the seat of Cardiff, North. He became the Member for Merthyr in 1972, and remained as the sitting Member when the seat was extended to include Rhymney.

Ted Rowlands and his wife, Janice, have served our community for nearly 30 years. He also made a significant contribution to the work of this place in that time. As an historian, he has recently written about his view of what was and could be possible by means of educated government intervention. In our local community, we credit him with many acts, not least on a world stage. Contributions that are perhaps not properly recognised are his actions in international affairs and peace, including the avoidance of conflict in the Falklands in the 1970s.

I suspect that when most local people think of Ted Rowlands there are echoes of those words of the *Merthyr Pioneer* that were said of Keir Hardie in 1915. They would give a similar but extended tribute to him by recording that their Member for humanity has resigned his seat but continues to work with us for our shared goals.

I have already set out the traditions that I hope to follow. They are those of socialists of independent thought giving constructive representation. I come from a family of miners and steelworkers, and I know the problems of a household affected by industrial disease, disability and caring. I already have my own small contribution in terms of Labour history in my constituency, because I am the first Labour Member elected this century and the first to have been born and brought up in the constituency that I now represent.

It is a constituency with a history of invention and production that was the crucible of Welsh politics in the past two centuries. Our cultural contribution is known now through sportsmen, musicians, actors, dress designers and writers, who influence others on a world stage. About one fifth of the land mass of the constituency is in the Brecon Beacons national park. We are the gateway to that park and the surrounding country.

We are starting to change from the industries of the past, and unemployment is falling. We are starting to attract and develop the new industries of biotechnology, computing peripherals and support industries, as well as retaining some modern manufacturing and small-scale production companies, along with food preparation and manufacturing and growing tourism. Some of the benefits of relocation and land reclamation, stimulated by government and European Union funding, are starting to change the years of economic malevolence that I have mentioned.

We still, however, have some of the most deprived communities in Europe in terms of health and other social considerations. We are making significant strides in relation to crime and we are improving education standards, but it is clear that poverty is the monster that we must slay. That will be done only by increasing and supporting opportunities for work and social investment.

As a Member elected in a post-devolution environment, I have to comment on how we can make the change that we want. Many of the opportunities that I have outlined require me to work closely with the Welsh Assembly Member who shares my constituency, Huw Lewis, and my neighbouring Labour Members. The opportunities given to us by the massive injection of European funding and matched investment in Wales, together with the other investments controlled at Westminster, give us an opportunity to work together to produce the change that we want.

We know that the strength of our constituencies is that of our people, which lies in both their ingenuity and their spirit. We know also that they are strong communities because they are made from a collective experience and an international brew. They range from Italians "in the rain" through Spanish steelworkers and Irish and Polish people. The list goes on, but they are all Welsh. It is because we represent such an internationalist tradition that we reject doctrines of narrow nationalism, which offer nothing.

I thank particularly my agent, Mervyn Ryall, for his work in helping to get me elected, and my local Labour party for selecting me in our centenary year to continue the history of Labour representation in our valleys. Most of all, I thank the people of the Merthyr, Rhymney, Cwm Bargoed and Darren valleys, whom I shall try my best to represent. We have our shared political and cultural history, but also the cholera and typhoid cemeteries that remind us of the need for measures such as social housing, which we are discussing this evening. There is also the need for investment that can help us to break the cycle of ill health and deprivation.

[Mr. Dai Havard]

Diolch yn fawr i chi a diolch yn fawr iawn, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope to catch your eye again.

8.29 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I congratulate those who have already made theirs, especially the hon. Members for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard), who made such an interesting comparison with what I have heard from the Government Front Bench so far during my time in this place.

I have the honour of having been returned for the Caernarfon constituency, which was previously held by Dafydd Wigley. It is a historic constituency: as Caernarfon Boroughs, it was held by David Lloyd George for 50 years between 1890 and 1945. I can add little to what has already been said about Lloyd George's enduring standing as a statesman of world significance, except to say that my understanding is still developing. He was succeeded by the legal scholar Dewi Seaborn Davies, who was a native of my own home town of Pwllheli and a Member of Parliament for five months only. He was followed by Goronwy Roberts, who won the new post-war Caernarfon seat for Labour in 1945, and went on to serve in the Welsh Office and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In 1974, the seat was won dramatically for Plaid Cymru by a young Dafydd Wigley, who went on to hold it for the next 27 years.

David Lloyd George was, of course, a Liberal, but at the start of his political career he was leader of Cymru Fydd, a nationalist movement that was a precursor of my own party of Plaid Cymru. Indeed, in that early part of his career, Lloyd George was known in the House as a Welsh nationalist with a small n. Goronwy Roberts was a Labour Member but, early in his career, he was a supporter of the Gwerin movement in Labour, which had both republican and nationalist tendencies—again with a small r and small n. I appreciate that those terms may be foreign to some Government Members.

Lloyd George was later made Earl of Dwyfor, and Goronwy Roberts was later made Lord Goronwy Roberts. Whatever their views, neither had the opportunity afforded to my immediate predecessor Dafydd Wigley, who is now a democratically elected Member for Caernarfon in our National Assembly in Cardiff. I am happy to tell his many friends in Parliament that Dafydd Wigley is well, retains his voracious appetite for work and is prominent in the proceedings of the Assembly. It is an honour and an enormous challenge to follow in his distinguished footsteps.

The Caernarfon constituency is a place of supreme natural beauty. Within its bounds are the many mountains of Eryri, within which is Yr Wyddfa, known to some in the House as "Snowdon, the highest mountain in England and Wales"—very much, I suppose, as Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in England and France. My constituency extends from Y Felinheli in the north-east through to the one-time slate quarrying areas of Rhiwlas, Deiniolen, Dinorwig, Llanberis and Dyffryn Nantlle. It stretches from Beddgelert in the mountains to Porthmadog, with its narrow-gauge railway, which is one of the links between my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) who, in terms of our debate, is not a neighbour from hell.

My constituency extends from the historic towns of Cricieth, Pwllheli and Nefyn to Aberdaron at the tip of gwlad Llyn, the western peninsula beyond the mountains, and on to Ynys Enlli, the island which, for centuries, was a place of pilgrimage where 10,000 saints are said to be buried. Returning east through Llithfaen, where the National Language Centre is located at Nant Gwrtheyrn, back past Trefor and Clynnog, we come to Caernarfon itself, where we have the fort of Segontiwm, which was built by some of our early visitors—the Romans—and left by them when they packed their bags in 383. Our castle is a massive and impressive fortress that was built 1,000 years later by some of our other visitors, and is now a world heritage site.

We have a wealth of architecture—contemporary, Victorian, Georgian and earlier—and a commercial and administrative centre that was once thriving, but, more recently, has been in decline. We hope that it is now on the cusp of a revival. But, more than that, we have the living and self-aware community of Caernarfon people, who are resourceful and open-minded, with a ready and engaging wit and an ability to survive. They are known as the Cofis, or rather, we are known as the Cofis, for I have the joy of being a recent recruit.

As is obvious from my remarks, my constituency is one of the heartlands of the Welsh language, which is a living language—not a relic of past—spoken by some 85 per cent. of my electors and 95 per of their children. The Welsh language is alive in Caernarfon; it is under pressure, but fighting back. It is not going to disappear; we are determined that it will not.

As I said, my constituency is an area of astonishing natural beauty; but, as the saying goes, "You can't eat the scenery." We have suffered the historic decline of our extraction industries of slate and granite, and manufacturing is under pressure. It is a particularly sad fact that we have a long-running dispute at Dynamex Friction in Caernarfon, which, I hope, will be resolved soon. Farming is in crisis, despite the unrivalled excellence of our agricultural products—beef and lamb. The majority of farmers are approaching retirement age and farm incomes are low and uncertain. Ironically, those farmers who ventured out and diversified into tourism have been struck again by the crisis in that industry. Tourism is a hugely important industry in my constituency, although too often unrecognised as such; it has been a struck cruel blow by the foot and mouth crisis.

Our long-term economic problems have led to a sustained out-migration of our young men and women, bleeding our communities of our most enterprising people. The rural and the urban parts of my constituency are beset by housing problems. Indeed, the worst housing in Wales, as measured by the National Assembly's index of multiple deprivation, is to be found in the communities in my constituency. Three of the 10 wards with the worst housing in Wales—the first, the third and the ninth—are in my constituency.

Eight per cent. of the Welsh housing stock is unfit—100,000 houses for 250,000 people. We have plenty of houses. We have social housing, but it is the wrong type and in the wrong place. Although we welcome the commitment in the Bill to afford tenants a choice from a

variety of housing, the ability of local authorities and social landlords to offer that choice has been severely curtailed by years of selling off, and by restrictions on new building and on the power of social landlords to acquire existing houses. As I said, we have plenty of houses in my constituency—good but expensive houses that stand empty, while private tenants endure the worst of bad housing.

We have homelessness—both homelessness recognised and homelessness masked by out-migration. The young people of my constituency have as much right to live, work and prosper in their home areas as have the young people of any other constituency, and that right is not conditional on language or some imagined racial category. I welcome the duties on local authorities to undertake reviews and to prepare strategies to combat homelessness.

On the day of my election, I visited all 84 polling stations in my constituency, though I assure hon. Members that I voted only once. When I arrived mid-morning in the mountain village of Rhyd Ddu, the boyhood home of that fine poet, T. H. Parry Williams, I was welcomed with enthusiasm by the polling officers, who said, "Eleven per cent. have already voted—seven people." Now, those seven voters and all the other electors in my constituency have expectations of the Government, but those expectations are more than tinged with scepticism. There is a growing consensus in Wales, and it is becoming an all-party consensus, that a strengthening of the powers of the National Assembly is essential.

Our aims here as Plaid Cymru Members are—yes—to foster economic development and the prosperity of our constituencies, to improve public services and to press for decent housing for all our people, but also to promote proper powers for our National Assembly, if only for the sake of coherence and efficiency in government. But for us in Plaid Cymru and for the people of Wales, much, much more is at stake. I am proud to commit myself here again today to that aim.

8.37 pm

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a contribution to the important debate on the Homelessness Bill. I begin by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) for a truly first-class maiden speech—we have heard several of them today.

During the recent election, I, like many other candidates, held public meetings almost every night in my constituency, and I debated with my opposing candidates on four separate occasions. On one of those occasions, at the instigation of Churches Together, the questions that we were asked included whether we would back the immediate re-introduction of the Homes Bill. I am happy to record that all four candidates said that they would welcome the re-introduction of that Bill. I am privileged to be the one candidate of those four who is able to fulfil that undertaking today—no longer the Member of Parliament with the lowest Labour majority, but the Member of Parliament with the 36th highest Labour vote.

Homelessness is an evil that has no place in modern society, yet like all hon. Members I have seen sights in this country, and especially in this city, that shame all of us. Although there seems to be unanimity among the parties that that is a scourge and a cancer that we must tackle with all the weaponry that we can bring to bear, it was not always thus.

Although I am now a Member of Parliament for a Northamptonshire seat, I cut my political teeth in inner London. I became a Camden councillor in 1990, at a time when, across the border in Conservative Westminster, certain councillors were talking of being cruel and nasty to the homeless—and homeless there were, many of them.

I lived at that time in Arlington road, just down the road from Arlington House, which was then and perhaps still is the biggest homeless persons' hostel in Europe. For one year I served on the board of management of that hostel. My council ward was the Brunswick ward, host to the architecturally celebrated Brunswick centre. Above ground at the centre was a shopping centre, a cinema, a club and flats housing several hundred people. Below ground, however, there was a carpark housing dozens of homeless people. After a surgery one Friday evening, representatives of the local residents association took me into that carpark to see for myself that subterranean housing estate. It was a site viewing that lasted only five minutes, made physically unbearable by the stench of urine. Residents had to park their cars there, and the homeless had to sleep there.

Down the road from my ward was Lincoln's Inn Fields, next door to the Inn of Court where I had dined with Law Lords to be called as a barrister a few years earlier. It was also home to dozens if not hundreds of homeless people. If they were not in Lincoln's Inn, they were underneath the arches of Waterloo, littering every doorway in the Strand or hanging around hopefully outside amusement arcades in Leicester square, hoping just for a punter for their prostitution.

Some of them were the hardened homeless, on the road for years; some may have even been exercising a freedom of choice to live that way; but many were the victims of the then Tory Government. Some were indirectly caught by the side wind of disastrous economic policies—the booms, the recessions, the mass unemployment, the negative equity, the repossessions and the widening gulf between north and south.

The then Government's influence on the homelessness of others, especially youngsters, was even more direct. The Tories closed down short-stay accommodation in, for example, Covent Garden, but they never replaced it. They also withdrew benefits from 16 to 18-year-olds except for those in the most exceptional and extremely vulnerable circumstances, so that even youngsters fleeing from abusive homes or abusive parents could find themselves unaided and forced into homelessness by the very Government to whom they should have been looking for protection.

The result of all of that was that, at the tail end of the Thatcher Administration, 140,000 people were homeless—140,000 scars on the modern history of this nation. The homelessness figure peaked in 1990, since when there have been steady decreases, but the decreases have been nowhere near fast enough. Moreover, the decreases seem only very rarely to have been due to concerted Government action to tackle homelessness as a key political priority.

During the Major Administration, when numbers fell to 116,000, the decrease was due to external factors, not to deliberate Government action. Indeed, the principal initiative of the then Government moved in entirely the wrong direction if the objective was to rid the nation of homelessness. With their Housing Act 1996, the Tories

[Mr. Paul Stinchcombe]

voted not to limit but to extend the definition of those considered to be intentionally homeless, to whom lesser housing duties were therefore owed. That made it more difficult for them to be rehoused, not easier.

With the same Act, the Tories legislated to reduce to the giving of mere advice the assistance to which even the unintentionally homeless in priority need were entitled if there was deemed to be suitable accommodation in their area. That, too, made it more difficult for them to be rehoused.

With the same Act, the Tories legislated to reduce, where it still remained, the duty to secure accommodation to a duty to secure it for just two years. Once again, the Administration made it more difficult, not easier, for the homeless to find the permanent home that they needed. However, even that was not enough. Having already presided over the general withdrawal of benefits from under-18s in the late 1980s, in 1996 the then Government further restricted housing benefit for under-25s to the average rent for shared accommodation, to single-room rent, so that no under-25s were entitled to independent accommodation, however vulnerable their circumstances. All would have to share with strangers.

So when the Labour Government came to power in 1997, we inherited not only 116,000 or so homeless people but a legislative regime and a benefits system that were designed to make things tough for the homeless. It is that regime which the Homelessness Bill—and, before the general election, the Homes Bill—is attempting to address. The Bill is a belated but welcome response to that regime.

The Bill is a belated response. Although it has been introduced early in this Parliament, it was introduced so late in the previous one that, despite the size of our majority, we could not pass it. That delay was unfortunate because the scale of the homelessness problem was huge when we assumed power and remained huge throughout the entirety of our first term. The number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need still stands at about 110,000.

The problem is particularly acute in London. I described earlier the manifestations of homelessness as of the 1990s, but little has changed. The same manifestations are here now; the beggars and the bedraggled are still with us, on the streets, in shop doorways and in London Underground access tunnels. It is not just the rough sleepers who are still with us, or those without a roof over their head, but those whose roof is not their own, but a friend's; those whose roof is not of a flat or house, but of a car; those whose roof may be of a house or flat, but one that is substandard, overcrowded or unfit for occupation.

In one outer-London borough of which I have some knowledge, the supply of affordable housing to meet housing demand is so inadequate that even if no one else applied for housing in that borough for the foreseeable future, it would take three years to make one offer of housing to every registered homeless family in temporary accommodation and four years to make one offer of housing to every tenant in housing need—and that is if nobody new came on to the housing register. That borough receives 300 homelessness applications every month and nearly 200 more applications a month to join the housing register. As matters stand, many of those applicants have no realistic prospect of ever receiving an offer of a suitable home.

Although the problem is clearly focused on London and the other cities, it exists elsewhere. In my constituency—leafy, middle England, and a rural area with 17 villages and 70 farms—I frequently see at my surgery those who present themselves as homeless: the lorry driver from Rushden whose relationship collapsed and who was sleeping in the cab of his lorry and had been doing so for months; the youngster on a programme for the Prince's Trust who was looking forward to his stay at the residential home for the disabled where he was to be a helper because it meant that he, too, had a bed to sleep in; the family who had been forced to waste their last pennies on hotel rooms as different local authorities passed them on, one to the other, until they had no money left; and several couples with children, evicted because of arrears, who could not then obtain either a reference or a deposit to live somewhere else.

That amounts to a reservoir of housing need in this city and throughout the country with which we now must deal. We are doing so, but later than we should. The Bill is a belated response; it could have come earlier, but it is none the less welcome. It is welcome because it deals with some of the obvious errors of the past decade and, in particular, the Housing Act 1996.

I particularly welcome four features of the Bill. First, it requires authorities to take a strategic multi-agency approach to the prevention of homelessness and the rehousing of homeless households. That is clearly right. Secondly, the Bill abolishes the current two-year period during which authorities are subject to the main homelessness duty. Again, that must be right. Thirdly, the Bill gives authorities a new power to secure accommodation for homeless applicants who are not in priority need, especially single people. That, too, must be right. Fourthly, I welcome the proposals to improve the right of appeal for housing applicants. Far too many have in the past been faced with the awful decision either to accept a property that they consider wholly unsuitable to meet their needs or to refuse that offer and lose the prospect of being housed altogether.

All those measures are welcome, and are welcomed not only by me but by all the major political parties, the local government associations and the charities. However, our enthusiasm, although real, must still be muted by our understanding that this Bill is a start, but not a solution. Much, much more needs to be done if we are truly to address a problem on the scale that I have described. That is why the Bill calls for the drawing up by local authorities of homelessness reviews and strategies. It is through such bigger, broader multi-agency strategies that most will be done.

Legislation alone can never be enough. We do not house the homeless by passing a Bill and making it an Act. We do so by bringing into being more supported temporary accommodation and by building more permanent homes. When we have those beds and those homes, we need not pious words and statutes but practical solutions on the ground if we are better to enable access to them by those currently excluded, whether through poverty, mental problems, addiction or any of the myriad problems that can make one homeless. All that requires proper co-ordination between different Government Departments and local government; between

the public, the private and the voluntary sectors; between those with responsibility not just for housing, but for planning, health, social services, social security and social exclusion.

How better to bring back into use the 760,000 homes that currently stand empty than by listening to the Empty Homes Agency, whether on VAT or council tax? How better to convert into sustainable homes the spaces that the institutions own above the shops in our high streets than by listening to those who have devised legal instruments that meet their concerns about being landlords?

How better to ensure that when new homes are built they are built for the poor as well as the rich than by revising policy planning guidance 3? Yes, the Labour Government revised PPG3—they were right to do so—and sought to extract from all appropriate private housing developments an element of affordable housing. That was a step in the right direction; but developers still argue, and all too often successfully, that their site is not an appropriate one, that it is too small to accommodate different types of tenure, that the economics of provision do not stack up, and that compliance would mean that the development was not a successful one, even if it was viable. PPG3 must be revised again, and soon, if the targets for affordable homes throughout the country are to be met.

How better to sustain in their homes those who are unused to managing themselves, let alone their budgets, than by providing social and health care and, above all, benefits to meet their needs? Let us tackle the single-room rent now, and signal our intent to do better by youngsters, not worse.

The Bill is a belated and partial response to a desperate problem. It is a very welcome start, but it is a start down a very tricky road. I urge Ministers to keep going on that journey, and I wish them very well on it.

8.51 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous), for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on their maiden speeches, and I thank the hon. Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons), for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard) and for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) for continuing my Cook's tour of the country.

I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Mrs. Jackie Ballard, the first woman to represent Taunton and a conscientious and hard-working Member of Parliament who quickly established an enviable reputation both within and without the constituency. I also want to mention David Nicholson, her predecessor. He never shouted loudly about all the hard work that he did, and I pay tribute to the full 10 years that he served in the House.

Taunton really is a beautiful constituency, encompassing the fertile Vale of Taunton, overlooked by the Blackdowns, the Brendons and the Quantocks, as well as half of Exmoor. Its mainstay in those parts is agriculture, and especially dairy and livestock—for those who do not know, it rains quite a lot there.

The past few months have been torturous for the farming and hill communities and all those in the rural villages. Foot and mouth disease has plagued us, although infection has played a relatively small part. We have all been affected. Wiveliscombe and Dulverton, two of the smaller towns, have both struggled. There has been a great impact on tourism, and especially sporting pursuits tourism, because Taunton has eight hunts, as my predecessor used constantly to say. The voluntary cessation of hunting in February added to the destruction of tourism in the constituency. That is especially bad news for all the farm businesses that had taken the Government's advice and diversified.

There are other rural businesses alongside farming, many of them situated in villages with wonderful names such as Hatch Beauchamp, Stoke St. Gregory, Stoke St. Mary, Bishops Lydeard and Sampford Arundel. Then we have Ashbrittle and Appley to the west of Wellington, and Huish Champflower and Brompton Regis up on the Brendons.

Agriculture has been affected recently, but in his maiden speech, no less, Sir Edward du Cann said that

"for all the support which the farming industry is receiving at the moment from the taxpayer, small farmers and hill farmers particularly eke out a not very satisfactory living."—[*Official Report*, 23 April 1956; Vol. 551, c. 1486.]

It is regrettable that, in the 45 years since he made that speech, we do not seem to have travelled very far.

If I have one long-term aim as a Member of Parliament it is to help the rural and urban elements of my constituency to understand that they rely heavily on each other. There is no better example of that than the livestock market in the centre of Taunton, which Mrs. Ballard described in 1997 as "thriving". I have to say that it is not thriving at all at the moment; it, too, has been closed because of foot and mouth disease.

There is no better testimony to the importance of agriculture than the mutual dependence that exists between the countryside and the towns: local shops have less money spent in them because the farmers do not make their twice-weekly visits to the livestock market. Farming and tourism do bring lots of money to the area—but not at the moment.

Another town, Wellington, has also been affected, but less so, because it is seven miles to the east of Taunton, and has been helped by the growth in the markets that the firms Relyon and Swallowfield both supply.

Nobody—even those with an urban disposition, such as Labour Members—wants to see our agriculture collapse, as farming has created and moulded our beautiful landscape, and that provides the backdrop to this country's tourism.

The Taunton constituency centres on the county town of the same name, which sits astride the river Tone. The Tone has taken to flooding at various points in the past couple of years, and we need to think seriously about how to combat flooding in the whole of Somerset in the next few years.

Taunton is the home of the county council and of Taunton Deane borough council. More importantly, in my opinion, it is also home to Somerset county cricket club; it is regrettable that we lost by eight runs to Gloucestershire yesterday. Taunton Town football club, which, sadly, until

[Mr. Adrian Flook]

this year had a habit of coming second in cup finals—19 times in a row—has managed to reverse that trend, and we are now the proud holders of the FA vase. The rugby club can also hold its head high, having won promotion.

My constituency is not just pretty names and stunning church towers, although we do have one church tower that has been described as the noblest parish tower in all England. The St. Mary Magdalene charitable fund needs £500,000 at the moment to restore the historic organ, the tower and the fabric of that church.

Some, especially those who wish to go there, may perceive Somerset as a bucolic idyll luxuriating in milk and honey. None the less, there are more than a handful of homeless people in Taunton and the rest of Somerset, and the problem is getting worse as agriculture declines, both in terms of the number of people employed and in terms of wealth.

There are pockets of rural poverty, and the people who live in them will look towards Taunton, which has only 2 per cent. unemployment, to provide them with work. They will therefore travel there and look for bedsits, but there are now fewer of those, as our landlords have been forced to upgrade the accommodation without any corresponding increase in rent. The heavy hand of the local authority and of Government legislation has frightened them off. It is worrying that the Government now say that they will publish a consultation document later this year. That will only add to one of the major problems in dealing with homelessness—that there are already too many laws that have frightened away private landlords.

We know how many people are officially homeless in Taunton, but we do not know how many there are unofficially. The Taunton Association for the Homeless says that it turned 90 people away last month, so it wants to build more rooms—yet the first the residents of nearby Alfred street heard of that was when the proposal went out to planning consultation.

That is regrettable. If we want those facilities to be able to cater for the number of people who are homeless, and to be accepted in local areas, we need to ensure that they can nurture the locality and that residents' fears are understood.

Taunton Association for the Homeless is a fine, well-runassociation, and its work is complemented by Open Door, which is run by Taunton Christians Together. As its mission statement says, Open Door tries

"to relieve the need, hardship and distress of the homeless within Taunton and the surrounding countryside."

However, Open Door has a problem that is not purely financial. Apparently, it can operate for only three days a week at present. It gets funding from the local councils partly because the county council will not operate on a Sunday.

If we are to be successful in combating the problems of homelessness, we need participation from the voluntary sector. I worry, because at every voluntary and charitable event that I attend I am too often the youngest by a whole decade—and I am not that far off 40. If people in my age group do not get involved in voluntary work and in supporting, financially and through their own actions, those charities that help the homeless, it is a potential worry because the authorities will not always be able to fill in the gaps. That makes the contribution of the voluntary sector very important.

I am sure that the Bill is well meaning, but I fear that it will not reduce the regulation overload that is seriously hampering attempts to reduce homelessness. That is a problem that we must all resolve.

9 pm

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I congratulate my hon. Friends who have made their maiden speeches today, and I also congratulate the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), whom we have just heard. We have had the privilege of hearing several spirited maiden speeches and have seen the emergence of strong parliamentarians who will be excellent representatives of their constituents.

Many of us will celebrate when the Bill finally reaches the statute book after many false starts, especially those of us on the Government Benches who have been trying to extend the rights of the homeless since the 1970s. Homelessness was my formative political experience, because my first job as a young woman was working in Battersea social services. I shall not say how many years ago that was, but it pre-dated the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. When homeless families came into the social services offices with their children, often with their worldly goods wrapped up in string, my job was to offer them a ticket back to whatever floor they had recently been sleeping on—perhaps belonging to friends or relatives—or to offer to take their children into care. Those were the only options available to homeless families, and that is why I worked in a voluntary capacity to help to ensure the introduction of the 1977 Act—of which we can still be proud—in the days of "Cathy Come Home". In a professional and voluntary capacity since then, I have worked to try to enhance the rights of the homeless and those in housing need.

It is significant that this Bill will be the first to receive a Second Reading after the election. I am proud that it is the Labour party that has always sought to protect the rights of the homeless and to tackle housing need. The new-found enthusiasm for the homeless on the Opposition Benches should be tempered with the reminder that it was during their 18 years in government that we saw devastating cuts in housing investment, over and above those in any other public service; 1 million people becoming homeless as a result of repossession; a doubling of homelessness; and, worst of all, in the dying days of the Tory Government, the Housing Act 1996.

Sections 6 and 7 of the 1996 Act further curtailed the rights of the homeless and reduced the duty on local authorities to rehouse homeless families permanently. Instead, the Act introduced a two-year duty, requiring local authorities to provide only hostel or other temporary accommodation. That was a disgraceful move and was universally condemned by homelessness charities and all of those working in the housing and homelessness sector. Inevitably, those measures led to an increase in the numbers of the homeless and the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We are still reaping the whirlwind of that legacy of the previous Tory Government.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does the hon. Lady realise that had those provisions not been made, almost

all the available social housing would have continued to go to those on the homelessness list, while those who had waited for years had no chance at all in many boroughs?

Margaret Moran: The hon. Gentleman demonstrates that he does not have an understanding of the link between homelessness and housing need more generally. The representations made by charities and housing organisations showed a clear link between homelessness and wider housing need, which the hon. Gentleman appears not to understand.

We have seen an increase in the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and in the number of homelessness admissions. That is regrettable, but it is to do with the legacy of the previous Government's housing and finance policies. The supply of affordable housing is falling, as are the numbers of local authority and housing association re-lets. That inevitably pushes up the number of homeless families. Families who are already in overcrowded or unsatisfactory accommodation may eventually find themselves homeless simply because the pressure on them is too great. Young couples who are forced to live with mum and dad find their circumstances becoming so difficult that they cannot cope with the overcrowding and are forced into temporary accommodation and homelessness.

We need to tackle the roots and the preventive aspects of homelessness. In line with the Bill, we also need a parallel strategy to tackle the need for an increased supply of affordable rented accommodation and for increased housing investment. We welcome the Government's additional investment. The increase to £2.5 billion in resources for local authorities and the doubling of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme will go a significant way towards increasing the supply of affordable housing, but much more still needs to be done.

I wish to make a couple of remarks on some issues that were discussed in relation to the Homes Bill. There has been a general welcome for the Homelessness Bill's extension of the measures to tackle the problems of families and individuals at risk of violence. I particularly welcome the measures to assist survivors of domestic violence who have for too long been forced to make the unpalatable choice of moving from their homes to secure their safety and that of their family.

I hope that a distinction is made in the guidance between the needs of survivors of domestic violence and the problems of antisocial behaviour. Domestic violence is a crime, and needs to be taken seriously. It is essential that when guidance is issued, the needs of the survivors are made much clearer than they have been, and that local authorities take their duties more seriously than they have done in many instances in the past.

If we are to give effect to the provisions that seek to provide greater safeguards for survivors of domestic violence, we need to think in a more joined-up way about other parts of our policy. Our "supporting people" policy, for example, is welcome in a general sense. However, there are grave concerns that by giving local discretion, there is a risk of survivors seeking refuge in women's aid hostels finding that hostels are not available because local authorities have chosen to fund other types of accommodation. We urgently need a national network of hostels and refuges for survivors of domestic violence. I urge Ministers to consider whether central funding is more appropriate if the protection afforded in the Bill is to have real effect.

When the Homes Bill was considered, there was debate about the uneven quality of housing advice services around the country. It was suggested that there should be minimum standards of housing advice available to all. I strongly endorse such a view, particularly in respect of survivors of domestic violence, because although we advocate a multi-agency approach, its effectiveness in terms of advice given and support offered is often patchy across the country. We need to introduce minimum standards for all agencies tackling domestic violence, so as to end the current location lottery. All survivors, wherever they live, should be assured of a refuge place if they need one and of the correct advice and support whenever they need it.

There has been much discussion of, and a welcome for, the introduction in the Bill of a homelessness strategy. During debate on the Homes Bill, it was pointed out that such a strategy should form part of an overall housing strategy that had statutory effect. That was resisted by Ministers on the grounds that more time was needed for consultation. Time has passed since then—although not time intended for such consultation—and I urge Ministers to reconsider such a requirement under the Bill. It fits completely into our partnership agenda and will provide a much-needed focus on more joined-up government—linking education, health, planning and so on. That is long overdue. Those sectors must be meshed together if we are effectively to tackle housing needs.

Mr. Don Foster: That is not merely the hon. Lady's view. Local authorities are desperately keen for a single requirement on them to provide an over-arching homes policy.

Margaret Moran: The hon. Gentleman is right. Strong representations have been made from that quarter. I have been appalled by some local authorities that, having undertaken stock transfer, say, "We don't do housing any more. We have got shot of housing". We do not advocate that approach to housing either in the Bill or more generally. We need a more strategic approach on a statutory basis, extending the statutory housing powers of local authorities to enable them to carry out their full range of duties in all aspects of housing provision in their area. That requires the strengthening of the obligations on registered social landlords and other housing providers to assist local authorities in meeting their housing needs.

Furthermore, if we are to reduce homelessness, we must make more effective use of the private rented sector. In Luton, for each of the 4,000 families in desperate housing need, there are seven empty properties in the private rented sector. That is nonsense. Without the resources or the statutory ability to tackle the problem of empty properties, that disgrace will continue. We must address the need for additional resources to deal with private sector rented properties that are in disrepair. We also need to provide greater resources for poor owner-occupiers who need assistance to maintain their homes to a decent standard, before they reach the state of dereliction of some properties in my constituency.

We need to improve quality and security for tenants in the private rented sector without driving up prices. I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State

[Margaret Moran]

mentioned that he is considering a consultation document on that sector and on houses in multiple occupation. Legislation on those sectors is long overdue.

We should extend the powers of local authorities to introduce discretionary licensing to all forms of private rented sector provision. It should not be restricted solely to low-demand areas. The current housing benefit system should be adjusted to give financial incentives, under licensing schemes, to private landlords who provide good-quality, affordable housing for households in need.

As my right hon. Friend said in his introduction, the Bill is but one element in the range of measures necessary to prevent homelessness and tackle housing need. We also need to set targets during the next 10 years for overcoming the backlog in affordable housing, to parallel our target for ensuring that existing housing meets decent standards. The Government should set out a programme for achieving those new targets, which will inevitably require a significant increase in housing investment. Local authorities should be required to show in their housing strategies how the target will be met in their areas. That would mesh with the Government's target to reduce the number of homeless households placed in bed-and-breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation. We need an emergency programme for achieving that target.

As we have heard, homelessness involves not only a financial cost to the Treasury and the public purse but a human and political cost. The problem is acute in London and is growing worse in the south-east. It is certainly reaching acute levels in areas, such as my constituency, around the M25 belt. Therefore, our need to increase the number of affordable social housing units is more acute, and we need to find new financial mechanisms to increase the availability of affordable housing in those areas.

We should tackle the low demand that exists in some parts of the country, but not at the expense of responding to unmet needs in areas of high demand. In that context, I have grave concerns about the review of the general needs index and the housing needs index. Under the current proposals, it seems that the areas of highest housing need could be penalised by indicators that address areas of low demand. I certainly ask Ministers to consider very carefully the impact of those proposals because we could financially penalise the very areas that need most support to accommodate homeless people and provide affordable housing.

We must also think about our wider housing strategy. If we are to tackle homelessness and housing need, we must stop treating arm's-length company initiatives as the only game in town. There are other methods of financing social housing, and we need to be inventive in considering them. For more than a decade, many tenants and housing professionals have said that a level playing field needs to be introduced in housing finance and investment.

I am not a purist in such issues. As the Government have said, what matters is what works. No need is more acute than that in housing. We must look beyond large-scale voluntary transfers as our main way of tackling housing need. We must consider a wider range of ways in which to increase housing investment.

I welcome the additional resources that have been invested, but in no way will they provide more affordable homes, which we urgently need, in the time scale necessary to tackle the problem. I have a suggestion to make to the Ministers who will discuss the forthcoming spending round with the Chancellor: we can consider increasing investment within the existing financial rules. The Chancellor has rightly introduced the golden rule and, at present, we are comfortably within that limit. Net public debt is set to fall steadily to below 40 per cent. of gross domestic product.

In 2001–02, the Chancellor could have increased public sector net debt to invest in housing by about £50 billion while still remaining within the golden rule. Housing investment has the additional benefit that it need not appear in one year's accounts; it can be spread over several years to meet need and demand. We are fortunate in that we have a Chancellor and Government who have set great store by healthy public finances, and we should use the healthy state of public finances to allow greater investment in housing. There is room for a significant increase in housing investment, by about 1 to 2 per cent. of GDP.

I hope that, in approaching the forthcoming spending round, Ministers will recognise that the Bill tackles the most urgent needs of homeless people, but that those needs should be dealt with in parallel with the need for greater investment in our housing stock and for increasing the amount of affordable housing. I hope that Ministers will put those arguments to the Chancellor, thank him for his financial prudence and say that he has room within his golden rule to allow greater housing investment—greater even than that which we have seen in the past three years.

The cost of homelessness is great. It is great to the public purse and to those who are personally affected, their families and their friends. It has a political cost, too. I welcome the measures in the Bill, but I hope that Ministers will move further and introduce other legislation, particularly for homes in multiple occupation in the private rented sector. I hope that they will take this historic opportunity to argue for greater housing investment and so end the torment of homelessness that so many of our constituents experience.

9.20 pm

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech.

It is an honour to represent the constituency of Ludlow and the county of my birth. It is a particular honour as I am the first Liberal Democrat Member ever to represent Ludlow and, I believe, the first Liberal to do so since 1886.

I welcome the Bill. Homelessness is not just an urban problem, as several hon. Members made clear. The homelessness problem in rural areas such as mine, where house prices are going through the roof and yet we suffer from low wages, is that young people are being driven out. The problem is not so much that they are sleeping rough, but that they are not sleeping in the constituency of Ludlow.

Several hon. Members have mentioned Stephen Ross, whose Bill in 1977 put much homelessness legislation into practice. Many Members will not know this, but he moved to Ludlow after he had finished his time in the House and was president of our constituency party until he died.

I also pay tribute to my predecessor, Christopher Gill, who retired at the general election after 14 years in the House. There is much local respect for him, because he

stuck to his principles through thick and thin. I suspect that Conservative Whips had less respect for his determination.

Christopher Gill could also be a doughty fighter for local people. At the outset, he was a lone voice in fighting for Kidderminster hospital. Despite the political differences between us, I suspect that he will be rather pleased that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) and I will continue his fight for services at that hospital.

Many Members have said—I am sure that everyone does in a maiden speech—that their constituency is one of the most beautiful in the country. All I say is that people should come to Ludlow and draw their own conclusions. Not only will they find it very beautiful, they will find that the people are very relaxed, friendly and welcoming.

The Shropshire hills have been given a boost by the Secret Hills Discovery Centre in Craven Arms, which is a must for all visitors. My constituency is also full of historic castles and buildings. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) referred to Caernarfon castle, but he may not know that, for some time, Ludlow castle was the seat of government for this country and, for a much longer period, ruled Wales. Ludlow now boasts more Michelin star restaurants than any other constituency and it has many fine pubs and hotels. Indeed, it has the largest number of micro-breweries. The figure of six is more than anywhere else and they produce top-quality real ales.

I do not, however, want to gloss over the problems that my constituency faces. It is one of the most rural constituencies in England. Nearly 12 per cent. of the working population work directly in agriculture and the jobs of many others are dependent on the agriculture sector. That sector has been in decline in the past five years and foot and mouth very nearly finished it off. It is the bedrock of the local economy and I hope that the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will turn the rural economy round and not earn the reputation of its predecessor, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Kidderminster hospital is primarily known because of its connection with Wyre Forest. However, a third of my electorate—20,000 people—used it because it was their nearest hospital. For them, the loss of the accident and emergency department might be life-threatening. They were used to the 45 minutes that it took from making a 999 call to being taken to an accident and emergency hospital. Many now face a wait of an hour and a half from the time that they make the call to when they arrive.

Shropshire and my constituency are affected by the poor state of local government finance, which is a familiar problem in rural areas. Schools are desperately underfunded but, none the less, produce excellent results. The roads improve whenever one leaves Shropshire. That is no surprise: every surrounding county is better funded. Social services have experienced severe cutbacks. I heard that a local government finance reform Bill was going to be announced in the Queen's Speech and was deeply disappointed when that did not happen.

The election in Ludlow was not entirely about party politics. Its electorate are relaxed, friendly and not easily stirred. Indeed, they probably have not been stirred for 115 years in political terms. However, there is a growing feeling that central Government are ignoring the constituency and that our problems are not being heard. The electorate have been roused and they have asked me to put their problems to the House. I hope that I will succeed in doing that.

9.27 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): We have had a fascinating debate, but it should not be taking place. The Homes Bill could have been an Act by now had the Government taken our advice and not insisted on linking it with the highly controversial compulsory seller's pack. It is a vindication of the Conservative opposition to that rushed and ill-thought-out measure that it was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. That goes to underline the pitfalls of abusing our powers of scrutiny by using programming measures to rush badly drafted legislation through the House. How many measures that succeeded courtesy of the Government's programming sledgehammer will we have to revisit in this Parliament simply because they legislated in haste? In their unseemly rush to flex their political muscle, legislation was not subject to the full rigour of scrutiny inside and outside this place. The Secretary of State, who is not present, had a cheek to present the Homelessness Bill as if it were the first month of the first Labour Government.

Let us look on the bright side. Without today's debate, the House would have been deprived of a string of excellent maiden speeches, of which a surprising number touched on homelessness. Interspersed with those were many contributions by old lags—the hon. Members for Bath (Mr. Foster), for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), and my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry). Indeed, I think that the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) spoke for even longer than she did in her maiden speech four years ago. However, that was not before the annual tirade—the short, sharp speech—by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). For those of us who joined the House four years ago, it is familiar to hear all the ills of the world put down to 18 years of Conservative government. There was no mention of the appalling housing record of Labour-controlled London boroughs. Perhaps she will put us on notice of when she will take some responsibility for the deterioration in housing under four years of Labour government, including her short, sharp tenure at the now defunct Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. When will she be prepared to be judged on her record as the Mayor's special adviser?

Returning to the maiden speeches, we started with an excellent contribution by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami). It is good advice to mention one's agent in one's opening speech. The hon. Gentleman's tones are not, perhaps, the mellifluous Welsh ones of his predecessor, but his understanding of the problems of his constituency and his portrayal of it as very different from the seat that his predecessor inherited 31 years ago show that he is in touch with his constituents. His point about stable communities being at the heart of a solution to housing problems was very relevant.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous), who also made an excellent contribution, as we would expect from someone

[Tim Loughton]

who cut his teeth in Conservative politics in Wandsworth, as I did. He managed to mention teacher numbers, police numbers, clinics, bypasses, banks, railways, flight paths and waste disposal—the entire panoply of public services—in one 12-minute speech. He will bring great experience to the House, not least from his work with homelessness charities, which he mentioned.

We had another excellent maiden contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly). Not many of us can talk about two highly distinguished predecessors with busts in the Palace of Westminster. I hope that my hon. Friend will not repeat the performance of the earlier of those predecessors, Oliver Cromwell, who snatched the Mace, made one contribution in his first year as a Member of Parliament and suffered a lingering death from malaria. My hon. Friend is very welcome here in the defence of the privileges of this House as its powers, including the power of scrutiny, come under attack not now from the divine right of kings, but from an arrogance of power exercised by an Executive in Downing street.

We then heard an excellent maiden contribution from the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons), following in the tradition of difficult-to-pronounce Scottish constituencies. His approach was a refreshing alternative to blaming everything on those wicked Tories between 1979 and 1997. His commitment to homelessness projects in his constituency resulted in the expertise with which he contributed on the subject.

I am afraid that I missed the maiden contribution of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), although I gather that he gave us some insight into the highly underhand tactics used by Liberal Democrat candidates, including the fact that he identified a former Conservative Member of Parliament as not living in the constituency, even though he was his landlord.

We then heard a contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). It is excellent to see the Isle of Wight back in Conservative hands, as well it should be. He brings to the House great expertise in education. He made very bold claims: he said that it never rains in the Isle of Wight. He gave us a different view on the promotion of tourism by advertising the prisons available on the island and the attractions of garlic ice cream, garlic beer and garlic honey—which is ironic given the fact that in "Dod's", he gives one of his recreations as avoiding gardening.

We then moved on to the Welsh tradition of unpronounceable constituencies, with the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard), whose maiden speech was a refreshing jerk back to the tradition of Labour Members blaming everything on the wicked Tories. By my count, he mentioned Keir Hardie at least seven times. His strong, passionate speech was reminiscent of Keir Hardie's contributions, and then he started mentioning socialism and trade unionists—subjects that do not, these days, raise too many cheers from his ministerial colleagues. The crucible of Welsh politics that produced Keir Hardie in the last century is, I fear, rather different today.

We then heard from another Welsh Member, albeit from a different party. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) follows in the distinguished footsteps of Dafydd Wigley and tried to outdo the Member who spoke before him by talking about Lloyd George rather than Keir Hardie. He certainly wasted no time in asserting his constituency's independence from that terrible place, England. He spoke with expertise on housing and with personal experience of wards that feature in the ten worst in Wales for housing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) spoke about his most beautiful constituency, but, with refreshing honesty, admitted that it does indeed rain a lot there, in contrast, apparently, to the Isle of Wight. He took the wise step of mentioning just about all the villages in his constituency, which always helps, and spoke intelligently about the stark mutual dependence of rural and urban areas and the problems of homelessness and poverty, which exist just as much in the country as in the towns. I am sure that the people of Taunton will be well served by their new Member. I would expect no less from someone who, like me, cut his political teeth in Wandsworth politics, and is also godfather to one of my daughters.

We completed our Cook's tour with the contribution of the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green). He followed the tradition of mentioning the beauty of his constituency, as well as the restaurants and breweries in which he takes pride. He was not quite shameless enough to mention them all by name to acquire free dining facilities, but his was an interesting contribution all the same. He also concentrated on the many problems of poverty and homelessness in a largely rural constituency.

I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), on her promotion to the Front Bench. She and I have done battle on many occasions, largely on financial Bills, although she was temporarily hushed during her tenure as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the now Chief Whip; we welcome her back and, no doubt, she will be more vociferous.

I greatly sympathise with the Under-Secretary, for her portfolio includes a number of poisoned chalices. It includes urban regeneration, on which the Government have singularly failed to deliver. They have produced a plethora of initiatives that are all about setting up structures rather than delivering, and there was no mention in the Queen's Speech of an urban White Paper or Bill.

The Under-Secretary is also responsible for planning—another area where the Government have singularly failed to overhaul the chaotic system under which we suffer—and housing, which was one of the previous Government's biggest failures. The Minister for Local Government has just arrived to give her a crumb of comfort for the Government's most appalling record.

Just five years ago, on 5 March 1996, the Prime Minister said:

> "Labour will do everything in our power to end the scandal of homelessness, to tackle the spectacle of people sleeping rough on the streets, and to end the waste of families sleeping in bed and breakfast accommodation."

Five years on, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said, the homelessness figures from the Department for Transport, Local Government

and the Regions are truly appalling. Ministers may quibble over the odd thousand, but we know as they know that the figure has been getting worse.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): It was the same when the hon. Gentleman's party was in power.

Tim Loughton: Is not that an indictment of the past four years? This Government have promised everything. We have had warm words and Green Papers and speeches from Labour Members, yet the figure is the same as when the Conservatives were in government—yet, as we are constantly hearing, the economy is stronger than ever. What an indictment of four years under this Government.

The figure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation is two and a half times worse than in 1997. There is the scandal of empty housing, with more than 750,000 empty homes. The north-south divide has worsened and the gap between rich and poor has vastly widened, yet the Government promised the reverse. What has been their response?

The response has been a dramatic slashing of the number of social houses that have been built over the past four years to a record low. A Green Paper published in April 2000 was long on words but left the future status of council housing in doubt and suggested confused gimmicks for dealing with the major problem of the shortage of affordable housing for key workers, especially in London and the south-east.

Despite promises, there has been nothing on houses in multiple occupancy, and there has been continuing crisis over inefficiency and abuse in the housing benefit system, which has been made more complicated by the Government changing the regulations almost weekly. There has been nothing to help young people to get their feet on the first rung of the housing ladder, and nothing to promote do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes, which we pioneered. There have been increases in stamp duty but they still fail to define exemptions from it in areas of urban regeneration, as promised last year. This Government have slashed the right to buy and abolished mortgage interest relief at source.

That is the legacy of the previous Labour Government. Housing is an area in which they have single-handedly failed to deliver. They need urgently to reverse their appalling record if they are to justify the second chance granted by the British people at the general election. I sympathise greatly with the Minister. She will be a high-profile fall-girl if her new team continues the culture of failing to deliver.

The problem continues to worsen and it is not limited to major metropolitan boroughs. In my constituency on the south coast, local people are suffering. Worthing and Adur councils are failing to find people places in short-term accommodation, largely because of the actions of large cities such as Brighton and Hove and of the London boroughs, which have the power to take block bookings in resorts along the south coast, leaving those of us who live in the area short of the accommodation that we desperately need.

In addition, the quality of accommodation has been worsening. People with disabilities are being offered upper-floor flats and children with asthma are being put in damp ones. In one shocking case, a woman who had twice attempted suicide was placed in a fourth-floor flat with a balcony from which, tragically, she threw herself last week. Many hon. Members will know of similarly desperate cases.

The Under-Secretary's job is an urgent one. We will help as much as we can by not opposing the Bill, programme motion or no programme motion. However, all her warm words and good intentions will count for nothing unless talk of new provisions for homeless people and directions to local authorities and other providers to implement homelessness strategies are backed up by appropriate resources directed toward the problem from central Government.

We support many of the Bill's provisions, as we did many of the measures in part II of the Homes Bill. We support homelessness strategies and, in particular, special measures aimed at those who are fleeing domestic and racial violence—in fact, we tabled amendments to strengthen such provisions in the Homes Bill. We recognise the special requirements of people with physical and mental health disabilities and we shall support measures to help them.

We welcome clauses that deal with the suitability of homeless applicants based on their behaviour, but we shall explore in Committee whether that includes previous behaviour. Dealing with neighbours from hell means dealing with people who have a bad track record in previous tenancies, but the Bill is not clear on that point. We also want to ask questions about whether the new regime now prevailing between the new Secretary of State and local authorities will include provisions for homelessness now that he has threatened to send in private companies to wrest control over local services from local authorities, and whether that will include failing housing departments.

We broadly support the Bill, although we have many questions that we shall put to the Minister and her colleagues in Committee. The Government still have a long way to go to honour their pledge to tackle homelessness. Those suffering the appalling waste of homelessness will not forgive the Government if they fail to deliver a second time.

9.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): It has been an excellent debate featuring some outstanding maiden speeches as well as contributions displaying the experience that Members of Parliament—especially Labour Members—have in housing matters. It is appropriate that the first Bill of the Parliament—a Parliament that will focus on public services—should deal with the most basic service of all: the need for a roof over one's head.

The Bill supports the rights of homeless people. Those rights were first recognised in a Bill that was introduced by a Liberal Member of Parliament under a Labour Government, but they were shamefully eroded by the Conservatives' Housing Act 1996. I wonder whether it was lingering shame about the 1996 Act, the results of the general election, or Wandsworth council's track record on dealing with homelessness that made the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) so uncharacteristically sour. *[Laughter.]* I give him some credit. I look forward to our discussions about the Bill and the issues on which I shall make a contribution to government.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

The Bill will be a landmark for homeless people and will form a key part of the comprehensive housing strategy that the Government have established to address the housing needs and aspirations of the nation. First, the Bill embodies the drive to prevent homelessness by placing a duty on local authorities to review housing needs and develop strategies to deal with them.

Secondly, we will extend the rights of homeless people and increase the powers of local authorities to help them. Anyone with an ounce of compassion would recognise that 16 and 17-year-olds who are out alone on the streets of our cities are in desperate need of safe housing. Under the Conservative Government, the rights of that most vulnerable group were not recognised. The Bill and the order on priority needs, which will be introduced shortly, will end the scandal of housing in some of the most affluent towns and cities in the western world being denied to young homeless people. That is one of the differences that the Bill will make, which is what the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) was asking about.

Thirdly, there is no point in recognising the needs of the homeless without providing more housing. That is why we are more than doubling the level of capital investment that we inherited, including £153 million over three years for supporting the most vulnerable people.

Fourthly, our proposals will put choice at the heart of letting. That will help us to achieve our objective of secure, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods. People who choose to move to an area are more likely to have a commitment to that community than those who are merely allocated a property at the convenience of the local housing authority. The Bill will deal also with housing aspirations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), in his outstanding maiden speech, spoke of the importance of meeting the aspirations of the community. The Bill will be important in meeting the community's housing needs. My hon. Friend paid a sincere tribute to his predecessor, who is well remembered and fondly regarded by all Labour Members. My hon. Friend's predecessor raised constituency issues frequently and forcefully. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue in that tradition.

In his maiden speech, the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) paid a well-made, well-deserved and heartfelt tribute to his predecessor. He referred clearly to issues of concern to his constituents. I do not know all of those issues, but I share one with the hon. Gentleman—the Silverlink service. I wish him well in the campaign. I hope that he succeeds.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) made a polished speech and paid glowing tribute to his immediate predecessor. He raised the issue of empty properties and asked whether people could not simply be put into them. The Bill enforces the importance of choice and the need to ensure that people live in properties in a part of the country where they want to reside and in a type of property in which they want to live. He also raised the important issue of creating stable communities, and that is one of the aims that lies behind the Bill and supporting policies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) was right to highlight the role of housing and social exclusion. He talked of the need for more advice to help young people to avoid homelessness. Again, that is one of the aims that lies behind the Bill and the policies that will be introduced to support it.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) referred to the important issue of homelessness in rural areas, as did several other Members. They were right to do so. There are a number of policies to ensure that the interests of people in rural areas are protected. For example, the Housing Corporation has a rural programme for settlements, especially for fewer than 3,000 people.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) talked about his passion for local services—a passion that many of us on the Government Benches share. He spoke about the role of his Liberal predecessor who introduced the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, which is clearly important in the context of the debate. He was right to focus on allocations policies, which are often overlooked but which are an important feature of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard) paid tribute to his distinguished predecessors and to the policies of one in particular, Keir Hardie. Far from being anathema to the Government, we have fulfilled several of the policies that Keir Hardie drew up all those years ago. I am sure that my hon. Friend will play an important role in advancing those policies.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) paid a fulsome tribute to his constituency, its traditions and especially its language. He drew attention to the hardship resulting from the decline of traditional industries and the loss of younger economically active people. He will probably go down in history as the Member who managed to visit, I think, 84 polling stations in his constituency on polling day.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) spoke movingly about agriculture and the importance of tourism in his constituency. He spoke about the need to deal with the particular pressures of housing in his constituency; I draw his attention to the importance that the Bill attaches to homelessness strategies, which should be drawn up by local authorities and should involve both the statutory and private sectors. I hope that that will help to resolve some of the issues that he raised.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) drew attention to the problem of homelessness in rural areas. The Government will ensure that funding for the new starter homes initiative is available for rural areas; I hope that that will help to keep some younger people in those areas.

I welcome the support that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) expressed for the Bill, although I suspect that he will also have a number of reservations. The seller's pack, about which he asked, was a manifesto commitment; measures dealing with it will be introduced when parliamentary time allows. The hon. Gentleman also asked about the rough sleepers unit. We shall look at the lessons that can be drawn from it before deciding how to develop important policies for keeping people off the streets of our towns and cities.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) spoke forcefully about the problems of homeless people in London, which are of great concern, especially the number of those who are currently homeless or in bed and breakfast. My hon.

Friends may be interested to know that the London housing statement will be issued next month; it is a working document for London local authorities and housing associations and should go some way towards dealing with some of the problems of housing and homelessness in the capital city.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) spoke knowledgeably about the Bill. Obviously, he played a substantial role in it reaching the House in its present form and I welcome his contribution. I shall certainly make sure that the consultation document is placed in the Library. He asked when the priority needs order would be introduced. It will be submitted for parliamentary approval at the start of the next Session; it will be an affirmative order, so it will have to be debated. It should therefore come in to effect by the end of next year. The hon. Gentleman also asked about registered social landlords and their obligation to work with local authorities. They already have a statutory obligation to do that; guidance is coming out and further guidance will be issued for consultation in August. I certainly undertake to look again at the timetable because, clearly, August is not a key time for people to debate consultation documents.

The hon. Gentleman raised a couple of practical issues, including priorities and whether people should be told automatically about any change in the priority order. I urge him to think carefully about the impact that that would have on local authorities in terms of sheer bureaucracy and red tape. If he thinks the matter through carefully, he will realise that that proposal would be impractical for most local authorities.

The same is true of time limits. For some people, 24 hours is too long to respond to a housing offer. For some people, three days is too short. I had to deal with a case in which a woman received a housing offer while she was in hospital having a baby. Under such circumstances, it is important for the local authority to be able to use its discretion.

The hon. Member for Banbury asked what was the point of the Bill and what difference it would make. I have given him one answer, and there are others. One is that it would end the uncertainty of the two-year limit; the other involves choice in lettings. If he cannot think what the Bill would achieve, he lacks imagination or he does not understand the reality of homelessness in Britain today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North made a number of serious points, especially about homelessness in London. On overcrowding, I agree that the present standards are incompatible with what should be expected. On the possibility of two strategies—one for the north and one for the south—I believe that housing strategies should be driven by local needs. That is the thrust of the Bill. It is therefore important that local communities and local authorities draw up the housing strategies that best meet those needs. That will result in not just one or two, but a number of different policies to suit the people who live in those areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) showed her long experience and expertise in housing matters, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), who was involved in piloting choice-based lettings. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) highlighted the need for policies to help particularly vulnerable people. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), my close neighbour in Northamptonshire, gave a forceful speech reminding us of the appalling sights that we used to see during the Tory years, and reminded us that although much will be done under the Bill much remains to do.

Those at the sharp end of helping the homeless—charities such as Shelter and Crisis—have welcomed the Bill and its provision to extend the rights of homeless people. It is clear from speeches made this evening that the Bill's provisions and the programme to combat homelessness, the biggest extension of rights for the homeless for a quarter of a century, the recognition of the needs of the most vulnerable people in our society, the protection for those at risk of violence and the measures to keep the young off the streets and to take responsibility for ensuring that those most at risk have a roof over their heads resonate with many hon. Members.

Our aim is not just to make sure that homeless people can get a roof over their heads; it is also to make sure that they have a choice of a decent home and the support that they need to become a valued part of our society. Homelessness, or the threat of homelessness, is one of the most frightening prospects for most people, and it is why so many people tolerate the intolerable—domestic violence, racial harassment, extremes of poverty, overcrowding or abuse—rather than end up without a home.

Together with the priority needs order and increased spending, the Bill will increase protection for the most vulnerable people in our society and will form an important plank in achieving our vision of a more inclusive and a more just society. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

HOMELESSNESS BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Homelessness Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Business of the House

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question—[28 June].

Question again proposed,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): As I was saying when I was genteelly interrupted the other day, the issues raised by the motion are quite wide and complex. Not least among them is the fact that, looking at the dates that we contemplate for private Members' Bills, particularly when we do not have the opportunity of knowing the substance of the Bills, it is extraordinary—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 102 (Welsh Grand Committee (composition and business)), in respect of its meeting on Tuesday 3rd July, the Welsh Grand Committee shall consist of all Members representing Welsh constituencies, together with Mr. Nigel Evans and Mr. Robert Walter.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Andrew Bennett, Mr. Harold Best, Mr. Jonathan Djanogly, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Ivan Henderson, Mr. David Tredinnick and Brian White be members of the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments; and that the said Committee do meet with the Committee appointed by the Lords on Thursday 5th July at half-past Ten o'clock in Committee Room 7.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Teaching Vacancies (Advertising)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): A couple of months ago, I read in bold print on the front page of *The Times Educational Supplement* that more—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not walk in front of an hon. Gentleman who is addressing the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Joyce: More than 9,000 teaching jobs were advertised in that edition of the newspaper. The figure was intended to catch the eye of teachers looking for new jobs. What struck me, however, was the amount of advertising revenue that the newspaper must have been receiving, mainly from the state education budget. Although the advertising rates varied depending on the size of advertisement taken out by schools and local authorities, it seemed reasonable, comparing rates with the size of the advertisements in the newspaper, to assume that the average advertisement cost more than £200. If so, by my reckoning, that single edition of the TES could have generated about £2 million in advertising revenue just from the teaching vacancy advertisements.

That certainly was a bumper edition of the TES, and teaching vacancies have seasonal peaks and troughs. It would be misleading, therefore, to extrapolate a year's revenue from a single edition. Instead, I asked the previous Minister for School Standards, now the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many teaching jobs were estimated to become available each year in England and Wales. I was given a figure of about 55,000, although that did not cover quite a large number of jobs of which the Department might not be notified.

If we therefore assume that the vacancies were filled at the first advertisement and that the average cost was only £200, that would be an annual revenue from teaching vacancy advertising in England and Wales alone of well over £10 million. However, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the true figure is rather higher. There is good reason to suppose that state expenditure on such advertising could be closer to, or even more than, £20 million, perhaps considerably more. As that is a great deal of money, it is worth expanding on both the demand and the supply side of the teaching recruitment market.

On the demand side, schools need to advertise in response to staff turnover and school expansion. In the past, when the numbers of teachers chasing jobs were great, it might have been possible to have 50 or more applications for just one job. Currently, however, that is usually not the case. In some parts of the country, advertisements for a maths post, for example, are likely to elicit only three to four applicants even before any short-listing process. In such circumstances it is quite usual for jobs to be advertised more than once.

Staff turnover rates vary across the country, but turnover in high-demand subjects can be very high indeed, as can turnover in schools in metropolitan areas. No school wants to be left with a gap at the start of the year, so in those circumstances advertising becomes very aggressive. Particularly in shortage subjects, each school

is aware that it is chasing the same few applicants as other schools in the area. Schools might use various tactics to attract staff, and an important one is the advertisement itself. It is not purely a matter of stating that a job is available; the advertisement needs to grab the attention of potential applicants and persuade them that that is the job and school that they want, rather than the 15 or 20 others that could be on offer.

How do schools achieve that? They do not do it by placing a dinky little advertisement. It is certainly a case in which size does matter. When teachers looking for new jobs are faced with four or five pages of adverts on their subject area, eyes tend to be drawn to the larger box adverts. These can cost between £300 and £500 each, which leads to an inflation of the costs borne by schools.

One school that I know of—one without significant staffing difficulties that no doubt spends rather less than others—has still spent more than £12,000 this year on advertising, 95 per cent. of which is through the TES. However, another has spent more than £40,000 in one financial year. While this must look like a small element of a school budget of well over £2 million—or, in Scotland, of a local authority budget that is many times that—the fact is that labour costs and other fixed costs dominate the budgets of all schools. The cost of advertising looms quite large with regard to that truly flexible part of a school's budget.

This year, some schools have received very welcome additional funding for recruitment and retention. For a school of more than 1,000 students, this could be as much as £25,000 to £30,000, depending on how the local authority wants to slice up the cake. Schools would like to spend this on funding imaginative ways of limiting staff turnover, by enhancing opportunities within the schools, for example, or by offering support for new staff, particularly in areas where the cost of living is high. But to some extent, scope for imaginative uses of this extra money is limited by the high cost of advertising. That is why driving down that high cost is so very important.

Schools and local authorities represent the main driver on the demand side in the teacher advertising market. When it comes to staff recruitment, schools and local authorities basically want three things: first, a cost-effective means of reaching a wide audience; secondly, scope for a quick response time as regards requests for information and the processing of applications; thirdly, in a broader sense, promoting the attractions of the school. At present, the plain fact is that the market is not delivering what schools and local authorities want.

Simply put, advertising is unnecessarily expensive and leads to unnecessarily long response and administration times. The main supplier of teacher vacancy advertising is *The Times Educational Supplement*, or TES. The overwhelming majority of expenditure by schools and many colleges is spent there. It is true that some rivals nibble at the margins, but there is no doubting the fact that the TES dominates that market. The market operates in a way not dissimilar to a monopoly.

During my own extremely modest business education, I was taught that a market environment consisted essentially of five elements: buyers, suppliers, competitors, threats of new entrants and threats of new products replacing the need for one's own. It is instructive to apply this elementary template to the case in point. Buyers in this case are, on the one hand, schools and local authorities who pay for the adverts and, on the other hand, teachers who pay through the cover price to look for jobs. Since revenues from the former hugely outstrip the latter, it is the purchasing power of the former—the schools, essentially, and local authorities—that acts as the driver. If a sufficiently large critical mass of schools and colleges chose other mediums, the teachers would follow. However, they do not, because there is only really one prime supplier: the TES.

As I have mentioned, there are other niche suppliers, such as *The Guardian*, *The Scotsman* and the regional press, which focuses on higher education, part-time vacancies and so on. However, they lack the wherewithal and the habit of readership to compete head on with the TES. Indeed, even these rivals at the margins can manage to compete in the modest way that they do only because they are already in the business of producing and delivering newspapers in high volumes. That very fact restricts any new entrants to the market since, by general consent, it would not be viable to publish a competitor to the TES without the supply chain and economy of scale benefits afforded to that publication.

It is clear that there exists no effective competition in the market as it is currently structured. Teachers buy or borrow the TES because that is where the jobs are, and schools advertise there because it is where all the teachers are looking for jobs. The net effect of this on pricing is predictable, and it is exacerbated by competition between schools, particularly in shortage subjects.

There remains one component of the simple market environment that I have not yet touched on: the threat of new products entering the market that replace the need for one's own. This Labour Government created the position of Minister for E-commerce and are emphasising educational technology because it is plain that the internet has exciting potential radically to restructure certain markets, to the benefit of both consumers and the companies that seek to operate within those markets.

The market that we are discussing tonight is a classic case in point. I believe that, at present, there is a form of market failure in advertising for teaching vacancies caused not by any questionable practices—indeed, the TES is an excellent newspaper—but simply by an overwhelming dominance of a single supplier, combined with high barriers to entering the market.

The situation could be transformed overnight by using the internet. Many dotcom companies have failed recently, but that is primarily because of the speculative element of their business, with the supposed demand for novel products as well as methods of delivery. In the case of teaching vacancy advertising, we know that there is a predictable demand. Should the market make the leap from a heavy newspaper to the web pages, the other benefits of an internet business would apply, minus the risks faced by dotcom companies in other markets.

Some farsighted companies have seen this already. For example, Schoolsnet offers unlimited recruiting advertisement for schools for the princely sum of £300 a year, which is something of an improvement on the £12,000 to £40,000 that I mentioned earlier. Of course, that low price reflects the current relatively low demand, since without the critical mass of subscribers, very few teachers use the service; but it also reflects the low set-up

[Mr. Joyce]

costs of the medium, and points the way, ultimately, to much lower costs for the buyers of the advertising service delivered.

I am not convinced that the structure of the market would necessarily change all that much, and I suspect that one or two suppliers would still dominate, because of the convenience for teachers of having most jobs advertised *in the same place; but I believe that the threat of new* entrants will be made far more meaningful with web-based advertising, and that will inevitably lower the costs for schools and local education authorities and remove the modest costs faced by teachers altogether.

It is difficult to miss the fact that the best internet site advertising teaching jobs is none other than that of the TES, which includes all the jobs advertised in the newspaper. A switch of the main medium would still leave the TES with a striking advantage over organisations such as Schoolsnet, gained from a critical mass of advertisers, and hence readers—or perhaps, in future, loggers on. Indeed, the site is so good and so complete that I suspect that News International already has that contingency well planned for—I commend it for that—but the fact remains that the internet provides meaningful scope for a critical mass of advertisers to switch together to a new competitor, which gives more power to their elbow. The switch could begin on a geographical or a subject basis or, more likely and more meaningfully, it could be agreed en masse among schools and LEAs to switch, or threaten to switch, at the same time.

I have spoken to a number of teachers and local authority administrators on the subject in the past few weeks, and it is abundantly clear to me that the conditions now exist such that a determined effort by budget holders to work together to secure a better deal would very likely meet with success. Schools would continue to compete keenly for the best staff, but with hyperlinks patching the main advertising sites with the schools' own, the cost of such competition would be much lower than at present, and perhaps restricted to in-house web design costs. Moreover, the dissemination of information about schools and jobs would take place instantaneously and applications would be progressed far more quickly, and without the expense of surface mail.

The time has come when, if the TES will not provide website advertising with direct links to schools' own sites at a cost much lower than that of advertising in the newspaper, someone else will. The Department for Education and Skills must now galvanise schools by urging them to seek the best deal and to work together to maximise their bargaining power with the present prime supplier—the TES—or potential future suppliers; and the time has come for the Scottish Executive to watch developments carefully, so that it can learn from practices down here, just as we learn from practices there.

Up to now, the DFES and the Scottish Executive have rightly left the decision on where to place advertising to budget holders at school and local authority levels. I would not want to see a departure from the principle that it is up to those budget holders to decide where to spend their money, but many of them would welcome advice from the DFES on the best way of securing partnership across the country and driving down the cost of advertising.

It is one of the notable successes of the Labour Government that all secondary schools and the great majority of primary schools are now on the internet. It is a fact of professional teaching today that teachers are comfortable with that medium. Teachers would welcome a change of format that would make the task of applying for a new job more user friendly and perhaps even enjoyable.

I end by reiterating the fact that I believe that the TES *is an excellent newspaper that* provides a broadly sound service, and I suspect that it is up to the challenge that lies ahead. There is undoubtedly scope substantially to lower the costs that I have spoken about, and it is now time for the DFES to encourage schools and local authorities to press that case with vigour.

10.15 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) for raising an issue of great topical interest in staffrooms and at school governors' meetings throughout the country. I know that, as a former teacher himself, he is well informed about such matters, and I congratulate him on bringing them before the House so early in this Session.

I shall address my hon. Friend's specific concerns about the problems of advertising for teacher vacancies, but I also want to underline the high degree of energy and investment now being directed at teacher supply, which will ensure that, over time, the problems of which the current advertising pressures are a symptom are resolved.

I do not, of course, speak for Scotland, but I hope that my remarks can convince my hon. Friend of the seriousness with which the Government view the issues that he has raised, and that our policies will help to avoid those difficulties, at least in the medium and longer term.

I acknowledge that the problem of filling teacher vacancies, and the associated costs, are real difficulties that concern the Government, but those difficulties are symptoms of a wider need that we are acting to address. Let me make it clear that the picture for teacher recruitment is by no means all doom and gloom. There are more teachers in post today than at any time since 1984, and 11,000 more than there were in 1997. In January this year there were 5,650 more than in January 2000—the biggest increase in a single year since 1976. There are also more than 44,000 extra education support staff compared with the number in 1997.

However, what I have said is not to be taken as an expression of complacency, or a suggestion that we intend to rest on our laurels. In the manifesto on which my hon. Friend and I fought the election, we committed ourselves to securing at least an extra 10,000 teachers over the next five years. Those increases will themselves, over time, reduce the demand for advertising, because many vacancies will be filled more quickly than at present. My hon. Friend was right to say that at the moment a large proportion of vacancies are advertised more than once.

Despite that massive improvement in teacher numbers, there are still more vacancies in the school system today. Schools are rightly using some of their increased funding—some £540 a pupil since 1997—to employ more teachers. There are 7,700 more posts in the system than last year. The number of teachers moving from post to post between academic years is what generates

advertising; there is a lot of "churn" in the system, with teachers moving from one post to another. However, our latest survey shows some 2,070 more real vacancies—using the definition that we have used for a number of years—in January 2001 than in January 2000.

It is also clear that there are particular points of pressure. Vacancy rates for most main subjects remain below 2 per cent., but the rate for maths, for example, is 2.1 per cent., and in information technology it is 2.8 per cent. It is in such shortage subjects that much of the expenditure on repeated vacancy advertising is being incurred.

We have taken further measures to address the problem. I have mentioned the pledge that there will be 10,000 more teachers by 2006. In the meantime, pay for all teachers has been raised by more than inflation for the third year running. New teachers now start on salaries of £17,000 a year outside London, and £20,000 in inner London. There are more teacher training places this year than at any time in the 1990s, and more than 6,000 more than there were 10 years ago. We have introduced £6,000 training bursaries and £4,000 golden hellos for shortage subjects to encourage more graduates into teaching. The number of school based training places for mature career-changers on the graduate teacher programme has also been trebled—a massive increase—to 2,250. Each place attracts funding of up to £17,000 a year.

We are now funding more than 1,300 refresher courses a year for returners to teaching, and we are consulting this month on the proposed welcome back bonus of between £2,000 and £4,000 for teachers who return to the profession and take up posts in the maintained sector between Easter and Christmas this year.

The maximum time that an overseas-trained teacher can work in this country without gaining qualified teacher status has been increased from two to four years. A fast-track route to QTS is also available for experienced overseas-trained teachers who want to develop longer-term careers here. The recruitment and retention fund is providing £35 million this year to allow heads in high-cost or challenging areas to put together priority packages to help recruit and retain staff.

Those are just some of the ambitious measures that we are taking to invest in a larger, high-quality teaching force, and to bring about the long-term solution to the problems to which my hon. Friend rightly draws attention. I am sure he will agree that the difficulties he mentioned, and the costs involved, reflect difficulties in teacher recruitment. In another move, we also proposed in the Green Paper in February that we should offer to pay off over 10 years the student loans of newly qualified teachers in the five shortage subjects, and we proposed options for extra help for BEd students in their fourth years. A wide range of initiatives is in hand to seek to address the underlying problem, of which the matter we are debating this evening is a symptom.

I accept that that range of activity has not, as yet, taken away the burdens on head teachers who are trying to fill vacancies now. *The Times Educational Supplement* did indeed come in at record weight recently. Some 6,000 vacancies were advertised on 1 June, but it was down to half that number a week later. The TES is clearly fulfilling a need but it is not, it goes without saying, doing so with any Government recommendation to schools that they pursue that particular avenue alone. As my hon. Friend said, there are other avenues for advertising.

My hon. Friend rightly paid much attention to online advertising in his remarks, and it should certainly be cheaper and more flexible than paper-based systems. The number of websites dedicated to online recruitment is growing rapidly. The Government are leading the way in a number of areas, not least through the Employment Service, with its telephone and web-based services.

There are also a number of dedicated education suppliers in the market. My hon. Friend mentioned some and I shall not attempt to mention them all; I am not in the business of endorsing any particular product over and above any other. My hon. Friend mentioned Schoolsnet, and the TES has its own website. The Stationery Office has recently launched an online recruitment facility through its site at schoolmanager.net, which provides for a range of school procurement and recruitment needs. Earlier today, some 100 teacher vacancies were being advertised on the site across a range of authorities and in all types of school.

A range of other firms offers dedicated web-based facilities. Eteach was indicating some 4,700 vacancies on its site earlier today and StepJobs.com was offering more than 1,700. Reed is an example of a high street recruitment agency branching into education on its website. Indeed, Reed wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently to draw her attention to the attractions of the service that it provides in that area.

Local education authorities often co-ordinate vacancy trawls in their areas, providing schools with a free vacancy circulation. Some are backing that up with internet options as well. When we checked earlier this afternoon, kent-teach.com, for example, had more than 150 teacher vacancies from across Kent. Another local initiative is Timeplan's Teachers4London website, which places vacancies from across London online. About half the London boroughs are making use of that service.

An increasing number of private agencies are offering a full recruitment service to schools. That includes several who have more typically been providing supply teachers to schools requiring cover, an area of the market in which the online opportunities have grown significantly recently, making the task a good deal easier and more flexible for schools.

Closer to my Department, the Teacher Training Agency has recruitment strategy managers working in 97 local education authorities to help to provide a co-ordinated local approach to vacancy filling. Three are dedicated to helping schools in challenging circumstances.

My Department does not have any figures to draw on to estimate the current cost to schools of advertising teacher vacancies, nor to make comparisons with previous years. The figure that my hon. Friend gave is probably as good as any, and his assessment is a helpful contribution to the discussion.

Many of the options that have been referred to will make charges and not necessarily reduce costs for schools, but some are available free. My hon. Friend mentioned Schoolsnet, which has more than 250 vacancies advertised today, and makes a very modest charge. That demonstrates again the flexibility offered by the new medium, in linking visitors to information about the school posting the vacancy and generally providing the chance to access much more information than would be available from a typical newspaper advertisement. It is not surprising that the online alternative is proving increasingly attractive to many schools.

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

There is a significant number of players already in the field, some with services that are either free or cheaper than the most popular current avenues. Although *The Times Educational Supplement* remains popular for very good reasons—because of its stature, its widespread readership and coverage and its quality—many schools have found that it is not the only potential partner that is valuable in filling vacancies.

My hon. Friend suggested that there could be a role for the Government. We need to be clear that the Government do not recruit teachers. Decisions on what positions need filling and who to appoint are, for very good reasons, the preserve of head teachers and governors. There is a market operating in this area and, in our view, our role is to increase supply to that market. We are taking the steps that I outlined to achieve that.

Before intervening directly in the mechanics of the market, I should want to be sure that any Government-backed intervention would not simply provide another website in an increasingly crowded market and that we assisted, rather than undermined, the prospects of existing providers, some of whose work I have mentioned.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to a significant problem. We are taking a range of actions to address the supply side. As teacher supply increases, particularly in shortage subjects, I expect the difficulties in recruitment, and thus the costs, to decline over time.

In terms of the symptom of increased teacher vacancies that is the increased cost of advertising, I am prepared to consider any constructive suggestions for helping schools to fill vacancies and reduce this additional call on their budget. That includes considering whether guidance to schools from the Department, along the lines of my observations tonight, would be helpful, and looking seriously at any arguments for a still more direct role.

It is in that spirit that I thank my hon. Friend for raising these important issues. He has helpfully highlighted the scale of the problem and some of the costs involved.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 3 July 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Member Sworn

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation required by law;

Alan Meale, Mansfield

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREENHAM AND CROOKHAM COMMONS BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the Greenham and Crookham Commons Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the current session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it had passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages;

That the petition relating to the bill which stood referred to the committee on the bill in the last Parliament shall stand referred to the committee on the bill in the current session of Parliament;

That no petitioners shall be heard before the committee unless their petition has been presented within the time provided for petitioning or has been deposited pursuant to Private Business Standing Order 126(b);

That, in relation to the bill, Private Business Standing Order 127 shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)' were omitted.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Tuesday 10 July.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Resolved,

That Ms Karen Buck, Mr. James Cran, Mr. John Heppell, Keith Hill, Phil Hope, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Andrew Stunell, Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Sir George Young be members of the Committee of Selection.

That the members of the Committee of Selection nominated this day shall continue to be members of the Committee for the remainder of this Parliament.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.—[*Keith Hill.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

East Coast Main Line

1. **Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If he will make a statement about the future of rail services on the east coast main line. [651]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): I am currently considering a request from the Strategic Rail Authority for a direction under section 26 of the Railways Act 1993, relating to the potential award of an early replacement inter-city east coast franchise

Mr. Beith: Does the Secretary of State realise that most regular travellers on the east coast main line would be appalled if the franchise went to Virgin and not to GNER? Will he make the decision soon and, once it is made, will he recognise how important it will be for GNER to invest in the rolling stock that can add to the capacity of the line and for Railtrack to invest in line capacity and to end its lamentable performance, which has seen the quality of service reduced because of the speed restrictions on the line?

Mr. Byers: Like the right hon. Gentleman, I am a frequent traveller on the east coast main line, so I understand the importance of the franchise being awarded. The important point is that submissions from both bidders are given proper and due consideration, and that is happening at the moment. I would like to reach a decision on a direction as soon as possible, but it must take into account all the arguments that I shall need to reflect on. I do not intend to rush and make the wrong decision, but I am aware that the award of the franchise is keenly awaited by many travellers throughout the country.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): The east coast main line is an economic lifeline for Yorkshire and the north-east of England and its present franchise holder, GNER, is a major employer in my constituency. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to maintain competition between the east coast main line and the west coast main line, with different companies operating the two franchises? Does he also agree that, because the modernisation of the west coast main line is already proceeding, any further delay will mean that the opportunity to modernise the east coast line will slip further and further behind?

Mr. Byers: I hope that the House will understand that it would be wrong of me in circumstances in which I am

considering the information that I have received from the Strategic Rail Authority to enter into a debate about the merits of GNER or Virgin Stagecoach. However, I can tell the House that I am actively considering the merits of both bidders and I will reach a judgment in due course about the right way forward and as to whether I should make a direction to the Strategic Rail Authority. There are constraints on what I need to take into account and I will reflect seriously on the points that hon. Members have raised—I must do that—and be guided by the advice that I have received from the Strategic Rail Authority.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I wish to associate myself with the comments of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), but will the Secretary of State be more specific about when he thinks that a decision will be concluded? As a user of the railway line, he must understand that GNER is reckoned generally to be one of the most successful companies since privatisation. What kind of message will it send for confidence in investment in the railway structure if such success is rewarded by it losing the franchise?

Mr. Byers: I intend to make a decision on the direction as soon as possible. I hope that the House will understand the need to take all relevant factors into account, which is exactly what I am doing. I must give due consideration to the strengths of both bidders—GNER and Virgin Stagecoach—and need to reflect on that. Awarding a franchise is a significant part of improving the standards and quality of our railway network. From being in post for a little more than three weeks, I believe that one of our key levers with the Strategic Rail Authority is the franchising process. I want to ensure that we use that to the full, which is why on 16 July we will publish new procedures and guidance on the awarding of franchises.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will be aware, however, that this is the third time that the franchise is about to be awarded. Although we are delighted to hear that he is considering the whole issue of franchising, unless some decisions are taken quite soon, real problems will occur in the railway industry. I hope that when he looks for good value for money for the taxpayer, he will remember not only that the awarding of franchises is the key, but that it needs to be turned quickly.

Mr. Byers: I agree with my hon. Friend and she is right to highlight the important role that the awarding of franchises can and should play in the process of improving the quality of our railway services. However, she will also be aware that it is right that when I make the decision, I reflect properly on the strengths of the arguments. It would be improper of me not to do so. I can assure the House that whatever failings I have as a Secretary of State, making decisions is not one of them, and a decision will be made as soon as possible.

Road Noise

2. **Mr. Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks): What proportion of the Highways Agency noise mitigation budget is being spent in the Sevenoaks constituency. [652]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I—[HON. MEMBERS: " "Hear, hear."] I hope that my response will be similarly received.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Has the hon. Gentleman got a driving licence?

Mr. Jamieson: I have responsibility for aviation and trains, but I neither fly a plane nor drive a train.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) welcomes the Government's provision for a ring-fenced budget for noise reduction measures to deal with the most urgent and pressing cases, and that he understands that there is strong competition for the available funds. However, he will be pleased to know that two locations in his constituency met the criteria for further consideration of possible measures.

Mr. Fallon: I welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities. Is he aware that my constituency surrounds a triangle of some of the busiest motorways in the country—the M25, M26 and M20? For places such as Kemsing, Otford and Swanley, noise is a real issue. Will he encourage the Highways Agency to experiment with different types of noise mitigation, such as muffling and noise protection, which are so impressively deployed on the new autoroutes in France?

Mr. Jamieson: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks on my arrival at the Dispatch Box from the Trappist silence of the Whip's Bench. He will be pleased to know that the M25 at Swanley and the A21 between Bessel's Green and Dibden lane are the sites that are under consideration. If those projects are successful, they will attract between £2 million and £3 million of funding. He will also know of the Government's commitment to noise mitigation measures. I believe that he attended the ceremony to mark the opening of the section of the M25 between junction 5 and Clacketts lane where noise has been considerably reduced as part of the noise reduction programme. Our 10-year plan contains a commitment that 60 per cent. of roads will be resurfaced with quieter materials and that all concrete roads will be resurfaced.

Council Tax Banding

3. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What plans there are to review council tax banding. [653]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): A number of respondents to our Green Paper on local government finance, which we published last September, proposed that changes should be made to the structure of the council tax bands. We are considering what they had to say in the context of preparing a White Paper, which we intend to publish later this year.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and welcome him to the Front Bench. I am sure that he will be hearing an awful lot from hon. Members about council tax banding. Will he acknowledge that the flawed system that was introduced by the previous Tory

Government penalises parts of the country, such as Grimsby and Cleethorpes, where the majority of properties are in band A? In particular, will he consider introducing a new lower band to acknowledge the fact that some people live in cheaper properties, such as mobile homes, bedsits or on residential parks, which are common in seaside resorts?

Dr. Whitehead: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind remarks, and I anticipate hearing from her and other hon. Members on this subject and many other council tax matters in the not-too-distant future.

We are aware of the concerns that occupiers of low-value properties have about their council tax banding. A revaluation would be necessary to split a council tax banding, and we have no plans for such a revaluation at present. In the Green Paper, however, we invited views on whether there should be a fixed cycle for council tax revaluations and whether that would make the system fairer. Revaluations for business rates are carried out on a statutory five-year cycle, but at the moment there is no fixed cycle for council tax revaluation.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): When looking at council tax banding, will the Minister address the concerns of residents in west Oxfordshire about the review of the area cost adjustment? That could add £100 to my constituents' council tax bills. The review is under way; when does he expect it to be completed? Will he guarantee that local authorities in the south-east, which have problems with teacher shortages, will be no worse off?

Dr. Whitehead: The Government are aware of the concerns of many people about area cost adjustment, and representations on the subject have been made by several hon. Members. The issue will be considered for the White Paper, which will be published later this year.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. Friend consider making the council tax system more progressive by increasing the multiplier on the top band?

Dr. Whitehead: The Government are also aware of the opposite view, which is that council tax band H could be split, or the ratio between the lowest band and the highest band could be altered to make the system fairer. All those considerations were included in the Green Paper. Responses have been received, and the Government are considering how best to respond to them in the White Paper later this year.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): May I, too, welcome the Minister to his new position? Did he, early in his time at the Department, find in the bottom of one of his red boxes the infamous leaked memo from No. 10, reported recently in *The Sunday Times*, which said:

"there are some very tough decisions to take here and we will need to move very swiftly after the election to implement them, especially if we are talking about a large shift of resources from London to the north"?

Does the Minister accept that whether or not he fiddles with the formulae, if council tax continues to rise at the rate that it has over the past four years, by 2005 it will be over £1,200 at band D? Does he accept also that if Labour were to introduce new council tax bands on higher value properties, including a new banding between bands G and H and a corresponding increase, that could mean a 40 per cent. increase in council tax for some people? That could also mean, with band D increasing at the same rate as it has so far under Labour, that people in houses in the highest bands could be paying an extra £1,600 a year by the end of this Parliament. Will he comment on those figures?

Dr. Whitehead: As the hon. Gentleman knows, whatever change one makes, either in the banding or the ratios between bands, the eventual council tax yield will remain the same, because any revaluation or rebanding results in other adjustments. The question to be asked of any revaluation or rebanding is whether it makes the distribution of council tax fairer. If a change is made, there will, of course, be winners and losers. That is an important consideration when one is deciding how best to deploy banding or valuation to ensure that council tax is as fair as possible.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not time that we took a serious look at what the banding would be of a big tent? First, Labour introduced a big tent; now they tell me that there is a Portillo big tent, a Clarke big tent and a couple of others—there is some money to be made here.

Dr. Whitehead: The Government have received representations about mobile homes—perhaps my hon. Friend has in mind a tent on wheels. The Opposition's tent currently appears to be on wheels because of the voyage of discovery that some Opposition Members are apparently taking.

Regional Government

4. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What estimate he has made of the total cost to the Exchequer of referendums on the introduction of regional government in England. [654]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 July, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on regional government in England. It will address the question of the cost of elected regional assemblies. It is too early at this stage to make any estimate of likely costs.

Mr. Brady: I hope that the Minister will ensure that accurate figures are provided to the public before they are expected to arrive at a judgment. Is it not likely that a cost of about £5 million—which is what the Scottish referendum cost—is a good starting point for his calculations? Does he agree that at a time when local authorities throughout the country cannot meet their social security budgets or pass funding on to schools and sixth forms, most people would regard spending £5 million on a referendum in each region as an appalling waste of money, given that the public manifestly do not want it?

Mr. Raynsford: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have set out full costings in the White Paper. I counsel him against pursuing the analogy that he drew with Scotland, for two reasons. First, the figures that the Conservative party has recently been bandying about are

based on extrapolations and are entirely misleading and unfounded. Secondly, he will recall that the Conservatives initially opposed devolution in Scotland, then had to change their mind when they realised the will of the people; they opposed the restoration of citywide democratic government in London, then had to change their mind when they realised the will of the people. He will know that we are committed to holding referendums before introducing regional government in England. The Conservatives would do well not to prejudge the view of the electorate, or they will make themselves as irrelevant as they did on 7 June.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): It is amazing to hear the concerns of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). Does my right hon. Friend recall that current Conservative party policy is to impose a referendum before—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Conservative party policy has nothing to do with the Minister.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend is to be dealing with this matter. May I press him on the timing of the White Paper: when does he expect it to be published? Does he agree that regional government elsewhere has shown itself to be good for jobs and prosperity and that to worry about the cost of a referendum at this stage is bizarre, especially when the questioner is a member of a party that was not at all worried about costing and paying for a referendum on the Nice treaty?

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point, and I shall make two points in response. First, in the White Paper, we shall of course examine carefully the benefits of a regional tier of government and set out the important factors she mentions in connection with regional economic development, as well as all the other factors that will bring advantage to those in the regions who want a regional assembly. Secondly, we are working hard on the matter, but, as she will understand, there are complex issues. We shall publish the White Paper at the earliest opportunity, but at this point—a mere three weeks into a new Government—it would be premature to give a definitive date for publication.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does the Minister accept that the people of the Isle of Wight find it hard enough to cope with a police authority run from Winchester and a health authority run from Portsmouth and that they certainly do not see why their taxes should be spent on a referendum that might result in more of their services being run from places like Woking?

Mr. Raynsford: I simply counsel the hon. Gentleman to take care before he offends one of his hon. Friends, who probably has a strong case to make for Woking. We have indicated that progress towards regional assemblies will be based on the consent—indeed, the expressed wish—of people within each region. Where there is no wish, it will not happen.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the question from the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is typical of an Opposition who want to know the cost of everything, but understand the value of very little indeed? Will he confirm that the Government's continuation of the devolution process will be based on its value to good government and our democracy, and that regional government is the natural next step along that road?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. The Government have a proud record over the past four years of developing a devolution agenda and extending to the people of the United Kingdom greater opportunities to play an effective role in the government of their nations and regions. We do not see that as a process that has ended; we shall continue to explore options to improve the quality of our democracy and extend opportunities along the lines indicated by my hon. Friend. Of course, we are concerned with value, rather than just cost.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Can the Minister clear up the mystery of the absence of any mention of regional government in the Queen's Speech and, indeed, any apparent urgency to give a timetable today? Has the whole enterprise gone west, along with the Deputy Prime Minister, or has it simply been delayed? As the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) claimed last month:

> "If a second-term Labour government fails to act on regional devolution it will leave the constitutional settlement enacted by New Labour dangerously unbalanced."

Will the Minister now say exactly what form those referendums on regional government will take? What tier of existing local government will be scrapped to make way for it, and will it be financed by the 5 per cent. regional income tax so beloved of Liberal Democrat Members?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman was obviously not paying much attention last night, when his colleague, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), spoke for the Opposition on the Homelessness Bill and made the valid point that, although there was no mention of the Bill in the Gracious Speech, it was the first Bill to be introduced in this Parliament. The hon. Gentleman should therefore not draw any inferences at all from what is, or is not, in the Queen's Speech.

I have indicated clearly to the House this afternoon that we are committed to publishing a White Paper, which will set out in detail the practical and factual basis on which we can proceed along that particular route. I am afraid to tell the hon. Gentleman that it will not fuel the kind of fantasies that he has voiced this afternoon. Those fantasies are all too typical of the Conservative party, which is prejudiced against devolving power to local communities and is fixated on cost, rather than value.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a reasonable timetable would be a White Paper this autumn, followed by legislation in the 2002-03 Session, with a view to regional assembly

elections taking place in regions that want them in 2004, to coincide conveniently with the European parliamentary elections that year?

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend has set out a perfectly reasonable timetable; we shall consider it and other representations before reaching our conclusions. I am sure that he will accept that, at this stage, it would be premature to give a definitive date for the introduction of the White Paper before the necessary work has been done to ensure that it covers the important range of issues that must be covered.

Rail Travel (Disabled People)

5. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): If he will make a statement on the provision of rail travel for disabled people. [655]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): We have introduced regulations under Part V of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—the DDA—which requires new trains entering service since 1 January 1999 to be accessible to disabled people, including wheelchair users. More than 200 new rail vehicles have been introduced which meet those requirements. Access to stations is addressed under Part III of the DDA. The provisions of the DDA also extend to light rail systems and, with the introduction of new systems, such as Midland metro and Croydon tramlink, we are opening up new local transport opportunities for disabled people.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Does he accept that disabled people are impatient for future improvements? Does he agree that there is something distasteful in the fact that constituents of mine—and, I fear, other people around the country—had to travel from Chelmsford to London in the guard's van of a train to make a hospital appointment eight weeks ago? Surely, in this day and age, it is unacceptable for disabled people on our railways to be treated, not as second-class citizens, but more like cattle.

Mr. Spellar: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, and I know that he has been in correspondence with the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), on the matter. As he knows, First Great Eastern has a rolling programme to replace the slam-door trains, which was the type of train available in the case that he mentions. There are other trains on that network that are more accessible to disabled people, and I know that First Great Eastern has taken on board the need to make sure that people are aware of that. There must be a rolling programme of replacement over the next two years, and there must be a balance between provision of information and provision of new stock.

That ties in with a point that the hon. Gentleman raised in his correspondence about facilities at stations and the need for those to be repaired rapidly when they become inaccessible to disabled people. The company acknowledges that the matter could have been better handled. We will certainly keep an eye on provision in the future, not just on that line, but on others.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Does my hon. Friend recall that it was the then Conservative Government who opposed the specific inclusion of transport in the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995? In relation to the total passenger rail stock, has he consulted disabled people's organisation as to an end-date by which all passenger rail vehicles will be properly accessible?

Mr. Spellar: As I said, on First Great Eastern the old slam-door rolling stock will be replaced by 2003. That is a welcome development. On my hon. Friend's first point, it would take an inordinate amount of time, way beyond today's questions, to list all the measures that the Conservatives opposed and subsequently found to be quite a good idea, starting with their efforts to privatise the railways, which I understand that their spokesman has acknowledged were a mistake.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister mentioned 2003 as the date by which slam-door stock would be replaced on one rail line. What about the other lines? Is any imaginative planning under way for those with sight problems? For years stations in Japan have had ticket machines that can be used by sightless people. More vision is needed in the Department and throughout the system.

Mr. Spellar: I take the hon. Gentleman's point that there is much scope for improvement beyond rolling stock. We need to look at what is often described as the software of the railway system, rather than just at the hardware. Under the Railway Safety Regulations 1999, all mark 1 rolling stock—that is, the slam-door rolling stock—has to be removed from the rail network by the end of 2004. There must be a rolling programme of replacement because of capacity limitations at the manufacturers, apart from anything else. I also take his point that we should be willing to consider innovations and ideas generated abroad, which we should not see simply under "the not invented here" heading, as has sometimes been symptomatic of our transport system in the past. Sometimes such innovations cannot be adapted, but sometimes they can, cost-effectively and with considerable benefit to the welfare of passenger users—able-bodied and disabled people alike.

Regeneration Strategies (Tourism)

6. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What plans he has for a joint approach with other Government Departments to promote local regeneration strategies based on tourism. [656]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Regeneration strategies are being developed at regional and local level to boost tourism. Blackpool is a good example, and I am delighted to see that in round 6 of the single regeneration budget, Blackpool was awarded £20 million for the improvement

of its tourism facilities. As president of the British Resorts Association, my hon. Friend is aware of the close co-operation between Government Departments and other agencies on tourism. I am sure that he will use his position to promote the successful regeneration of British seaside towns.

Mr. Marsden: In welcoming my hon. Friend to her post and congratulating her on that appointment, I also pay tribute to the work of her Department and its predecessor, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, in respect of the money invested in SRB and other structural funding. Will the Department recognise the important involvement of other Departments in that process and the vital contribution that tourism makes to regional regeneration, not least via regional airports and a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises? In that regeneration process, will the Department take particular account of the needs of seaside and coastal towns, which, by their very nature, have a periphery of only 180 degrees?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend may be aware of the tourism summit in March this year. That was a good example of inter-departmental co-operation and many issues that arose there are being taken forward, including access of seaside resorts in terms of various Government policies and funding, planning for leisure and tourism, and matters affecting the Home Office, such as the licensing and gambling reviews.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): In considering single regeneration and its interaction with tourism, will the Government now consider allowing regeneration expenditure to be targeted outside the parameters currently set for the affected areas? Some attractions that need enlivenment and investment are situated outside the existing boundaries and cannot currently receive the resources. In the coastal strip that I represent, the money needs to be spread further.

Ms Keeble: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the need for money to be spread flexibly. The Government are committed in our regeneration strategy to taking on board the views of the local community and to ensuring that the regeneration money is spent where it will have maximum impact and meet the requirements of the different communities.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I welcome my hon. Friend to her new post. Can she imagine the devastation caused by 44 cases of foot and mouth and the culling out of 240 farms in my constituency, and the effect that it has had on tourism? Will she consider closely the contribution that tourism can make to regeneration in the towns of Bishop Auckland and Barnard Castle? Substantial amounts will be needed to market those areas, so I would be glad of a positive response.

Ms Keeble: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his best wishes. The tourism summit that I mentioned earlier considered the impact of foot and mouth on tourism. I have visited his constituency and seen a number of farms in the various beauty spots in the area, which is well worth visiting and deserves support.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Minister will be aware that Fylde lies next door to Blackpool. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and I therefore understand the importance of tourism in regenerating the Fylde coast. However, one big problem that tourists face is reaching the Fylde coast by the often overcrowded M6, especially at the weekend. When will her Department give us some news about proposals that would ease congestion on that vital routeway to the north-west?

Ms Keeble: That was ingenious cross-cutting from one section of the Department to another. I am sure that the issues that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned in relation to roads will be taken on board by the Department and that he will receive a response very shortly.

Railtrack

7. **Clive Efford** (Eltham): What steps he will take to increase public accountability of the management of Railtrack. [657]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): The statement of principles agreed on 2 April between the Government and Railtrack set out a new agenda for the company and a new working relationship with the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority. Railtrack is now implementing the reforms and restructuring of its organisation agreed as part of that deal. In addition, the rail regulator has strengthened the accountability of Railtrack by rectifying weaknesses in the initial regime.

Clive Efford: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. However, does he accept that the House's inability to hold Railtrack's management directly responsible, especially for the decisions that led up to the Hatfield catastrophe and others, created some of the disaffection that voters felt at the general election? Does he also agree that public opinion is ahead of the House? People out there believe that the people who stand at the Dispatch Box are ultimately responsible for Railtrack's decisions. If we are to increase the House's standing in public opinion, we must make sure that Members of Parliament can hold companies such as Railtrack directly accountable for spending public money on public services.

Mr. Byers: The priority is a railway network that operates on time, is safe, clean and comfortable. That is currently not the case. Yes, as Secretary of State, I have a responsibility, but so do all parts of the industry, such as Railtrack, the Strategic Rail Authority, the regulator and the train operating companies. The time has come for them to stop passing the buck and to take responsibility for providing a world-class rail service. The Transport Act 2000 contains the requisite legal provisions and the 10-year plan provides for investment of more than £60 billion in rail. That should improve the railway network. The British public want that, and we need to deliver it.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Secretary of State claims that there is no need for any major structural change.

Does not he accept that Railtrack has failed miserably to operate in the public interest? Operating as a private monopoly creates a conflict between passenger safety and profits for shareholders and former chief executives. Will he reconsider his decision to make no major structural changes and examine proposals for bringing the parts of Railtrack that directly run the railways into a not-for-profit public interest company? Secondly, will he consider giving train operating companies the opportunity to manage the maintenance of the track on which they operate?

Mr. Byers: We need a period of stability to enable all the parties in the railway network to concentrate on providing a safe and reliable system. That must be the priority.

Let us consider some of the hon. Gentleman's points. The market capitalisation of Railtrack amounts to some £2 billion and debt liabilities account for some £4 billion. That totals £6 billion, which could be spent on investment. His proposals would require legislation. They would simply introduce paralysis into the system, when we want genuine improvements. However, in the autumn, we expect Lord Cullen's second report on the rail crash at Ladbroke Grove, outside Paddington. It will deal with structural issues to do with the railway network. Clearly, the Government will need to reflect on its recommendations.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): That response is helpful, but is not it obvious that, since privatisation, Railtrack's priority has been its shareholders? That continues to be the case. Railtrack was kicked out of the second phase of the channel tunnel link, opted out of the east coast main line and refused to modernise the west coast main line unless the public purse paid for it. For the massive amounts of public money that have been poured into Railtrack, the Strategic Rail Authority should take a direct, majority interest in it to ensure genuine public accountability in future. That is long overdue.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend will know that, last Friday, I issued new guidance and directions for the Strategic Rail Authority. They will change its relationship with Railtrack. One of the objectives of the guidance is ensuring that Railtrack concentrates on its day job, which must be to provide a safe and reliable network. To achieve that, it needs to work closely with the train operating companies. I met the new chairman of Railtrack, John Robinson, last week, and I am pleased that he is going to meet all its customers—the train operating companies – to identify a more positive way forward.

The House will agree that one of the great weaknesses in the railway network over the past few years has been the inability of the respective parties to work together. I hope that, in the light of the experience of the past couple of years, they will recognise that it is in everyone's interest—in theirs and that of the travelling public—to put their house in order and concentrate on providing a railway network that runs on time and is safe and comfortable to travel on.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Did I hear the new Secretary of State correctly a few seconds ago, when he said that he was worried that structural change might introduce paralysis into the rail network? What exactly does he think that the network has been suffering from over the past few years? Instead of arguing that other people are buck passing and not accepting responsibility, why does not he accept responsibility? Why does not he accept that it is impossible satisfactorily to control a private monopoly by regulation? Why does not he accept that, instead of having endless meetings with senior executives of Railtrack, he should engage in the structural change that could make a difference? Does he rule out the substantial public subsidy that flows each year into the railway network being used in the public interest to build up a majority share and ensure public accountability?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of many examples in which regulation is effective as far as the private sector is concerned. That is the reality of the situation.

Mr. Salmond: They are not monopolies.

Mr. Byers: If we look at gas and electricity, we can see where regulation has been effective.

In this particular case, we need to ensure that the structures that exist, and the levers that we have, are used effectively. That is what I am committed to doing. The hon. Gentleman feels that things have been bad over the past two years—and I accept that they have; they have been grim—but they would be so much worse if we started the whole process again. We must use the powers that now exist under the Transport Act 2000, which was introduced last year, coupled with the 10-year plan and the £60 billion investment that is now in place. We must ensure that that money is delivered quickly so that we can have the kind of rail service that the people of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland want.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the traffic chaos being caused in Bolton by the closure of Railtrack bridges? The footbridge across the railway line at Bromley Cross is so unsafe that two children have been injured. Will he ensure that Railtrack fulfils its public responsibility on bridge safety?

Mr. Byers: As my hon. Friend will know, Railtrack has established a new body to deal with rail safety, which is just being put in place now. I am sure that it will want to reflect on the specific point that he has just made.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment and welcome him to the Dispatch Box in his new role. After four wasted years on transport, the British public are hoping very much that he will improve on his predecessor's record. May I also welcome the refreshing tone that the right hon. Gentleman adopted in his comments about the railway and Railtrack, and his acknowledgment that the industry needs a period of stability and an end to the blame game that was practised by his predecessor?

I endorse entirely the right hon. Gentleman's statement on the structure of the railway, when he said that it would be imprudent to implement any changes to regulation, particularly of safety, before we have seen part 2 of Cullen. If he carries on in this vein, may I assure him that, if he delivers, he will have our support against his

Back Benchers, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party, all of whom want to take him back to the bad old days of nationalisation?

Mr. Byers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. If he continues in the same vein, he is going to cause me enormous difficulties in the months ahead.

Mr. Jenkin: I welcome specifically the right hon. Gentleman's statement ruling out renationalisation. May I question him about the constant threat of strikes? Does he support the right of trade unions to disrupt passenger services, when they are doing so simply to pursue the political agenda that they call "Take back the track"? Will he consider introducing legislation similar to that of other European countries that prevents strikes in essential public services such as the railways? He would have our support on that.

Mr. Byers: I am pleased to say that I am able to disagree, which will be of enormous benefit to me. As I know from my previous role as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with responsibility for employment relations, the crucial point is that the structure does not allow any group of workers to strike for political reasons. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, in that we would not support such action as it would be unlawful. However, we recognise that people involved in an industrial dispute should be able to strike.

Cullen Inquiry

8. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What steps are being taken to implement the recommendations of the Cullen inquiry. [658]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Health and Safety Commission published part 1 of Lord Cullen's report into the Ladbroke Grove train crash on 19 June. I have asked the commission to ensure that the 89 recommendations are acted on, and to report back to me within six months. The chair of the HSC has asked the industry to tell him within a month how it intends to take forward the recommendations.

Ms Drown: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. My constituents who were bereaved or injured in the Southall and Ladbroke Grove crashes want the recommendations of the Cullen inquiry to be implemented. Will he give all hon. Members access to reports at the six monthly intervals outlined in the Cullen report, so that we can give our constituents the assurances that they are asking for: that safety is a priority, that safety issues are being actioned, and that safety on the railways will always remain a priority?

Mr. Spellar: Understandably, my hon. Friend has been assiduous in pursuing issues arising from those two horrific incidents. We firmly believe that improvements in safety and the implementation of the various recommendations must be done, and must be seen to be done. I am pleased to provide the very necessary reassurance to commuters from her constituency and from across the country.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in supporting the call of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs to hold an independent investigation of every rail accident, as happens for civil aviation disasters?

Mr. Spellar: In all honesty, I must tell the hon. Lady that we would have to define the nature of incidents. Such practice in the nuclear industry fell into disrepute when even minor incidents that had no relevance to nuclear safety were subjected to greater investigation and action than was required. I am in no way underestimating the need for safety, but there must be proportionality. As she knows, there have been public inquiries into major accidents on the railway system. Safety monitoring is on-going, not least by the Health and Safety Executive, which is doing a good job and is monitoring the outcome of the Cullen inquiry. We await part 2 of the Cullen inquiry, and the implementation of its recommendations.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Will my hon. Friend give us an assurance that he will consider the Cullen recommendations to the Association of Train Operating Companies and the Railway Safety group where there may be room for Government action? I am thinking specifically of driver training, which was at the heart of the problem in that incident. The Cullen report shows how poor the standard of training was in Thames Trains. Cullen hinted at the need for a national curriculum and national standards for driver training. Will my hon. Friend try to lead the industry towards taking such action to make our trains safer?

Mr. Spellar: I await an early report from the Health and Safety Commission. I take my hon. Friend's point, which applies not just to the railways, but to other transport systems. There is a need for rationalisation, for improvement in the training of drivers and other operatives and for the maintenance of standards. We are very keen on that. It is important for the industry and for public reassurance, and it is also important in view of our overwhelming desire, across Government, for the re-skilling of the country and the maintenance of high skills and technical standards.

Local Government Elections

9. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If he will introduce a system of proportional representation in local government elections. [659]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We have consistently made it clear that we have no proposals to change the voting system for local government, other than the introduction of the supplementary vote system for the election of directly elected mayors which is provided for in the Local Government Act 2000.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is that not a complacent answer, given the current levels of participation in elections to local authorities throughout the United Kingdom? If the Minister does not propose to consider the possibility of reinvigorating local democracy by introducing proportional representation, what other proposals has he? Now that executive structures are being created in authorities all over the UK under the new cabinet system,

is there not a powerful case for using PR to ensure that a broader spectrum of back benchers is elected to scrutinise them?

Mr. Raynsford: Mr. Mayor—[*Laughter.*]

Mr. Speaker: It is normally "Provost" where I come from.

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

We are not complacent. We have an ambitious agenda for the modernisation of local government, but we believe that such modernisation involves far more fundamental processes than simply changing the way in which people vote.

In anticipation of the hon. Gentleman's question, I asked my officials to look into the matter. They assured me that they were unable to identify any reliable data suggesting that the introduction of PR has had any effect on turnout.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I hope that my right hon. Friend will go on resisting the continual cooing and wooing of the Liberal Democrats—and that of some of my hon. Friends—in regard to proportional representation. Does he agree that PR leads only to deals being done by politicians—perhaps, nowadays, in smoke-free rooms—and the presentation of policies that no one voted for?

Mr. Raynsford: I must initially disappoint my hon. Friend by reminding him that, when the Greater London Authority was introduced, I was responsible for the system of proportional representation for its assembly. He will appreciate, however, that the Government believe in solutions that are appropriate to different circumstances. We do not believe that one size fits all, and I have made it clear that we have no proposals to introduce PR to local government.

House Improvements (Lancashire)

10. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What additional resources he is making available to housing authorities in east Lancashire to help them tackle decaying private sector housing. [660]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): We recognise the very significant problems with private-sector housing in east Lancashire, and £9.7 million has been allocated to the six east Lancashire local authorities this year to improve housing through the housing investment programme. Nationally, housing capital resources will rise to some £2.6 billion in 2003-04, and east Lancashire should benefit from that increase.

Mr. Prentice: That £9.7 million sounds like a lot of money, but it is not enough. In my constituency, 6 per cent. of houses are empty; across east Lancashire, one in five are unfit. The task is huge and daunting, involving not just Pendle but Burnley, Hyndburn and Blackburn.

Housing is the major policy issue that has not been adequately addressed by this Labour Government. I call on my hon. Friend, her colleagues in the Cabinet and the Prime Minister to recognise that east Lancashire's housing is uniquely appalling, and to ensure that we are given special help to remedy some of the problems that are staring us in the face.

Ms Keeble: The problems in my hon. Friend's part of the country are well recognised, in particular, those of empty homes and abandoned properties. The Government are considering some of those issues and will produce policy proposals to deal with them.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Finance) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.30 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is just the thing for a warm and soporific July afternoon. The Berlin European Council in March 1999 was an important step forward for the European Community and the United Kingdom. It initiated several important reforms to help to prepare the European Union for enlargement. It was also a negotiating success for the UK, securing no increase in the own resources ceiling, bringing EU spending under control and protecting the UK abatement. By making a shift away from the traditional own resources basis towards the gross national product basis the Council made contributions fairer and less vulnerable to fraud.

The Bill will carry into effect the financing decisions of that Council. I commend it to the House and I hope that Conservative Members as well as Labour Members will support it. It will be something of a test of Conservative Members' readiness to listen to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and to engage sensibly with the serious realities of Europe. We will all be interested to see how they get on—*[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) is giving us a taste of how they will get on. High though my regard is for him, I am disappointed that, yet again, I am denied the opportunity to debate with the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] My hon. Friends might well ask that. Every time that I challenge him to a debate he seems to be gagged and to have disappeared.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman on gagging the hon. Member for West Dorset.

Mr. Redwood: I did not guarantee to talk about that issue. I want to talk about the issue at the heart of this debate. Will the Government tell us which European taxes they favour under clause 16 of the document from the Commission that we are discussing today? They signed up to the introduction of European taxes by 2006 and the House has a right to know what sort of taxes they want.

Mr. Smith: As we have made clear, and as the right hon. Gentleman knows, any change to the tax regime in Europe is a matter for unanimity. We have made the UK position clear: we do not accept the need to introduce new taxes. Moreover, we strongly support imposing and maintaining firm financial discipline on the expenditure of the Community, as does the Bill.

In carrying into effect the financing decisions of the Berlin summit, the Bill is an important stage in the reform of EU finances. At Berlin, we met our key objectives of bringing EU spending under better control, retaining the own resources ceiling at its previous level and safeguarding the UK abatement.

To set those achievements in context, the earlier agreements on EU spending in 1988 and 1994 allowed for real increases of 17 per cent. and 22 per cent. respectively over the five years of those deals. By contrast, the Berlin agreement will stabilise EU spending. For the first time, spending in the EU 15 is projected to be lower in real terms at the end of the seven-year planning period than it was at the beginning.

The Berlin deal also maintained the UK's abatement in full and maintained the overall ceiling for Community own resources at a constant 1.27 per cent. of EU national income, thereby contributing to strict budget discipline and better control of EU spending.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Are things going to get better? As the right hon. Gentleman knows, they are celebrating in four countries in Europe—Germany, Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands—because they have been assured that they will pay less. If they are to pay less, does not that mean that others will pay more?

Mr. Smith: Proportionately and relatively, countries not on the hon. Gentleman's list—except the UK whose abatement is safeguarded—will contribute more to the UK abatement. As I was saying, it is an achievement of the Berlin agreement and a UK negotiating success that we fully protected the abatement. At the end of the planning period, expenditure in the EU 15—although there are costs of enlargement that I shall come to later—which was about 89.5 billion euros in 2000, will be 89.3 billion euros in 2006. Anyone with knowledge of the history of the growth of EU spending will know that to bring it under that degree of control is a considerable achievement.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am not terribly clever so I do not quite understand how we can, at one and the same time, cap expenditure and expand the Community yet be allowed to retain a complete abatement. Is the Chief Secretary seriously telling us that, under other provisions in the measure, there will not be a way of taking in much more taxation for the use of Community institutions, but under a different heading?

Mr. Smith: The ceiling of 1.27 per cent. to which I referred relates to gross national product. Of course, it is true that, as the EU's GNP grows, so too does the allowable expenditure. The financial perspective—the framework on spending—does indeed show lower real-terms expenditure planned in the EU 15 in 2006 than in 2000. In contrast to the history of the past growth of EU spending, that is an achievement and is to be praised.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) is far too wily a bird to be taken in by the right hon. Gentleman—the sooner he recognises that pertinent fact, the better. Will he return to the point that he was making a moment ago? He claimed fully to have protected the British rebate but then went on, in a stealthy, subordinate clause, to acknowledge that there are implications of EU enlargement. Why does he not spell out factually now,

in plain and simple terms, what we will soon realise to be the case—that this country will have to forgo, as part of the enlargement process, windfall gains that we would otherwise have secured?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) is indeed too wily either to be taken in by, or to make too much common cause with, the hon. Gentleman. The truth is that we have protected the abatement. Moreover, we will benefit from abatement on any new expenditure incurred as a consequence of both enlargement and the ceilings in the existing EU 15.

The hon. Gentleman refers to windfall gains. A precedent was given by Sir Geoffrey Howe who, I think, described a previous agreement as not a euro more, not a euro less. That precedent, which is fair, is that there should be neither a windfall gain nor a windfall loss as a consequence of these adjustments.

The abatement is protected in full. The precedent, in both 1992 and 1998, was that it would be unfair for us to benefit twice: to benefit from the substance of the changes that we had argued for and welcomed, and to benefit accidentally as a result of the way in which the abatement was applied. There would have been a double gain if those windfall gains had not been adjusted in the way that I have described, which was consistent with what was done in 1992 and 1998.

The important thing is that we said that we would protect the abatement, and we have protected the abatement. Moreover, the United Kingdom will benefit very considerably from the application of the abatement to any new expenditure on enlargement. Expenditure that was incurred before accession does not fall within the abatement, just as it does not fall within the basis of the calculation of the expenditure that I referred to previously.

Therefore, the abatement has not been an issue as far as pre-accession expenditure is concerned, and the abatement will not apply to such expenditure as it continues in future, but it will apply to all new expenditure. That was a considerable negotiating gain. Many of our partners in Europe would have said that the United Kingdom should have surrendered the abatement. We certainly did not and would not, because we want United Kingdom contributions to the EC budget to continue on a basis that is fair, and is combined with the stricter discipline on overall EU expenditure—very much stronger discipline than Conservative Members voted for when they voted through the European Communities (Finance) Act 1995.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Chief Secretary gave a very full answer to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), but will he tell the House what contingency has been made for the situation that will arise if the economic growth to which he referred does not occur, and there is a reduction in growth in the European Union?

Mr. Smith: If the GNP of the European Union were to come down, the ceiling on expenditure would come down with it. It is right for that discipline—ensuring that spending bears a relationship to what is affordable on the basis of the production and wealth of the EU—to be imposed.

I draw a very strong contrast with what happened previously. When the last two EC finance Bills were passed, under a Conservative Administration, the ceiling went up. We kept the ceiling in place at 1.27 per cent. Before Berlin, many Conservative Members claimed that we would be unable to safeguard the abatement or maintain financial discipline, but we did. It is reflected in the Bill, so Conservative Members should support it.

The UK contribution will not increase as a result of the new own resources decision, and we shall gain a fair benefit from the application of the abatement to new costs of enlargement. The UK's abatement also means that other changes agreed at Berlin have a neutral financial impact on the UK. Overall, the new own resources decision is a very good deal for the UK, leading to no increases in our contribution and keeping the abatement.

Other elements of the Berlin conclusions also benefit this country. The tight controls on common agricultural policy spending that we negotiated will mean a fall in the price of cereals, beef and milk, bringing benefits of £1 billion a year in Britain—about £70 a year for a family of four. Indeed, the summit represented the most radical reform of the common agricultural policy since its inception; spending on the CAP will decline in real terms from 2002 onwards.

Berlin also introduced the so-called second pillar of the CAP. The increased focus on rural development is a significant and welcome advance. It moves the CAP from production-based subsidies and towards incentives that are more sensitive to the environment, tackling some of the anomalies and perverse incentives of the current system.

Another welcome feature of the changes to EC financing emanating from Berlin was the reform of EU structural and cohesion funds. That streamlined the categorisation of funds, while maintaining a level of funding for UK regions amounting to £10 billion over the years 2000 to 2006. The funds are addressing structural difficulties in qualifying regions, assisting economic development and promoting skills.

The financial reforms to which the Bill commits us pave the way for the enlargement of the EU, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described in Warsaw as perhaps the EU's greatest challenge, but also its greatest opportunity. As I believe is widely acknowledged in the House, enlargement will bring great economic benefits to central and eastern Europe, providing an opportunity for growth, development and prosperity. EU membership will help to raise standards of living and spread education and employment opportunities. It is important to stress that it will benefit existing EU countries as well. Expanding the single market will increase trade, stimulate competition, cut input costs, improve access to larger labour markets and encourage productive investment.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Perhaps those of us who have always thought that enlargement was a big mistake should vote against the Bill, as it may be our only opportunity to express that point of view. Beyond that, given the excellent wisdom and judgment of the Irish people, expressed recently in a referendum, about what the Chief Secretary is now claiming for enlargement—they were not conned for a moment—will he now give us a referendum on Nice before we make the final commitment?

Mr. Smith: No, and I have no intention of joining the right hon. Gentleman in ascribing motive or advice to

[Mr. Smith]

Ireland; it is a matter for the Irish people to sort out. I said that I thought, genuinely, that there was a measure of understanding on both sides of the House that enlargement was a good thing.

Mr. Forth: Nonsense.

Mr. Smith: That speaks volumes about the attitude of the Conservative party to this major historic opportunity to entrench greater stability, prosperity, freedom and respect for democratic rights in central and eastern Europe, of which every hon. Member should be proud.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): On connecting the agricultural changes to enlargement, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential that the changes to the CAP are in place as soon as possible? Otherwise, any talk of expansion will be completely out of the question. That is particularly true of the dairy regime, where the introduction of Poland would completely wreck any CAP funding, unless that funding was completely changed beforehand.

Mr. Smith: The Berlin conclusions represented a significant step forward in terms of the momentum behind reform of the CAP, and the fall in total expenditure between 2002 and 2006 is an achievement. No one underestimates the force of the argument that my hon. Friend advances. Further reform of the CAP must accompany enlargement. That is one way in which we can secure welfare gains for the existing populations of the EU, as well as the economic benefits that I have described for the peoples of central and eastern Europe.

The Berlin reforms are an important part of a continuing process of reform in Europe, which the UK is leading. At Lisbon, Europe's Governments signed up to economic reforms to enhance labour market flexibility and capital and product market modernisation, bringing more open markets and greater competition. At Stockholm, the EU pressed ahead with measures to meet the strategic goal of raising the EU's productivity and employment performance beyond that of the best in the world by 2010.

Those measures will complement the Government's domestic efforts to raise productivity and we will continue to advocate this reform agenda so that we see the completion of the single market in utilities, energy, telecoms and financial and professional services. We want a reformed Europe that is outward looking, rather than inward looking, that actively pursues multilateral trade liberalisation and closer transatlantic trading links through the launch of a new world trade round and that lives up to our responsibilities to relieve the debt of poor countries and tackle global poverty.

We also support administrative reform in Europe to cut out waste, fraud and corruption. The Government fully support Neil Kinnock's reform programme to modernise the administration of the Commission, and it was, of course, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer who proposed the establishment of the new European anti-fraud office, with independent powers to seek out and tackle fraud against the EC budget.

Mr. Bercow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I want to make progress; I have given way a lot.

On EC finances, CAP reform, enlargement and honest administration, the Government and the Bill are on the side of modernisation and progress, with constructive engagement for change. It is instructive to compare the Bill with the previous European Communities (Finance) Bill, which was introduced in the House by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe in 1994. Unlike this Bill, that measure increased the ceiling on EC spending, did nothing to cut fraud and waste or to reform the CAP. In introducing it, he argued:

"That increase in the contribution is . . . the price that we pay for the undoubted benefits of membership of the European Union. We pay for a seat at the table to enable us to influence the political and commercial character of that market."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 932.]

That Bill, which became the European Communities (Finance) Act 1995 and which would be repealed under this Bill, increased the United Kingdom's contributions. He said that it would do so by "about £250 million." Who voted for that Bill? The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe certainly did so—he has been consistent in such matters.

Mr. Bercow: I certainly did not.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman was not even here then.

Who else appeared on that Division list? Yes, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) is on that list. The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is also there, as is the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and, yes, the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo), the then Member for Enfield, Southgate. All today's Tory leadership contenders voted for those higher contributions. That shows that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe can get most of the rest of the Tory party in the Division Lobby behind him on Europe—even though they were losing the argument then, just as they are now.

It was not just the charms of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe that got the Tory party to vote for the 1995 Act, nor even the then Prime Minister's having made it a vote of confidence; their argument then was that the House had to support the British Government in honouring their international obligations and commitments. If that were true then, it is equally true now, and Opposition Members should support the Bill. However, the more important reason why they should support it is that ours is a better Bill, based on a better agreement.

This Bill is tougher. It will stabilise contributions and it will keep the EC budget to the same ceiling. It will tackle fraud and waste. It will reform the CAP and it will enable enlargement to proceed. The Berlin conclusions represent an important step in the on-going process of reform in Europe; they show that by engaging with Europe Britain can win the arguments and secure change. The Bill, under which the Berlin agreement will be ratified, will involve stronger controls on EU spending, the beginnings of a more effective agriculture policy and no increase in the own resources ceiling. The agreement is a good deal for the United Kingdom and an important step for the EU, and I commend the Bill to the House.

3.54 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am not sure about the billing that the right hon. Gentleman gave me, but I welcome him on his return to the Dispatch Box on what I think is the first occasion that he has spoken from it since his reappointment as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I also intend to pay him a compliment by saying that, having now heard his arguments for several months, I know that he never betrays the merest hint of doubt or timidity in putting the Government's case; he stays resolutely on message however overwhelming the evidence to the contrary. I have listened carefully to his arguments that the agreement was a good deal for Britain, but the more he was cross-examined by my hon. Friends, the more tortuous, unconvincing and lengthy his arguments became.

The Chief Secretary asked us for our view, so I shall make it clear. We do not share the Government's evident sense of self-satisfaction or the description of the budgetary decisions that are embodied in the Bill as a negotiating success. Much needs to be done to reform the European Union budget and these decisions do not even begin to reform it. The outcome is disappointing for United Kingdom interests.

The House will be aware that there are long-standing, natural and legitimate United Kingdom concerns about the EU budget, about the unbalanced nature of the Community's expenditure policy, about the incidence of fraud and waste in the EU's spending policies and about the net cost to the United Kingdom of the EU's revenue and expenditure policy. We believe that, in the decisions that are embodied in the Bill, the Government have missed an opportunity to do something about those concerns. The cost of that missed opportunity will be borne by taxpayers and households in the United Kingdom.

I was interested to hear the Chief Secretary's history lesson. He took us back to the legislation of the 1980s and 1990s, and he went as far back as the time when Geoffrey Howe was responsible for such issues. Hon. Members will have noticed what a big point the Chief Secretary made about the abatement mechanism and how he claimed that it was an achievement of this Government to have continued it. However, I gently remind him of who exactly negotiated the rebate in the first place. It was negotiated by a Conservative Prime Minister in the face not only of the natural hostility of other European member states that were representing their interests but of the predictions from Labour Members that the then Prime Minister would go to the negotiations in Fontainebleau and return with not a penny piece. Amid all that hostility, it was a Conservative success and a real achievement to have negotiated the rebate mechanism that has saved much more than £20 billion for this country. Indeed, it will save us £2 billion this year.

The United Kingdom, however, remains a net contributor to the European Union and, in the last calendar year, made a net contribution of just over £4 billion. As the Chief Secretary said, the own resources decisions provide for the continuation of that abatement mechanism, but although he tries to trumpet that as a success, it would appear on closer examination that, while the position of the United Kingdom remains the same, that of other member countries has been improved by the decision.

Given the requirements of European treaty making and decision making, it would have been difficult for the Government to fail to bring back the abatement mechanism, because they have a veto. Although they had a veto to protect their position on that, they did not succeed in taking the United Kingdom's position any further forward by returning any more resources to this country from the net contribution that we make to European Union funds.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West) *rose—*

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe) *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I shall give way to the right hon. Lady first, because she was a Minister with responsibility for Europe.

Joyce Quin: Given that, before the meeting in Berlin, Conservative Members predicted that the abatement was in danger, that we were in danger of breaching the own resources ceiling and that we would get a poor settlement on structural funds, will the hon. Gentleman now admit that they were wrong on all three points?

Mr. Clappison: Our view was based on a completely honest, accurate and objective evaluation of the negotiating skills of those who were representing us at the European summit. They came home with nothing.

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman stresses in critical tones that we are net contributors to the EU. Were we to have a Conservative Government, would it be their policy to refuse to be a net contributor in the future?

Mr. Clappison: I think that the hon. Gentleman would make common cause with me in agreeing that we should try to bring down the net contribution by as much as possible, but the Government have failed to do that. The right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) shakes her head, but she will know the facts because she has been an Agriculture Minister as well. The Government have failed comprehensively in their attempts to bring down agricultural spending when their record is compared with that of Conservative Governments throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) referred to the way in which other countries have benefited from the negotiations while we, at best, have stood still. Although the language in the explanatory notes is as torturous as the Minister's argument, the Government cannot avoid admitting that

"the financing arrangements of the correction are changed to reduce the amount borne by Germany, Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands."

We are also net contributors to the European budget, but our contribution has not been reduced.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my hon. Friend clarify a detail of the negotiation? Is it not a fact that the Prime Minister yielded part of the abatement that we should have received as a windfall from enlargement, and is that not worth hundreds of millions of pounds a year?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is right. He raises the important question, which I have pondered, of when is a

[Mr. Clappison]

windfall a windfall, and when does it contribute something to someone else? A windfall is an interesting term to use.

Before I deal with that, however, I want to emphasise the fact that although other member states in a budgetary position similar to the United Kingdom's benefited from the negotiations, little progress was made on reducing our net contribution to the EU budget. After the negotiations and the legislation, with which the Government are so pleased, the UK will continue to pay to receive the benefits of EU membership, to which the Minister referred, while other members obtain those benefits and receive a payment or make a smaller payment than we do. I listened carefully to what he said about the future of the net contribution. Implicit in his comments was the idea that the UK will remain a net contributor. He did not say whether that diminished or grew as a result of the negotiations.

On the windfall, the explanatory notes say:

"provision is made for the United Kingdom to forgo the 'windfall' gains it would have received from the"

switch from VAT-based contributions to gross national product-based contributions and from the decision to allow members to retain a higher proportion of customs duties. It will be interesting to know why a change that the UK might obtain is characterised as a windfall and is thus a benefit that must be removed. Given that we have been such a large net contributor to the EU budget—the second largest after Germany—a windfall is exactly what many people see other member states getting as a result of our membership. Householders and taxpayers of this country will think that our Government should fight to preserve or obtain what is described as a windfall if it means making a cheaper contribution and lower taxes for our citizens. No doubt there will be an interesting technical explanation for that, and perhaps the Liberal Democrats will be able to give it.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I am afraid that I cannot help the hon. Gentleman on that, but does he agree that the normal dictionary definition of a windfall gain is a one-off gain? Does he, like me, suspect that some of the windfall gains that are referred to in the explanatory note might be on-going gains?

Mr. Clappison: I am surprised. That is a rare example of the phenomenon of a Liberal Democrat criticising the Government. The hon. Gentleman makes a legitimate point. The windfall to which he refers will recur year after year, and I am grateful to him for drawing attention to that.

No doubt there will also be an interesting technical explanation for the claim in the Labour party manifesto that

"our contributions are falling to similar levels as France and Italy."

That may be true of gross contributions, but it is certainly not the complete picture for net contributions, which are what matter.

The Economic Secretary pulls a face, so let me tell her what the Court of Auditors annual report for 1999 said about the net contributions. She might care to tell us later how that fits in with the Labour party's claims that our contributions are falling to levels similar to those of France and Italy. The report gives the net contributions as follows: France, £766 million; Italy, £1,153 million; the United Kingdom, £3,482 million. I should be interested to know how those could possibly be described as similar levels.

I turn now to EU expenditure on agriculture, which the Chief Secretary was brave enough to describe as the most radical reform of the common agricultural policy. He was prepared to go a little further than the Prime Minister, who in his statement following the Berlin European Council said that the Council had brought

"the common agricultural policy under tighter control than before. Agriculture spending by 2006 is planned to be less than 2 per cent. in real terms above its level next year, and falling."—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1999; Vol. 328, c. 732.]

In fact, agriculture spending, as a proportion of the total EU budget, is undiminished by the decisions made at Berlin, and I understand that the proportion will rise from 44 per cent. in 2000 to 46 per cent. in 2006. The old problem of the EU budget being unbalanced by huge spending on the CAP remains; the Government have made no progress on that, compared with the substantial progress made throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The Government and the Prime Minister have simply failed to deliver.

Mr. Redwood: I wonder whether my hon. Friend is being characteristically generous to the Chief Secretary and the Government by concentrating more on the United Kingdom's net contribution. The Bill will raise taxes on British people to make gross spending commitments far in excess of the net contribution. Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the spending commitments made by the European Commission in Britain are for projects or purposes that we would never support; and that, under the rules, many of the projects are in any case too marginal to be funded directly out of British taxpayers' money?

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Not only is there a net contribution, but some of the EU money that comes back to this country is not used for purposes that our Government and our people would regard as a priority.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does this money form part of the £20 billion cuts? Will the hon. Gentleman start listing where they would fall?

Mr. Clappison: We always know when we are hitting a nerve because the right hon. Gentleman has to come up with a completely different subject and a bogus statistic. I have genuine statistics from the Court of Auditors, on which he relies. I have drawn attention to this country's large net contribution and to the Government's statement that it is falling to a level similar to that of other countries. Of course, the Government want to try to cover up the fact that they have failed to get good value for the British taxpayer.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is a master of understatement, and that is part of his natural charm. Will he confirm that although agriculture expenditure, as a proportion of the total EU budget, will rise by approximately 2 per cent., as he said a few moments ago, it will rise by about 7.5 per cent. in 2001, relative to 2000?

Mr. Clappison: As well as being understated, I am honest, and I have to say that I do not have that statistic

at my fingertips, but knowing my hon. Friend's great interest in statistics, I would be surprised if he were not correct. Another point that might find favour with my hon. Friend—one with which more dedicated connoisseurs of European statistics than me might already be familiar—is that the financial perspective predicted by the EU often turns out to be an underestimate: spending is often far greater than originally predicted.

There are strong grounds to suspect that EU spending on agriculture does not always meet the highest standards of financial regularity. My hon. Friend might think that that, too, is an understatement, but after the Chief Secretary's opening statement, I am trying to be as objective as possible. I think that the view that I have expressed is common ground among many. The Chief Secretary should be aware of the Court of Auditors' statement on the 1999 budget and the court's identification of unauthorised payments totalling more than 1 billion euros made to farmers under the EU agriculture programme.

We are strongly interested in fraud and irregularity. We note the Chief Secretary's comment about the establishment of the anti-fraud office under Commissioner Kinnock. We wish it well, but hope that the predictions that emerge from that office will turn out to be more reliable than some of those made by the Commissioner in the past. We take fraud and irregularity seriously.

On a related subject, we note that spending on administration—a matter with which the Chief Secretary did not deal—is to rise every year between now and 2006 and is to consume an increasing proportion of the EU budget. Spending on administration already amounts to 5 per cent. of the budget; it is set to rise to 6 per cent. in 2006. In fact, it appears to be one of the fastest growing, if not the fastest growing, items of expenditure in the EU budget between now and 2006. I should have thought that he would have more to say about that, given that it, too, is a cost to the British taxpayer.

The Bill and the negotiations that underlie it represent a missed opportunity for the United Kingdom. Whatever spin they try to put on it, the Government have failed to deliver better value for money for the UK taxpayer. They argue that their approach to the EU has at least preserved the UK rebate—one that was negotiated by a Conservative Government. It is hard to envisage a Government as ineffective in negotiations as the current Government managing to secure such a rebate in the first place.

The Government have made scant progress in addressing the problems of EU finance. It is hard to avoid concluding that, once again, they have missed the opportunity to address UK concerns and bring home better value for the UK taxpayer. The negotiations will benefit taxpayers in other countries, but not in this country. Whatever spin the Government put on it, they have missed an important opportunity.

4.13 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): The Bill makes possible the expansion of the European Union. Great difficulties in arriving at a suitable financial arrangement were expected, but they were overcome magnificently by the Berlin European Council of March 1999, which lies behind the Bill. What a pity the EU does not manage to trumpet its triumphs more loudly. Instead, a major achievement went almost unnoticed as just another EU meeting.

We would do well to remember the significance of making EU enlargement possible. It will entrench democracy and the principles of a modern economy in countries whose attachment to both has been fitful throughout the 20th century.

Mr. Redwood: I quite agree that we should entrench democracy, but is not one of the main provisions the idea that, if there is a referendum in which people vote no, the answer is no, it means no, and the treaty falls?

Mr. Beard: I gather that that is a reference to Ireland. We accept the sovereignty of individual member states: the matter is one for Ireland to sort out, not for this Parliament.

As I said, the Bill will entrench democracy and the principles of a modern economy in countries whose attachment to both concepts was fitful throughout the 20th century. In doing so, it will underpin political and economic stability on the borders of western Europe; such stability has not been known for several hundred years, if ever. Not only does it provide for western European security, it enhances the life chances and the standard of living of people in those countries in ways that could only have been dreamt of before.

Some people fear that enlargement will mean unwanted migration across Europe from the poorer to the more affluent countries, with tensions arising as a result. The best insurance against that is not police controls, but giving the people of the poorer countries of central and eastern Europe the hope of a better life in the culture and countryside that they know best. That now becomes possible as a result of the financing arrangements in the Bill.

The advantages are not all one way. British firms will benefit from increased trade and investment, supplying goods and services to 500 million customers in the largest single market in the world, and the advantages that that will bring to British businesses will strengthen their competitiveness worldwide.

The average intelligent inquirer would never guess that such prospects lie behind the Bill, with its obscure cross-references; nor do its explanatory notes expand understanding significantly. I urge the Government to explore ways in which we can deal with European policy more transparently and less obscurely. It is darkness that fertilises such an abundant crop of myths about Europe, the greatest of which is regularly propounded with froth and fantasy by the Opposition and concerns the evolution of the European Union into a European superstate that usurps the power of member nations. It is a demon, created to frighten the gullible, the innocent and those who do not observe facts too carefully.

The European budgets that the Bill makes possible over the next five years range from a total of 1 per cent. to 1.2 per cent. of the EU's gross national product—hardly a dominant aspect of European spending. The total European Union budget for 2001 will be £65.5 billion, compared with £400 billion for the United Kingdom Government's budget alone. The sum spent by the UK Government on welfare benefits in one year is 50 per cent. more than the total EU budget. To put it another way, for

[Mr. Beard]

every £1 spent by the Government of a member state in one year, the EU spends 2½p. It is on that flimsy foundation that Opposition Members have built the absurd spectre of a federal European superstate. Moreover, the chief question in selecting their leader in the coming weeks will be: who can best slay that dragon? Someone should turn the lights right up to show that the beast that the Opposition are stalking with such assiduity is, in fact, the shadow of a pussycat on the wall.

Another myth that prevails among Opposition Members is that the Germans, French and Italians are always bossing us around and telling us to do things that are not in our interest. However, we have the same voting strength as the Germans and the French. The Germans pay 28 per cent. of the EU budget; the French, 17 per cent; and the Italians, 12 per cent, compared with the UK's 13 per cent. I wonder how we were bullied into letting the Germans and the French pay so much more than we do.

The fatuous suspicion of everything emanating from the EU became self-fulfilling for the previous Conservative Government, which went to every negotiation seeking to domineer and ended up provoking the hostility of the majority. They isolated themselves, then sought to blame their isolation on scheming foreigners who were up to no good. Needless to say, they did not win friends or influence people.

The Berlin Council negotiations, which are the foundation of the Bill, were a triumph for a wholly different approach by the Labour Government. Berlin was a triumph for the co-operative approach that seeks allies and presents a reasoned case, rather than table thumping to emphasise uncompromising demands.

European Union spending, as has been said, is brought under control by being capped at 1.27 per cent. of total Union gross domestic product. Previous such budgets provided far greater increases. Moreover, there had been an expectation, promoted by the Opposition, that the rebate would have to be reduced to get agreement on expansion, but we have come away with the UK abatement maintained in full.

Spending on the common agricultural policy was considered a tricky problem, given that nations entering the EU—Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic—are overwhelmingly agricultural, but as we have heard, common agricultural spending is budgeted to decline to less in 2006 than in 2001—a gain of about £70 a year for the average family in the UK. Although agricultural spending will be 45.5 per cent. of the total budget, that is well down from the dominance that agriculture once had in the EU's affairs.

That reduction has contributed to the decline in the overall budget for the next five years, ranging from 1.2 per cent. of gross national product in the Union in 2001 to 1 per cent. or just under in 2006—well within the cap of 1.27 per cent. of GDP that has been set. There can be no better demonstration that spending has indeed been brought under control.

The fruits of successful negotiations are not seen solely in the big picture. The European Union has set aside £600 million a year to deal with foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease. Much of that will come to Britain in the next few years—from an organisation which, Tory Ministers used to say, stole their sweeties every time they negotiated with them.

One of the inflexible aspects of the European Union was the way in which its revenue was raised from member states. Some came from the customs duties of individual states; some came from a levy related to a country's VAT receipts. Where those sources of funds did not meet the budget, money was provided in proportion to the country's gross national product. The customs duties and VAT resources often introduced anomalies in the amounts paid by each country and were a source of fraud. This negotiation has revised the arrangements so that there is far less dependence on VAT, and revenue contributions depend much more on GNP. The arrangements are therefore fairer and less likely to lead to anomalies.

Mr. Bercow: I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech, but it is clear that he is a member of the Dr. Pangloss school of optimism. Can he tell the House what assessment he has made of the prognosis of the MacDougall report for the level of fiscal disbursements as a proportion of gross domestic product, in the event that we join the eurozone, as he wishes?

Mr. Beard: I have made no further examination of Mr. MacDougall's report, which is many years old and irrelevant to the present circumstances, as is any concept of our being in the euro for this budget.

The Berlin Council negotiations, which we are ratifying today, are a clear demonstration that constructive engagement pays off. Britain's negotiating objectives were achieved, and we confirmed and won friends among our allies. Contrast that with the Conservative Opposition, who have just fought a general election with demands fundamentally to renegotiate our position in Europe, knowing that, with no other European nation supporting them, the end would be humiliation or the need to pull out of the EU altogether.

Despite total rejection of that policy at the general election, four out of five of the candidates for the Opposition leadership election would continue it. They must acknowledge that half the United Kingdom's total trade of £132 billion is with the European Union, and 17 per cent. with the United States. If we were to pull out of the European Union and join the North American Free Trade Agreement, as some Tory leadership contenders would prefer to do, there would be an immense upheaval for the whole of economic life in this country for many years—and for what? Furthermore, most inward investment into the United Kingdom would evaporate if we ceased to be a member of the European Union, with repercussions for our balance of payments and our national economic management in general. We cannot play games with those vital interests or secure them in isolation from our natural allies.

I believe that the budget that we are ratifying demonstrates three major points. First, the cost of our membership of the European Union is trivial by comparison with the interests that it safeguards and secures. Secondly, the institutions of the European Union have proved that they can adapt to changing circumstances. Thirdly, this Government's approach to the EU, which is based on a spirit of co-operation with allies, secured more for British interests in four years than was gained throughout 18 years of Tory hectoring, denunciation and isolation.

4.26 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) made an interesting speech, but rather oversold the Bill by suggesting that it was of such great historical importance. I am afraid that he might have been thinking of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, which will be considered tomorrow. That Bill has a place in history, but I do not think that the Bill before us can be given the same billing. It is a modest measure that arises from the modest decisions taken at the Berlin summit. Indeed, its modesty explains why it is disappointing, as the agreement reached at Berlin was a missed opportunity for the European Union.

Mr. Beard: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if there had been no agreement on financing the European Union after expansion, no expansion would have occurred?

Mr. Davey: To that extent, the hon. Gentleman is correct, but the idea that the budget would suddenly disappear was not on the cards at Berlin and is something of an Aunt Sally.

The modesty of the Bill was revealed by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who told us that the triumph in the negotiations was what was defended and did not happen. He told us that Britain did not lose its abatement and that the ceiling on spending was not raised, but he did not try to sell the Bill to the House in respect of any positive way forward for the European Union and Britain.

Some of the missed opportunities relate to lack of reform and to the whole budget process. We need to be more ambitious in this House and in the European Union in looking for wider budgetary and common agricultural policy reform. One of the objectives of debates such as this, not only in the House but at European Union level and in the summits, should be to take the money out of the EU altogether. Tory Members should not become excited; I am not suggesting that there should be no budget at the European level and would not agree with such a suggestion. We must, however, focus the debate about money in the EU on policy and activity, not on pork-barrel politics. Much of the debate is currently about which country gains what, but we must move discussion away from that perspective and consider the purpose of the EU and the benefits of spending on particular EU policies and activities.

Mr. Redwood: How can the hon. Gentleman possibly say that this is a modest Bill? It is staggeringly expensive: there will be a cost of about £60 million a year for every word in it, and it is a huge sting on British taxpayers. We are shown how Liberals care about other people's money when we see that they do not understand how much is involved or how much will be wasted or lost through fraud.

Mr. Davey: I am disappointed by that intervention. As the Chief Secretary made clear, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) voted for such Bills, which provided for taking similar amounts of money from the British taxpayer. The right hon. Gentleman is wrong again.

I want to develop the point about taking money out of the political debate on the European Union. As the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford said, the amounts of money are small, and if we could remove their consideration from the debate we could focus on the EU's genuine benefits. They include the single market, benefits to internal and external security, environmental protection, and the EU's greater international standing and ability to negotiate trade agreements. British taxpayers, companies and citizens gain most from such benefits. The money debate is irrelevant in many ways. We do down the European project by always allowing the debate to revert to relatively small amounts of money—I stress the word "relatively" before the right hon. Member for Wokingham leaps to his feet.

The Berlin decision and the process that underlies the Bill are regrettable. When we debate local government grant settlements, we appreciate how complicated the formulae for sharing the money between United Kingdom local authorities have become. They are even more byzantine than EU formulae. However, as we try to reform those processes for local government and national Government spending, we should share some of the lessons on budgetary reform with other EU countries, many of which are taking similar action. We are not learning the lessons of local and national budgetary reform collectively at European level.

Why do we not consider budget making that focuses on outcomes and outputs? The Chief Secretary has been proud of his public service agreements. They suffer from a few problems, but they represent a move in the right direction. The EU needs to focus similarly. Hon. Members may be surprised to learn that some improvements have been made, primarily through the initiatives of British Commissioners. The draft budget for 2001 was the first at European level to be divided into policy areas. That is an amazing change, which should have happened many years ago. It is the sort of change that we need to be able to analyse European spending sensibly and move away from pork-barrel politics, which the Conservatives go on about but which miss the point.

The previous Conservative Government should take credit for some interesting developments in ensuring that European spending has a legal basis. I should have liked the Berlin agreement and the Bill to move further on that. The previous Conservative Government took a case to the European Court. They contended that some spending by the European Commission had no legal basis. The Labour Government continued with the case and the spending was successfully challenged. That was a UK triumph. Ensuring for the first time that EU spending lines have a legal basis has meant improvements in European budget making. However, much remains to be done, and the Bill is therefore disappointing.

I should like to set out other aspects of budget reform that the Government should consider. If possible, they should use the Bill or any future European meetings to press them. I pay tribute to Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrat Member of the European Parliament for East Midlands. He wrote an interesting article entitled "Spring Cleaning the EU. Doing Less to Do More". I owe some of the ideas on budgetary reform that I am about to set out to Nick Clegg's experience at the European Commission and Parliament. For example, he argues that far too many lines in the EU budgets deal with very small amounts of money. In other words, small pots of money are put forward in a very grand way and attached to grand-sounding policy initiatives, but they mean very little and amount to no more than a row of beans.

[Mr. Davey]

He argues in his paper that we should delete all those small lines in the budget which together amount to significant, although not huge, sums of money. In that way, the budget could be cut.

We need to pursue the idea that there should be no budget allocations in the EU budget that are not related to core EU areas. The European Union, backed by the European Parliament, often puts forward small amounts of money that have nothing to do with the core competencies and functions of the European institutions. We should press for those to disappear under the philosophy of subsidiarity.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Does the hon. Gentleman have in mind, in that proposal, such matters as EU embassies around the world?

Mr. Davey: That may be one of the areas in question, although EU embassies around the world relate to some of the core functions of the EU, namely security and international relations. The EU clearly has more of a core role there than it has in, for example, tourism in the UK.

I should also like to see other changes. Commissioner Patten's analysis and scrutiny of the way in which the allocation of external aid from the EU has been carried out, or not carried out, in recent years would bear another look. The Government should push for Commissioner Patten's reforms in that area to be adopted.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Dr. Palmer *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I give way to the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer).

Dr. Palmer: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting a total ban on EU spending outside the core areas? Is he thinking of running for the Conservative leadership?

Mr. Davey: To the hon. Gentleman's second question I can give a resounding no. On the first question, I would not want a complete and utter ban because that could become too inflexible. However, we need a massive reduction in those areas because they are straining the European Commission and the institutions of Europe unnecessarily. Much official time surrounds the spending of small amounts of money: putting forward the bids and tenders, auditing and monitoring them, and so on. We are wasting the abilities of Commission officials on paltry policy initiatives. We need to ensure that Commission officials—the bureaucracy—in Brussels focus on what they are there for, namely international co-operation between members of the European Union.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Heath: Will my hon. Friend assure me that he will not resile too far from the position that he admirably sketched out? I entirely agree with him that it is essential that the European Union should stick to its core competencies, and that those should be far better defined than they are at present. I do not like the idea of slush funds that can be dipped into around Europe, and he is absolutely right to focus on that issue.

Mr. Davey: I give my hon. Friend the assurance that we in the Liberal Democrat Treasury team will work with our colleagues in the European Parliament to press for that reform agenda.

A further example is the myriad community initiatives that are spending money in individual member states but are administered from Brussels. That is clearly nonsense and contravenes the principle of subsidiarity. I say that because I know that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has a wealth of ideas about subsidiarity and is dying to intervene on me. Just to help him, I shall give way.

Mr. Bercow: I was hoping to help the hon. Gentleman, because I am a naturally helpful soul, as you can readily testify, Madam Deputy Speaker. He laments the narrow focus on moneys to the exclusion or detriment of considering who should be responsible for what. Given that the Prime Minister came to the House as long ago as 18 June 1997 to trumpet the supposed merits of the subsidiarity and proportionality protocol of the treaty of Amsterdam, and was ably supported in the process by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether there has been one case of a directive or regulation of the European Union being repealed in accordance with the provisions of that protocol—just one?

Mr. Davey: I am afraid that I shall have to write to the hon. Gentleman, because I do not know whether there has been such a case. I do not claim to be an expert.

Mr. Redwood: There has not been one.

Mr. Davey: If that is true, I regret that. Clearly, we must ensure that the changes that enable such regulations to be repatriated are enforced. That would be welcome on both sides of the House, and the hon. Gentleman does the House no service by suggesting that only his party is interested in such matters.

Another area of budgetary reform involving big numbers is the common agricultural policy. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury told us that major reform of the CAP lay behind the Berlin summit. I wish that were so, because greater reform is needed in the new world. The CAP was born in the 1950s and 1960s, when there were worries about food supply and the economies of European Union countries were much more rural. The world is different now, and we have also learned of the CAP's negative effect on developing countries, which is another reason for reform. The enlargement of the European Union may lead to an explosion of the budget if it remains in its current state, as eastern European countries join. We must be far bolder in reforming the CAP.

We need to develop the painful issue of sustainable agriculture and sustainable management of our countryside. We should ensure that funding goes to

smaller farms rather than to huge agribusinesses, and we need to reduce the bureaucracy involved in managing payments from the CAP. Huge sums are wasted on government and private sector bureaucracy. There are only four farms in Kingston and Surbiton, so I cannot claim to be an expert on agricultural issues, but farmers in other constituencies have told me that they spend an enormous amount of time applying for these funds and then showing that they have been spent in the right way. We could get rid of a significant amount of bureaucracy in the private sector if we reformed the CAP sensibly.

Mr. Drew: Does the hon. Gentleman understand the dilemma that we face? The way to open up agriculture is through increased globalisation, which comes at a cost, given the increased risk of animal diseases and the problems with the method of producing crops.

Mr. Davey: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. It is why the reform of the CAP should be based on wider issues, such as how it could help to develop organic farming across the European Union. That would be one way to deal with the pressures implied in his remarks.

I want to refer to budget accountability. It is remarkable that in recent years the House has debated Bills relating to the European Union's budget in far greater detail than it has debated Bills on the United Kingdom Government's Budget. That goes against the whole debate on Europe. We are told that the European Union is not accountable and that this Parliament has no say, but this Parliament spends more time debating the intricacies of the European budget than it does debating the Budget of the Government who are directly accountable to it.

That is worth mentioning because the House should have a greater hold on the UK Budget, and should consider repatriating some of the good practices on budget analysis at European level. The European Parliament has a debate on the budget ex ante, before it is agreed. How many times has the House had a meaningful debate on the Budget estimates? Under the Standing Orders, we have only three days to debate the Budget estimates. That is absolute nonsense. Again, we need to strengthen the ex-ante powers of the House, and I should have liked an indication in the Bill that the Government wanted to improve accountability more widely.

Some Conservative Members have referred to the European Court of Auditors, which they are always praying in aid for their anti-Europe propaganda. That is partly because the Court of Auditors is such a strong body that it is actually able to root out some of the waste and corruption. We should argue for the strengthening of the auditors who report to the House, and suggest giving them some of the stronger powers conferred on the European Court of Auditors.

The Bill is very modest. It does not do huge amounts for either the European Union or the British taxpayer, and to that extent it represents a missed opportunity. Even so, the Liberal Democrats will not obstruct modest measures, however lacking in courage they may be. We will support the Government tonight, but we hope that, in debating these issues in both the House and the European Union, they will be far more courageous than they have been up to now.

4.46 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): The Bill gives effect to an excellent negotiating result, as has been emphasised by a number of speakers. Such things tend to be discounted in advance and forgotten afterwards. We should pause for a moment to recognise the success of the ministerial team that negotiated, and also that of Britain's overall approach in a positive and co-operative agenda.

When I have travelled in Europe, I have always been struck by the fact that there is little schadenfreude in regard to the problems that have sometimes arisen in Britain over European policy. There is a genuine wish to co-operate and to work with us, and a substantial community of interest. When the British Government reach out to work with European partners and achieve a sensible conclusion, they have an excellent chance of success, as we have seen in this instance.

The main substantive change in the Bill is a shift away from dependence on value-added tax and Customs revenues as the primary source of Community revenue towards a greater reliance on a fair reflection of each state's gross national product. That is welcome for several reasons. First, it is fairer to countries like Britain that have less agricultural, more balanced economies with a strong industrial base. Secondly, it is fairer right down to the individual level: VAT is not predominantly known as a progressive tax, and it is reasonable for each country to contribute according to GNP.

Thirdly—this has not been mentioned so far; it was particularly striking that the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) did not mention it—the shift will reduce the opportunity for fraud. Whereas in every EU country it is not unknown for people to try to evade VAT, I know of no attempt to change the figure for GNP. There is therefore a reasonable chance of a positive side effect, namely a reduction in fraud. I hope that in the long term the Government will aim to eliminate the historical and artificial basis of funding as a side effect of VAT and the tariff budget, and substitute a straightforward levy on the basis of GNP, so that each country is fairly treated.

The commentary of the hon. Member for Hertsmere on the Bill reminded me of the old claim that Britain is a nation of shopkeepers. He focused to an extraordinary degree on very small sums of money, to the total neglect of the overall picture. I will give a couple of examples. The entire net contribution of the United Kingdom comes to less than 1 per cent. of Government expenditure.

The hon. Gentleman is particularly exercised by administration, describing it as one of the fastest growing areas of expenditure. The growth rate for administration in the proposals is 1 per cent. The total extra cost to UK taxpayers of the entire increase that he described is 1p per taxpayer per year. That is the area on which the Conservative spokesman focused.

If we are to spend our debating time challenging the figure of 1p, it is reasonable to ask whether the scrutiny that the budget is getting is appropriate—whether it is the sort of scrutiny that the Conservative party has repeatedly claimed is missing from the European scene.

I also noted the hon. Gentleman's general attack on European spending in Britain. He refused to answer the Chief Secretary's question about which European projects in Britain he would cut. He still owes us that explanation. If he does not give it, I hope that the Conservative party

[Dr. Nick Palmer]

will give us further details, later in this debate or in the more general debate tomorrow, about where it wants the axe to fall.

We have all shared in the pleasure of Britain's successful defence of the rebates. It is also fair to note that the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union observed that the objective of which we need to keep track is not the rebate but ensuring that Britain's share of contributions is fair. Until now, the rebate has served us well. In the long term, as the Committee argued, we should be prepared to consider any approach that secures a long-term basis for Britain's fair share—possibly one without some of the artificial side effects that result in us turning away European spending because of the impact that it would have on the rebate. For the time being, however, the outcome is entirely welcome.

Before considering the detail of the debate it is worth looking at the fundamental question of why we are members of the European Union. Is it—as the hon. Member for Hertsmere seemed to suggest from time to time—to try to make a small profit and reduce our net contribution—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Whoever owns that audible pager should silence it or remove themselves from the Chamber.

Dr. Palmer: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Why have we decided to be members of the European Union? Is it to make a small profit, or to achieve some long-term concrete goals? If one studies the record of both Labour and Conservative Governments in the past 40 years, the goals become clear. The first is to achieve a lasting peace in Europe. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) recently attended the commemoration on the Somme and we all know from recent living memory how fatal it can be for our continent if we swerve away from that goal.

That means that we must retain as an overriding objective the goal of European harmony. We spend much time arguing about European federalism and European unity, but the central goal of the European Union is European harmony. We disturb that at our peril. That is why expansion of the EU is so important. It is not to enable us to gain the economic strengths of, for example, Hungary or Poland, but to bring the eastern European countries into the European family of nations so that they, too, are committed to harmony and unity. If that costs us 1p each—or even 2p—we should accept that price.

The second objective is the promotion of trade within the EU. The figures leave no room for doubt that that has been astonishingly successful over the years. It is crucial to Britain, as a central trading nation, that such trade continues to expand and develop.

Some Opposition Members are extremely sceptical about our membership of the EU, but are none the less willing to pay lip service to the idea. They say, "In 1965, Sir Edward Heath persuaded me to vote 'Yes'. I thought I was only joining a trading community, but I see to my horror that it is something quite different." I believe that the overwhelming majority of British exporters would subscribe to the view that it is only within the EU that we have a realistic prospect of maintaining the trading growth that is so crucial to our country. Is it worth 1p? Yes, it is—it is even worth 2p.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Dr. Palmer: I give way to the hon. Gentleman as I see that he is poised to spring.

Mr. Bercow: Indeed.

The hon. Gentleman is becoming positively misty-eyed on the matter. I acknowledge and respect the fact that he is a committed European federast, but I presume that he does not seriously suggest that the cause of peace in Europe has been, or will be, achieved by European Communities (Finance) Bills. Why does he not simply acknowledge the central fact that the crucial and noble goal of peace in Europe has been achieved not by the European Union, but by NATO?

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman will find little international support for the belief that European harmony was achieved without the European Union. Obviously, I agree that the Bill—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind all hon. Members that we are debating amendments to the arrangements for Community finance.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for protecting me from the siren voices on the Opposition Benches.

The central issue is that, with the Bill, we are making a commitment that protects our current level of contribution to the EU. As I and other speakers have argued, that amount is a tiny proportion of our total spending. With that commitment, we are playing a part in achieving the goal of European harmony, European trade growth and European joint commitment to a common future.

The Opposition do themselves no credit either with Labour Members or with the wider public when they try to focus the whole debate on small items of expenditure. The focus should be on where we take the European Union and whether our current finance base is sufficient for those goals.

I commend the Bill to the House and I commend the Government for their negotiating achievement.

4.59 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the Register in the normal way.

The most important power that this House of Commons won over many centuries was the sole right to impose taxation on the British people. What we are debating here today is an incredibly expensive Bill that is a very large tax demand upon the British people, running to almost £8 billion in the current year, on the figures of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), and perhaps more in subsequent years.

One of the most unsatisfactory things about the Bill is that it puts forward a very complicated formula, derived from a correction to a European Commission document, for calculating how much the British people may have to

pay, and states that we shall not know until some time in the future exactly how that calculation can be made, and how big a tax bill the Government are proposing today for the British people as a result of this measure.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House the last time that the House rejected a spending request from the Executive?

Mr. Redwood: It happens all too infrequently when we have such an unbalanced Parliament, with so many unthinking and uncritical supporters of the Government on the Government Benches. But I remember that sometimes, under previous Governments, proposals were rejected when independently minded Back Benchers combined with more independently minded Labour Back Benchers, in those days when they were in opposition, to inflict justice on the country and correct the Government's wrong decisions. I welcomed that. I was not always in the rebel Lobby myself but, as an independently minded Member, I always admired a system that could make the Government think again.

Mr. Davey *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I will give the hon. Gentleman a second chance.

Mr. Davey: I just wanted to help the right hon. Gentleman. The last time that the House refused a request for spending from the Executive was in 1919.

Mr. Redwood: I am not sure that I agree with that statement. I seem to remember that under Baroness Thatcher measures that had spending as well as legislative implications were rejected, so I believe that the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. That is not unusual for the Liberal Democrats, who live in a fictitious world where they cosy up to the Government at every available opportunity and then try to tell the British people the biggest mistake of them all: that they are now in some way the official and effective Opposition. Yet we see them on their knees in the Chamber day after day, grovelling to, agreeing with and supporting the Government; and then they dare to tell the public outside the House that they are in some way Opposition MPs.

Today the hon. Gentleman again showed that there was no stuffing in him. He said that he agreed with some of the things that the Government did. He said that he would support them in the Lobby tonight. However, if one listened carefully, one detected a soupcon of criticism because the Government were not giving enough of our money away—they were not going wholeheartedly enough in the European federal direction. So I will take no lectures from the Liberal Democrats on how to conduct ourselves in the Chamber and how to hold this unworthy Government to account.

The Government are after our money yet again. After the stealth taxes of the last Parliament, they have the gall to come before us today with this socking great bill, and they cannot even tell us exactly how much money is entailed. Nor, of course, can they tell us how the money will be spent. In the debate, these important points have already been dragged out of a reluctant Government. They do not know how much will be spent. They do not know entirely how it will be spent. They have very little control over how it will be spent. Even the money that we get back may be spent on causes and projects that we would not ourselves choose to finance. Under the rules of some schemes, indeed, projects must be ones that the British Government would not think worthy of financing; otherwise, they are ruled out of court.

So I say to the House, do not just look at the net cost, whatever that may be; my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere suggested £3 billion as a good starting price. Look at the gross cost: £7.5 billion or rather more—it has been in other years—going out from our taxpayers. All that money will be spent in ways to be determined by unelected people in Brussels, and quite a lot of it spent in places far from any of our constituencies.

Mr. Beard: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is making a most interesting fact-free point. I have the figures. In 1995—remember who was in office then—our net contribution, with abatements, was £4 billion; in 1996, it was £2.3 billion; in 2000, it was scheduled to be £2.4 billion. Those figures should hardly turn the earth upside down and cause the revolution to which he is pointing.

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman thinks that I am pointing to a revolution, as I have not come to my prescription for what might be done in place of the Bill. He has missed my main point, which is that he should look at gross spending, which is what requires taxation to be levied in this country.

My worry is that the Government, who recommend the surrender of 29 or more vetoes over important policy matters in the Nice treaty, are, by stealth, giving away the power of this place—and, therefore, of the British people—to tax themselves in the way in which they and their elected representatives choose.

Two documents accompany this debate. The first is the Bill, which refers to the Commission decision of September 2000 contained in an extended paper. If it is passed, the Bill will expressly write the paper into our legislation. It is most important that we study the paper as carefully as we do this slim Bill. The Bill, as I have said, is probably the dearest Bill that has ever come before this House, costing about £60 million for every word.

The document is even more worrying than the Bill itself. Labour Members and Ministers will argue that we have had finance Bills from the EU before. That is quite true; they have always caused me some difficulty, because they represent budgets that have high proportions of waste and fraud and expenditure in far-away countries that do not give any direct or indirect benefits to my constituents. What is worrying is the wording in the attached paper concerning future intentions over our abatement and the power of the Community to tax directly.

Dr. Palmer: I do not want to be unkind—I know that the right hon. Gentleman grew up before the numeracy hour was introduced—but he says that the total cost of the Bill will be £60 million a word. As the total cost—or gross cost, as he prefers—is £7 billion, does he reckon that there are only 100 words in the Bill?

Mr. Redwood: I make it about 120 words for the points in the Bill that matter for the purposes of legislation. I have not included the short title, which is

[Mr. Redwood]

rather longer than the Bill itself. If the hon. Gentleman studies the Bill carefully and learns to count, he will come to a similar conclusion. He needs more time to practise; he looks a lot older than me, so he could not have benefited from the numeracy hour either.

The important point in the attached document is paragraph 16, which states that the Commission shall undertake before 1 January 2006 a general review of the operation of the own resources system accompanied if necessary by appropriate proposals in the light of all relevant factors including the effects of enlargement on the financing of the budget of the European Union with the possibility of modifying the own resources structure by creating new autonomous own resources. From reading the document, one can see that it is wonderful prose. It is the kind of thing that one would fall asleep over whenever one picked it up. However, it is important that we do not fall asleep over this leaden, dead and deadly prose. What it means in normal language is that they have gone away and worked out how to impose direct, new European taxes on the British people—as well as citizens in other countries in the EU—because they are after our money and they would rather do it directly.

The House and those who may hear about this outside need not believe me on this. They will say, "We all know that the right hon. Member for Wokingham is very sceptical on these matters." However, they should certainly believe the ambassador of Belgium who, on the "Today" programme only this week, affirmed that the Belgian presidency, which is about to start, has as one of its main aims the creation of those very autonomous own resources—those very European taxes—that we see written into the document and referred to in the Bill. So before the House allows the Bill to proceed, we need to ask what those new taxes might be and why the Government have signed up to the possibility of investigating such taxes, with the presumption—they always like to say that they get on with all the colleagues in the EU—that they will go along with the conclusions of the report, which will undoubtedly involve imposing direct new taxes on British and other voters in the EU.

We already know exactly what the EU has in mind. The Paymaster General chaired a most important working group to try to get rid of what the EU calls unfair tax competition practices. She did so with the express intention of making corporation taxes more penal in the United Kingdom and its offshore islands and dependencies, which have more favourable business tax regimes. I am sure that that is one of the ideas that the EU intends to press home. There is no evidence that the British Government object in principle to that proposal; there is every evidence that they are collaborating by stealth.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Why cannot the right hon. Gentleman accept the assurances, which I gave earlier in answer to his question on this very point, that the Government do not support a new EU tax? I cannot put it clearer than that. We do not support such a tax and such matters should be decided by national Parliaments, accountable to national populations for the tax decisions that they make. Let him forget the fantasy strain of his argument.

Mr. Redwood: How can it be fantasy when the words appear in the paper, which the Government have sanctioned, that we are considering—a proper, high-level study of new European taxes? Will the right hon. Gentleman now stand up and say that he will strike those proposals from the document and that he will move an amendment to the Bill tonight? Will he say that the Government have made an awful mistake and that they do not want the EU to investigate those new taxes? If he moves such an amendment, I shall rush to the Lobby to vote for it. I should be a co-signatory of such an amendment if he would like to share the Order Paper with me when we debate the Bill again.

I offer the Chief Secretary the opportunity to intervene, but we see that the Government are signed up to the new European taxes. They will not strike those proposals from the document; they will not move a suitable amendment, as we know from the Government's actions. The Paymaster General chaired the working party, and the Chief Secretary cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and renounce her works, saying that, of course, it was a huge mistake that they were dragged into discussing unfair tax competition and that there is no unfair tax competition.

I should like the British Government to say, "We want taxes to be lower here than in competitive countries." I should like them to say, "There is nothing unfair about having lower taxes than other countries." That is a sign of good sense and good management, and the main aim of public policy should be to have lower taxes so that people and businesses prosper and more investment is attracted to this country. We could then have better public services because a much more prosperous economy would be taxed at a lower rate. If only the Government would understand that and, instead of occasionally paying lip service to it when speaking to business audiences, actually do it, they might lift the growth rate and make us more prosperous.

Mr. Beard: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why public services did not improve under the Governments of whom he was a member, who determined to have low taxes and under whom this country's public services rotted and declined to an unprecedented degree?

Mr. Redwood: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis at all. Many improvements were made in many public services during the Conservative years, which is why the Conservatives were regularly re-elected with large majorities.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Name the improvements.

Mr. Redwood: I should be very happy to name the improvements, but it would take a very long time; there are so many of them. A large number of improvements were made in the local police service in my area, with the recruitment of many more police and a falling crime rate in the later years. There were many new hospitals and schools, and many extra public service workers were recruited. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was a Member in those days and that he will remember the very long list of achievements that the then Prime Ministers

used to produce at Question Time in the days when Prime Ministers used to answer questions twice a week, instead of not answering them once a week.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is straying very wide of the mark, despite having answered the intervention.

Mr. Redwood: You are quite right, Madam Deputy Speaker. I stand corrected. I was drawn on by the intervention and wanted to answer it.

We cannot trust the Government on taxation because of their past actions. I give the Chief Secretary another example. He said that they would never accept new European taxes, but they were forced to accept the art levy. It is doing grave damage to the art market in Britain, as it was designed to do, and it does damage to art markets throughout the European Union. It will send many transactions and deals outside the EU altogether. At the time, the Government claimed that they were battling against the levy, but they then discovered that they could not succeed. Therefore, they caved in and we ended up with a tax that nobody in this country wanted.

We fear that the same will happen with the energy levy, which is one of the most obvious candidates mentioned by the Belgium Government, who now hold the presidency. They want to impose a Community-wide energy tax and to produce from it direct revenues for the financing of Community expenditure.

We know that the European Union harbours ambitions to turn VAT from a European-determined tax to a European-collected tax. It wishes to go the whole hog, so that all VAT is collected centrally through Brussels. We will no longer be able to determine under such a system how much is levied here and how much is levied in Belgium or France. It will be necessary to establish a grant formula rather like our complicated local government grant formulas to decide how much will be given back.

Will the Government guarantee today that they will never accept such a proposal? Will they reassure us and say to our partners in Europe, through this debate, that there is no point in the Commission working on such proposals or in member states discussing them because the British Government will veto them? I shall be happy to give way to the Chief Secretary if he will confirm that we will never accept such a VAT system. Once again, he stays in his place, so it is clear that there is another item on the Government's secret stealth agenda to transfer VAT to Brussels as a European tax. *[Interruption.]* He chuckles and laughs but he will not give us the guarantee that any decent Chief Secretary would give if he had no serious intention of negotiating on such matters.

Mr. Bercow: To support my right hon. Friend's argument, will he confirm that the European Parliament, with the active support of many of its Labour Members and in a self-important gesture, regularly seeks a direct relationship between the European Union and domestic taxpayers? Is that not part and parcel of the Parliament's bid to project its status from flyweight to heavyweight?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. European Union institutions are pushing out many tentacles to capture the powers that they need to have the full range of government control over British citizens and those elsewhere in the Union. I am sure that he is right to say that the Parliament would like to be involved in tax raising.

The most serious threat of tax raising comes from the work of the Commission that was put to the Council of Ministers and is nodded through when the British Government think that we are not watching or when they are asleep. They sometimes seem unaware of their own proposals, and they pretended to be so earlier in the debate when I challenged them.

Another tax that we know the European Union wishes to impose and could be covered under the measures in the Bill is the withholding tax on savings. The Government made much of fighting a battle to persuade the EU to downgrade, for the time being, its request for a direct tax to be imposed on people's savings held outside their country of origin within the EU and, instead, to put in place in complicated procedures for disclosure so that national Administrations could make sure that they had collected all the due tax.

I suspect, however, that the Government will be placed under enormous pressure to impose the whole withholding savings tax. The German Administration are keen to do that, and that would be very damaging to the offshore islands related to the United Kingdom under the Crown. I fear that the Government will not prove up to defending their position in the next four years. They gave more ground than they should have done in the past four years and they have never properly made the case in principle against the tax. They never seem to understand that it is a tax on enterprise, effort and prudence and that the tax would drive business outside the EU altogether.

The tax would not succeed in capturing business for Frankfurt at the expense of London, Luxembourg, Gibraltar or the Channel Islands. It would drive much business offshore from all those places if they were all brought under its provisions. The Chief Secretary remains silent on this point, because he is clearly unable to put categorically on the record that the Government will never go along with such measures. We have to assume that by negotiating, discussing and talking endlessly about those things, the Government are prepared to compromise, which means sacrificing a vital British national interest.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Government have not always been silent on the withholding tax. Does my right hon. Friend recall when no less a figure than the second person in the nation—the Deputy Prime Minister—was asked about it in the previous Parliament? Unfortunately, he did not answer yes or no because he did not know what it was.

Mr. Redwood: It was one of the few magic moments in that Parliament. The Deputy Prime Minister was, for once, at a loss for words when one of my hon. Friends asked a superb a question, which did all that it should by putting the Government on the spot and showing that they were hopeless. It resulted in a flurry of correspondence and press articles, which did much for the British people and their financial services industry by highlighting the dangers.

Dr. Palmer: The right hon. Gentleman presses Government Front Benchers for assurances. Would he

[Dr. Palmer]

press his Front Benchers for the same assurances if the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) were to lead it?

Mr. Redwood: I can do better than that. I can assure the hon. Gentleman about all the items that I have raised with Front Benchers, who are admirably led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague).

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, hon. Members are going wide of the mark

Mr. Redwood: You are right, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have been too generous, which is always my weakness in such matters.

The famous paragraph 16, which the Government did not mention, says that the Commission should undertake before 1 January 2006 a general review of the correction of budgetary imbalances granted to the United Kingdom, as well as the granting to Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden of the reduction in the financing of the budgetary imbalances in favour of the United Kingdom. We have a double whammy. Not only will the study consider new European taxes—of which there is an even longer list than I have given to the House—but it will go over the ground of the British budgetary contribution in the light of possible enlargement. That is most worrying because, once again, the Government have not been entirely open with the House. Instead, they have come here to say that they came, they saw, they conquered and that all was well because the budgetary rebate was safe in their hands. Yet we discover that there is another study, the only purpose of which is to wear down the UK.

Why did the British Government go along with the study? Why did they not say that the rebate has been negotiated—incidentally, by a far greater Prime Minister than we have today—and that the Prime Minister is sticking to it? Why did they not explain that we will veto any suggestion of changing the arrangements? The so-called windfall element—our just return under the excellent formula negotiated by previous Governments—has been partly given away. We discover from the infamous paragraph 16 that there is to be another study, and more pressure will be placed on the UK to find a formula that is so complicated that it will persuade some people that nothing damaging has been given away. However, when the consequences become apparent in a few years' time, we will undoubtedly find that we have lost out.

On considering that sorry document, the conclusion must be that we are in a state of flux. The legislation is provisional and we could be a lot worse off than under the current settlement, which is vague and difficult to pin down. Article 3 of the Commission document sets out a formula, which is too long and complicated to include in *Hansard*, that amounts to a blank cheque. We still do not know how the formula will apply, so we have a massive bill without a clear price.

Article 8 of the document states that the Community's resources that are referred to in articles 21A and B shall be collected by the member state in accordance with national provisions imposed by law which shall, where appropriate, be adapted to meet the requirement of Community rules. The Commission shall examine at regular intervals the national provisions communicated to it by the member states, transmit to the member states the adjustments it deems necessary in order to ensure they comply with Community rules, and report to the budget authority.

In other words, we have not only this colossal bill and the uncertainty about how much it will be in future, the giveaway on another study of our rebate and the huge study on European taxes, but in certain areas, particularly customs duties and levies, we are giving away wholesale this Parliament's power to decide how and when taxes should be levied, because anything that we do is subject to the approval of the Brussels governing machine.

Labour Members have tried to widen the debate.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): You lot are doing that.

Mr. Redwood: I have not widened the debate at all. I have stuck rigidly to the Bill. I am the first person to have mentioned the crucial document that we are meant to be debating because, naturally, the Government wanted to sweep it under the carpet. In their wider remarks, they have said that peace and trade flow only from the European Union and that if we had not joined, or if a Government, not a Conservative one, pulled us out, they would in some way be dissipated or removed. That is clearly untrue. Switzerland and the United States of America trade extremely successfully with the European Union even though they are not members. Germany would want to sell her BMWs to the United Kingdom, whatever our status. I am not recommending withdrawal.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he has said that he will not fall foul of the rule.

Mr. Redwood: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am not recommending withdrawal, but I think that Labour Members should correct the record when they have tried to make misleading points about our relationship with the European Community. Our position is that our relationship with the Community needs a thoroughgoing renegotiation, and the Government are unable to do that. We need to renegotiate the agriculture settlement, which is too dear and bad for customers and farmers, and mainly helps people in other countries. We need to renegotiate the regional and social funds, which are not well directed for British purposes.

I often go on holiday to Spain to enjoy the marvellous roads that my fellow taxpayers in Wokingham and I have generously paid for. Signs on all those roads, which carry the famous European logo with the 12 stars, or 12 apostles, tell me that they were lavishly paid for with European funds and that I was standing treat. It is a great sadness to me that I will not be going this year, so I will not get my money's worth. All those roads are being built with our money, and we do not get the benefit if we do not go on holiday. However, it would not be much of a holiday to have to put up with the air traffic controllers acting as they are at present.

The Government cannot to negotiate a decent deal on expenditure or on the protection of the rebate in perpetuity. There are difficulties with the detail of the

rebate, as my hon. Friends have pointed out. I am sure that other colleagues will make that point if they catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Government are selling the pass on the right of this House to have the sole charge of taxation, subject to the will of the British people in general elections. The Chief Secretary is scowling, but we have discovered in this debate that he cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and offer us the guarantees that we need.

Paragraph 16 of the Commission document is deeply worrying. We are on track for more European taxes, following the art tax that has already been imposed. We discovered last year at Budget time that the Government wanted to cut VAT on church maintenance and repairs; the Opposition wanted to support them. The Government were told by Brussels that they could not take that action, and they backed off. That was a harbinger of what will happen under this Government: more stealth taxes, more taxes from Brussels, more control of life from Brussels and the pass being well and truly sold.

I hope that my colleagues will stand up for the democratic right of this Parliament to be the only place that imposes taxation on the British people. I hope that they will stand up for the right of the British people to a tax rebate and a budget rebate from Brussels. I hope that they will stand up for the right to spend money on the things that we want, and not on what Brussels wants. I hope that they agree that this is a rotten Bill, delivered by a rotten Government who are trying to get it through the House before anyone notices it.

5.29 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): It is a joy to follow the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), because he is such an easy target. This is the first European debate of the Session, and it is interesting to reflect on the styles of the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill is minor and unimportant, whereas the right hon. Gentleman described it as dangerous and "a socking great Bill". He then went straight into pork-barrel mode, moaning that he wanted money spent in his constituency and nowhere else. I assume that that means in no other constituency than his own, rather than no other country than the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Gentleman made an error when he spoke about a tax on the art world. I am a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, which has considered the directive. It allows a royalty to be paid to artists on the second sale of their works of art—it is not a tax. I did not agree with the Government's resistance to the measure, because it strikes me as entirely fair: if someone makes a record and sells a number of copies, it is fair that they receive a royalty on each; likewise, it is eminently sensible that someone who creates an original piece of artwork should, when it is sold a second time for more than a certain value, get something back. That too is fair; it is not a tax. However, the right hon. Gentleman does not appear to be able to distinguish between genuine taxes and items that he wants to throw into the mix simply to frighten the populace.

Was the right hon. Gentleman frightened by something to do with Europe when he was a young child; or was it the experience of Mrs. Thatcher, now Lady Thatcher, ramming through the Single European Act 1985, which created the single European Union that he is now fighting to get out of; or was it the experience of Mrs. Thatcher similarly ramming through—at the time with his support—the legislation on the Maastricht treaty? Some experience must have frightened him so much that he acts in an irrational and somewhat paranoid way when matters relating to Europe come up. I do not know whether he has thought about the events ofthe past two months, when his party universally adopted the same attitude as his and was rejected by the people of the United Kingdom. If the Conservatives do not find some way of tempering that attitude, we will remain on the Government Benches and they on the Opposition Benches for a long time to come.

It was rather churlish of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton to mock my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard), who has some vision about Europe. The hon. Gentleman gave us a lesson on the "Nick Clegg MEP budget process", which he seemed to think a valuable contribution. That reminds me of why the Liberal Democrats have 52 Members of Parliament, compared with the Scottish Labour group's 55 Members. That is more than the whole Liberal Democrat parliamentary party. *[Interruption.]* Before my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) says it, let me acknowledge that the north-west group has more members than the Scottish group.

We must look far beyond budget processes for the heart of people's interest in European debates. Today's is the first European debate of the new Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury stated what has been achieved—a stabilising of the UK contribution to the EU budget. That is especially important when seen in the light of previous agreements. The 1988 agreement, reached under a Conservative Government, allowed for a 17 per cent. increase and the 1994 agreement led to a 22 per cent. increase over five years. Those are large increases, whereas the Bill reflects negotiations that resulted in a freezing of our contribution and a securing of the abatement.

We are not talking about Nice, as the right hon. Member for Wokingham appeared to think at one point. We are talking about the Berlin European Council agreement of March 1999. That is worth focusing on, because it is significant—it is not a minor matter. Perhaps we did not achieve everything we wanted in terms of changing the European Union budgeting system and its outcomes, but a solid step forward in the right direction was taken.

After increases of 17 per cent. and 22 per cent., stabilising our budgetary relationship with the other countries represents significant progress. Despite the thrashings about of Conservative Members today, had their party remained in government, the UK contribution could have continued to rise and I suspect that it would have, so we should acknowledge that a significant gain has been made. I have seen a briefing that describes the outcome as a triumph; I am not into triumphalism, so I would describe it as a significant and positive change in the relationship between the UK and the European Community.

The fact that the abatement is kept in full is significant. Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), referred to Lady Thatcher's securing of the rebate; there is no doubt that that was

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

commendable, and we should not take that achievement away from the lady. Now that time has passed, we have been able to retain the rebate when, as we move towards enlargement, there are clearly aspirations in the EU to try to get increased contributions from the UK. The matter is therefore important, and we should commend the negotiating team for its efforts.

We should also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) for pointing out the simple and important fact that the most significant thing is the transfer of resources from the value added tax base to the gross national product base. We discussed that transfer at various times in the European Scrutiny Committee; we think that it is correct and commendable.

It is true that some windfalls will be forgone, as the hon. Member for Hertsmere said. However, it is nonsense to stir up the debate with things that have to be given up, as talked about by the Opposition. Negotiation is about reaching a balanced settlement: one which retains our abatement in full and guarantees that, when we go into the enlargement process, we can similarly secure a negotiation that will continue throughout that period. That is an extremely strong positive which is not diminished in any way by the fact that we have had to accept that we must give up some windfalls from VAT/GNP transfers.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if had we taken the windfall, it would, in effect, have been double counting? We already benefit from the rebate, so we would benefit doubly, which would not be fair.

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend made that point very well in his contribution, and I hope that it will be taken seriously. He is right; if we demand, as we say in Scotland, that our eggs be double yolked, that would not be to our benefit later, as other European Community countries would notice our double counting and eventually demand redress. We would probably see a slip in our reputation, which is now extremely high in the EU; after the fracas at the end of the previous Government, we are making progress. As my hon. Friend knows, when we go to other European countries, we are treated with respect and seen as fair negotiators who are genuinely and positively involved in the European process. Sadly, that seems to have slipped from the agenda of most of the Conservative leadership.

There has been a move to make a slight amendment to the common agricultural policy. I would not make much of that, although I know that it sounds good to say that the amendment will bring benefits, from 2002, equivalent to £70 per family or £1 billion to the country. When I look at CAP regimes, the one that always strikes me as the most bizarre is that in which 1 billion euros is contributed to the growing of tobacco in the EU. None of that tobacco is of a sufficiently high health and safety standard to be used within the EU, so we provide export subsidies to companies to sell it to the Caribbean and Africa. In the light of that billion, just getting rid of that regime would probably improve the health of people in the Caribbean and Africa and would save as much as we will in the first tranche of CAP savings up to 2002.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while £70 a year is a worthwhile saving for the average family of four, nevertheless there remains the sum of about £930 a year that such a family is paying in higher food prices because of the disaster of the residual CAP? Much more needs to be done, even though that step is worth while.

Mr. Connarty: I agree; the point of discussing the Bill is to debate it as the first European Bill in the context of progress that has been made. We should not in any way see it as the only step that we can take; in fact, it is not the Government's only aspiration to make that amendment to the CAP. Many more will come during this Parliament and future terms of a Labour Government, and they will bring significant benefits. Some amendments, we know, are long overdue, but it is difficult to change an established regime which many farming communities throughout the EU, including some of our own, rely on and regard as a bankable cheque. We have to negotiate at great length before putting in a better and fairer regime and, at the same time, achieve the benefits for the consumer that my hon. Friend wants.

The negotiation was the first time that we had tried radically to reform the CAP, and we should have been given some credit for that. The churlish way in which it was dismissed by Conservative spokesmen was wrong. If the public outside see us, at the beginning of a new Parliament, getting into point scoring, that continues the devaluation of the process of government and opposition. The ranting of the right hon. Member for Wokingham will not make people think again about a Government policy. Sound advice on the budgeting process would probably carry much more weight with the public than his paranoia about the EU.

The public want us to develop a European Union that is prepared to give to people. To mock the road building in Spain, as the right hon. Gentleman did, is nonsense. When Spain joined the EU, our one great fear was that people from Spain would flood into our labour market and undermine our wage structures and much else.

David Taylor: Even the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Connarty: I am reminded that the shadow Chancellor came to this country from Spain, but I think that that was for political reasons.

Despite our fears when Spain came into the EU, people went back there because, through the structural funds, we lifted the Spanish economy so that it became attractive for them to return and use their skills and talents back in Spain, even if that meant that roads were built in Spain that the right hon. Member for Wokingham might think should have been built in his constituency. If we compare the gross national product of the two countries, it is clear where the money should go in a fair and balanced EU.

Similarly, the idea that we might discuss the taxation systems across the EU has been mocked, even though some of them work against the UK. Tax changes will not necessarily always benefit someone else. The rationalisation and sensible application of tax rules and regulations will benefit the UK. It is not good enough to try to score points by scaring people, particularly at the beginning of a Parliament, when there is no election in sight apart from the Conservative leadership election. Perhaps that is what lies behind the mocking; it certainly has nothing to do with the benefits to the people of the United Kingdom.

The rural economy was mentioned. After the BSE and foot and mouth debacles, and the extensive changes to the rural economy, the inclusion of the rural economy in the Berlin agenda in 1999 was visionary. We now realise that it is not just about farming and the common agricultural policy, but about the structure of society in rural areas, many of which are not directly reliant on farming but depend on people using the rural economy as an asset, bringing value to it and allowing others to remain in their rural communities. The negotiation team should be commended for the prominence given to the rural economy.

The Bill is preparatory; it is not the measure that will allow enlargement to proceed. I am keen on the enlargement of the EU, having served on the European Scrutiny Committee and visited the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. The EU would benefit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe described, in defence terms and in other ways not covered by the Bill; and also in terms of growing the market and the valuable common idea of a Europe of democratic nations—not one European state, but all of them giving and taking, balancing and growing the EU together—for example, by examining tax and the way in which that income is disbursed. Nations that have strengths should give to those that have weaknesses, but that should be done sensibly.

I am not a Minister, so I do not have to worry about acknowledging that I was upset by and a little ashamed of the Irish vote. I come from an Irish background and have many relatives in Ireland. It is clear that that vote was an attempt to keep the benefits of the European Union—which Ireland has received in large measure and used to grow its economy—for those already inside this "better" group of nations, and not to allow those benefits to be dissipated by being given to nations that need them much more. Most of the countries that I mentioned—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland—need the benefits of EU membership more than Ireland currently does. Ireland has reaped tremendous benefits from the EU that could now be available to people in the former Soviet bloc.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The terms of the debate are fairly narrow. We are discussing financial arrangements in the Community budget.

Mr. Connarty: Thank you for that direction, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that the document to which the right hon. Member for Wokingham referred dealt with the basis of enlargement. The negotiations have protected us from having to pay increasing amounts into the budget, as we have retained our abatement, but we must consider preparations for using that budget in different ways throughout the EU. We should see the Bill in those terms. It is not monumental, as it does not deliver what the Nice treaty will achieve when it is debated and—I hope—passed by EU nations. However, it prepares the way for those changes to be made without destroying our finances. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe said, less than 1 per cent. of taxation and expenditure will be going to the EU.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere made much of administrative spending, but it was pointed out that such spending amounts to only 1p a year for UK taxpayers. Administration expenditure is at about 5 or 6 per cent., which is low. That level does not frighten me, as long as we ensure good governance, implement Commissioner Kinnock's recommendations and run the budget efficiently. We should not be concerned only about keeping down the administration budget. If the audit function is removed in order to save money, the ability to run a fair budget is thereby destroyed. We must look underneath the expenditure level, rather than merely play around with the figures. A number of private organisations would like only 5 or 6 per cent. of their budgets to be spent on administration.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman may be making the case that Labour Front Benchers did not make. Does he not accept that it is natural to ask questions about administration, when it seems to be the fastest rising item in the budget?

Dr. Palmer: It is not.

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend may want to give us the figures, which he probably has to hand. I know that he is knowledgeable about these matters.

On the fraud and financial management recommendations, everyone was worried about fraud and corruption—for instance, with regard to the tobacco regime. When the regime was investigated, it was reckoned that the same tobacco leaf was being counted almost five times in the EU. Tobacco can be moved around the EU as a wet product before it dries out. It was suggested that Mafia connections were involved, but we did not find out about them after the investigation, as the gentleman in charge of the regime jumped, fell or was thrown from his fifth-story window in Brussels and died before his knowledge of the regime could be revealed.

If administration expenditure is increased because of an anti-fraud and audit drive, the money is being well spent. I am not worried about an increase to 5 or 6 per cent. if the money is being spent correctly. I would be much more worried if the amount were low and not enough officials were available to ensure that things were done correctly. That is why the increase does not bother me.

This Government believe—as I hope the Conservative Government did—that fraud in EC budgets is unacceptable. Hon. Members may remember that the anti-fraud office was based on an initiative suggested by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Mr. Prodi's first act as EU President was to appoint Mr. Kinnock as the Vice-President with responsibility for reform. When Mr. Kinnock came before the Scrutiny Committee, he gave a very good account of himself and his work. We should have commended our Front-Bench Members on making sure that they were fully behind the work in the negotiating round. It is significant that we now have a code of conduct for Commissioners and Commission officials that did not previously exist. We have a whistleblower's charter. Such matters may be administratively costly, but they are also sensible.

The Bill is productive. It will not change the world, but it does not allow the past trend of massive increases in the budget to continue. It is not a trivial measure, as the Liberal Democrats would have us believe. It stops the rot and turns the EU around. It achieves much, but much remains to be done. I support the Bill and commend it to the House.

5.50 pm

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I hope that you will forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I comply with custom for a few moments and mention my predecessor and my constituency.

My predecessor, the noble Lord Temple-Morris, is a unique man. He spent 23 years representing the Conservatives and four years representing Labour. He also qualified as a barrister and a solicitor. He was clearly a man who liked to try everything. Hon. Members on both sides of the House—naturally—have told me that he was a diligent constituency Member, and I shall try to continue his constituency work and emulate his long and ennobling career.

His footsteps are unusually difficult to follow. However, the seat of Leominster has a history of unusual Members. Although, in 1305, the towns of Ledbury and Bromyard decided that a Member of Parliament was far too expensive, at 2 shillings a day, and chose to withdraw their privilege, Weobley and Leominster continued to pay up. John Scott, who went on to be the Earl of Eldon, was elected in Weobley in 1783. Perhaps worrying about voter apathy, he asked about the best way to win Weobley. He was told that it was to drive into the town with a dray laden with cider. I have not tried that method of canvassing. John Scott also avoided it, and instead rode into the town, knocked on the door of the prettiest girl and kissed her. Later, when asked the reason for his popularity, he fought his way into the crowd and kissed the same girl. He went on to be Lord Chancellor.

Leominster Members have had a variety of fates. One shot himself, one was hanged, another was imprisoned in the Tower during the south sea bubble crisis, and Roland Stephenson, who I am sorry to say was a London banker, was outlawed for fraud in 1829. He escaped by boat to Savannah, where he was arrested and taken to jail in New York. Happily, we also boast two Prime Ministers so far: William Bentinck, later Duke of Portland, and William Lamb, later Lord Melbourne. In Leominster, as well as in history, being christened William is an auspicious start.

Like all before him, my predecessor but one, Sir Clive Bossom, who made his maiden speech here in 1960, followed in his father's footsteps to the House. It is therefore a great responsibility and a source of enormous pride to follow in the footsteps of my father, Sir Jerry Wiggin, who represented Weston-super-Mare for more than 28 years.

The constituency of Leominster is great not only in history, but in size. It is at least 2,500 sq miles, and one of the largest constituencies in England. Its borders run from Wales into Worcestershire, and from Shropshire to the Wye valley. Julian Critchley, the late Member for Aldershot, described it as Arcadia. Indeed, it is a truly beautiful part of the country. Hon. Members who wish to holiday there instead of Tuscany will be delighted by the large number of excellent hotels, inns and pubs. That is hardly surprising, given that the fields are full of cider apple orchards, vineyards and hops.

Attractions range from Eastnor castle to Offa's dyke, as well as many beautiful houses and our unique architecture: the famous black and white trail that runs through Pembridge. The main market towns are Tenbury Wells, Bromyard, Kington, Ledbury and Leominster. All have the some of the friendliest, most charming people.

It is no surprise that the county that produces the best food is also home to the finest and fittest soldiers. We are proud to host the SAS base at Credenhill. It is the only permanent garrison in the United Kingdom.

The terrible effects of foot and mouth mean that our tourism industry could do with all the support and visitors possible. It needs, not loan guarantees at 8.75 per cent., but a positive message backed by a properly funded English tourist board.

Foot and mouth has been a monumental crisis for my constituents. There have been several outbreaks in the constituency, and we have lost not only large numbers of stock but some hope for the future of farming. There has been widespread misery, and I pay tribute to those who have soldiered on resolutely. They have put up with the culling of healthy stock without confirmation of infection, D notices and movement restrictions, the stigma of dirty farms, the uncompensated loss to the value of cattle over 30 months, the bodies of culled stock lying awaiting removal for up to nine days in Winforton, the disinfectant at the gates, and the constant washing of vehicles and reclusive living.

The sense of helplessness was worst. Sometimes it was caused by Ministry vets culling healthy dairy herds while welfare culls were left waiting. We must not forget the suffering caused to animals that tried to lamb in chest-high mud. Our farmers care for their animals. They rightly feel a sense of rage against incompetence and cruelty when they watch their sheep starving or drowning, and know that they would be prosecuted for neglect under normal circumstances.

An outbreak was announced in Brecon today. The crisis is therefore far from over. Common-sense steps, such as supporting auctioneers who collect animals in collection centres, must be hurriedly implemented. The Government have created circumstances in which farmers might hope that their animals get foot and mouth because those whose stock is culled are better off than those who battle on against the virus. That contradiction has been created by pointless rules, such as the 20-day rule, which are applied without common sense.

If we are to prevent the disease from recurring, we must first hold a full and public inquiry. We must ban imported meat from countries where foot and mouth is endemic, and we must take any opportunity to reform the common agricultural policy. We must end the mechanism that pays farmers to drive the length of the country, collecting old ewes for the benefit of the subsidy.

The Government were quick to blame farmers for the spread of the virus through the movement of sheep, but they passed up the chance in Berlin to change the rules. The Government must grasp the nettle of reforming the CAP, which made the practice widespread. We do not have much time. Farmers in countries such as Poland would also like to enjoy agricultural subsidies. When they join, where is the money to pay for them? Which of our world-class public services will be cut to top up the contribution?

We have already lost the accident and emergency department of Kidderminster hospital, and the lives of my constituents are at risk from the distances that they are required to travel. We cannot afford to miss the chance to reform the CAP again. We must remember that it costs the average family £15 extra a week, yet we agree that British farming does not have the chance to compete on a level playing field.

We must seize every opportunity to reform the CAP; we must not miss the chance. We must lead the way, and cut the Gordian knot.

5.58 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on his first contribution. It was a lucid and at times humorous speech and it clearly showed that he is already well aware of the problems of his constituency. He comes across sincerely, as a man who cares. We wish him well.

One of the most important debates in the European Union in 1996, 1997 and 1998 centred on the document entitled "Agenda 2000". The debate was conducted in the EU institutions, but it also took place in the various national Parliaments. It examined enlargement and how that would improve existing member states and bring political stability and democracy to countries that aspire to EU membership. It was and is a debate about regional policy, and about how the structural funds and the cohesion funds might be developed to the betterment of the EU. It is a debate about how the common agricultural policy might be reformed, in the context of the changing world in which we live, to meet the new stresses and strains that enlargement will inevitably bring to it. It is also a debate about how the European Union could be funded in the future and how the own resources issue could satisfactorily be resolved.

Following that continuing debate and the discussions that have been held on those issues, an extremely important European Council summit took place in Berlin in March 1999. The Bill before us today follows on from the decisions taken at that meeting. I honestly believe that that European Council meeting in Berlin came to a conclusion that was good for the European Union. There were also conclusions that were good for the British Government's negotiating position and for Britain's national interest. I say that for three reasons.

The first reason is that a clear decision was taken at Berlin to bring the common agricultural policy under much tighter control. Decisions were taken to cap the CAP, so to speak. It was agreed that, by 2006, agricultural spending in the EU would be 2 per cent. less than in 2000. Many of us would like to have seen a much greater reduction in expenditure on agriculture. However, that decision was enormously significant, especially if we bear in mind the fact that it was decided at the Edinburgh European Council meeting just a few years earlier to increase agricultural expenditure by 9 per cent. Compared with just a few years ago, therefore, progress has been well and truly made.

The second notable outcome of the Berlin Council concerned regional policy, particularly with regard to the cohesion fund and the structural funds. Reference was made earlier to the importance of the MacDougall report, which was written some time ago. The Berlin Council still addressed the underlying theme of the MacDougall report, which asked how a single European market could pull together in an integrated social sense. A market, wherever it may be, cannot exist without a sense of economic and social cohesion behind it. Markets will soon fall apart unless they are underpinned by that kind of ethos. That is why I particularly welcome the clear decision that was taken, after Berlin, to establish objective 1 status in many parts of the EU that had not previously had it.

Objective 1 status is for those parts of the EU whose gross domestic product is less than 75 per cent. of the EU average. Unfortunately, many parts of the United Kingdom fall into that economic category. I say "unfortunately" because it is nothing to be proud of that parts of the United Kingdom are among the poorest parts of the European Union. Areas that have now been categorised as objective 1 areas include Cornwall, south Yorkshire and also Merseyside, which retained its objective 1 status. In this context, Northern Ireland received a special objective 1-related package. West Wales and the south Wales valleys also received objective 1 status for the first time.

As a Member who comes from south Wales, I welcome the fact that, because of the Government's negotiating success in Berlin, the economy in south and west Wales is receiving an injection of £1.2 billion over the next seven years. That money is desperately needed to rejuvenate the economy of more than two thirds of Wales. It is currently being used to develop training, to provide infrastructure and to ensure a different and much stronger base for the Welsh economy. If we had not achieved that negotiating success in Berlin, that money would not today be providing the tremendous boost that it is to the Welsh economy.

That money is being spent not according to a diktat from Brussels, as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) alleged, but on the basis of partnership. Local authorities, the voluntary sector, the National Assembly and local businesses are coming together in Wales in a true spirit of partnership to determine their own priorities for spending the money that is coming from the European Union. That is the true principle of subsidiarity: that decisions are taken as close to the people as is practicable. That is my vision of what the European Union should be about in future.

The money coming in to areas such as south and west Wales as a consequence of the Berlin decision has meant that, for the first time, public expenditure in Wales is going beyond the Barnett formula. We are determined never to repeat what happened under previous Administrations, when money was not claimed from Brussels because there was no match funding already in Wales. Now, because extra resources are coming through beyond the Barnett formula, we are confident that that will never happen again. When there is money to be spent, it must be spent.

In addition to objective 1 status benefiting the United Kingdom, objective 2 status is doing the same. Objective 2 applies to rural areas of the Union that are suffering real difficulty and to those areas suffering industrial decline. Some 14 million people in the United Kingdom are now living in areas benefiting from objective 2 status, which I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will warmly welcome.

The third important outcome of the Berlin Council was the new formula to be introduced for the revenue side of European Union finances. A key decision, as has already been stated, was that a greater proportion of moneys raised from contributions will be linked to gross national product, while fewer contributions will come from VAT and Customs payments. That is enormously important because it is a far fairer formula than the one that we had before. It is fairer on the United Kingdom and on poorer

[Mr. Wayne David]

states of the European Union. Moreover, it is a formula that will substantially reduce the likelihood of fraud. That is an important aspect of the new settlement.

Another important aspect is the fact that we have maintained the rebate that was first negotiated in Fontainebleau in 1984. It is worth underlining how significant an achievement that is. We should not forget that many member states of the European Union fought tooth and nail—that is not putting it too strongly—to try to take away the United Kingdom's abatement. It is to the Government's great credit that we have successfully maintained it. I want to emphasise that that was a huge achievement. Crucially, too, maintaining the ceiling on own resources at 1.27 per cent. of EU national income was something that I would expect Members on the other side of the House to welcome as much as we do. Taken together, the achievements negotiated in Berlin were very notable. For the first time ever, spending in the European Union will be less in real terms at the end of this financial period.

As hon. Members have noted, this is a short Bill, containing just two clauses. However, it is a Bill of enormous significance. Despite what some people have suggested today, it is not about federalism or about creating some kind of mythical European superstate. It is not about taking power away from the United Kingdom and giving it to strange bureaucracies overseas. This practical Bill is all about creating a fairer and more effective funding mechanism for the European Union in the future. I sincerely hope that it gets the full support of the House.

6.10 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I congratulate my hon. Friends on their maiden speeches. They have a great advantage over me: they have completed this ordeal, which is still ahead of me.

I should like to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Martin Bell. He was the first Independent Member elected to the House for 50 years. He tells the story of how, shortly after his election, he was invited to tea by Barbara Castle. Over tea and biscuits in the House of Lords, she summed up her advice, drawn from her 60-year career in politics. She said to him, "Young man"—which, he confesses, completely won him over—"whatever else you do, you must never be afraid to stand alone." Of all people, this former war reporter probably needed that advice the least.

Martin Bell had stood alone courageously in the Balkans when he reported the wars in that region in all their brutality. In the House, too, he stood alone. He stood alone when he forced the Government to find time to ratify the Ottawa convention on land mines. He stood alone when he controversially spoke out against the air strikes against Iraq. He also stood alone when he campaigned to overturn 50 years of Whitehall stonewalling on the question of far east prisoners of war.

Be it Serbia, NATO or the Ministry of Defence, Martin Bell took on powerful opponents and won. However, two opponents in the end defeated him. The first, I am happy to say, was my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) who defeated him in the general election. The second was the Speaker's Chair, because he campaigned long and hard for the Cross Benches below the Bar of the House to be recognised as part of the Chamber, but he failed miserably. That is a good lesson to all new Members on the power of the Speaker's Chair in such matters.

Many people come to the House as idealists and leave it as cynics. I have got to know Martin Bell quite well in the past couple of years, and it strikes me that he came to the House as a cynic and left as an idealist. The man in the white suit will be as missed in the corridors of the Palace of Westminster as he will be by people on the streets of the Tatton constituency, whose interests he represented so well. I am greatly honoured to take his place in the House.

The very name of the Cheshire constituency that I now represent is a clue to the fact that it is not a single community, but a collection of communities. Tatton is not a town or a village. In fact, no one lives in Tatton—or not any more. Tatton is a building. I believe that I am one of only two Members whose constituency is named after a building. If hon. Members are trying to remember who the other one is, I shall put them out of their misery—it is the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper).

Unlike the Brighton Pavilion, Tatton Park is the rather austere, imposing ancestral home of the Lords Egerton, who are now deceased. It is now the National Trust's most visited property, and home to many popular exhibitions and concerts in my constituency. On Tatton Park's doorstep is the beautiful and historic market town of Knutsford. Once a major stop for travellers on the road to Manchester, it has long been replaced in that function by the less historic and frankly less beautiful M6 Knutsford service station. Thankfully, the coaching inns on King street remain, and more leisurely tourists still visit in large numbers.

Knutsford got its name from the place where the Danish King, King Canute, forded the River Lily—hence Canute's ford. I can report to the House that the majority of the residents in Knutsford, like me, take what could be called a Danish view of the Government's plan to join the single currency. Knutsford may be steeped in history but it has its modern problems, such as the constant pressure of development and traffic and the fear of crime. I shall seek to overturn the recent decision of Home Office Ministers—the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is a former Home Office Minister—to deny us funding for closed circuit television. There is also the noise and pollution from Manchester airport's second runway. One of my priorities will be to try to change the law to allow airports to fine planes that deviate unnecessarily from agreed flight routes and noise limits.

Around Knutsford stretches the fertile Cheshire plain, in which lie the beautiful rural villages of Mobberley, Pickmere, Plumley, Allostock, Byley, Whitley, Comberbach and Lower Peover—I have left out half of them. Lower Peover is an idyllic village with a fantastic local pub called "The Bells of Peover", in which General Eisenhower and General Patton once planned the D-day landings. These days drinkers plan who will buy the next round.

All those villages have suffered from the collapse of rural services, the deep recession in agriculture and the disaster of foot and mouth disease, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) eloquently referred. Farmers in Crowley, who are now

struggling with a recent outbreak, or employees at the Chelford market who have seen their jobs disappear, do not agree with the Prime Minister that we are on the home stretch in tackling the consequences of this disease. I shall do everything that I can to ensure that Cheshire's rural communities get the support they need.

On the western edge of the constituency are Barnton, Rudheath and Anderton—three suburbs of the old ICI salt town of Northwich—which have often been neglected in the politics of the constituency. I am determined that that will end. At the other end of the constituency lie the former cotton towns of Wilmslow and Handforth, and the famous village of Alderley Edge, which is known to locals for its infamous traffic problems. Together they make up a wonderful residential area that is also home to many successful companies, including the research laboratories of Astra Zeneca, where world-leading research is carried out into cancer and heart disease.

Wilmslow is famous across Britain as the home of football players, "Coronation Street" stars and pop singers. However, the town's most famous celebrity is known simply as Pete. He was an unfortunate man who was found garrotted, beaten and stabbed on Lindow common. Wilmslow is not a violent place, so that discovery came as a bit of a shock. The local police launched a murder investigation. Inquiries were made and suspects were interviewed, but even the excellent detective work of the Cheshire police could not solve this murder, for it turned out that Pete had been dead for 2,000 years, preserved in the peat bog that gave him his name. He now lives in the much safer surroundings of the British museum.

Another famous Wilmslow resident was the code breaker and computer pioneer, Alan Turing. It is a sad irony that the man who did more than almost anyone else to defeat the Nazi tyranny by breaking the Enigma code was persecuted in Britain for his homosexuality, and committed suicide. It is a welcome sign of a more understanding age that a statue of Turing has just been unveiled in Manchester.

Although much of the Tatton constituency is prosperous—not for nothing is it the place where Mr. Rolls met Sir Henry Royce—there are pockets of deprivation on the Longridge, Spath Lane and Colshaw Farm housing estates, and in many of the rural areas. I shall do everything that I can to help those communities.

I am delighted to have been elected to represent such a fine constituency, but it deeply concerns me that so many fewer of my constituents chose to participate in the election. Our turnout, like that of many constituencies, fell by more than 10 per cent. Some people argue that that is nothing to worry about, as it is a sign of a contented population who are happy with the present state of affairs. I believe that that is a dangerous and mistaken understanding of what is happening out there in the country.

My constituents are not content with the state of the national health service, the education system or the transport system. They are not happy to go on paying ever more taxes, or that their streets are not safe. Far from it—they are deeply angry about all those things, and they feel that we, their politicians, are not listening to them. The people of Cheshire feel remote from what is going on in Westminster. They see our debates and watch Ministers on television, but they do not hear much that relates to their daily lives. They feel even remoter from what is going on in the institutions of the European Union, whose financing we are discussing.

New directives emerge from the bureaucratic ether, and no one bothers to explain to the people and the companies affected where they came from or why they are needed. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money is spent on hugely wasteful EU projects, such as the aid budget or the common agricultural policy. Everyone throws up their hands and says, "We know it's a waste of money, but there's nothing we can do about it."

The politicians of Europe, including our own British Government, proceed down the path of ever closer European integration, drawing up plans for European armies, European constitutions and European taxes. No one stops to ask the people of Europe whether this is actually the direction in which they want to travel. It is striking that the only two countries that have asked their peoples, in the last year, whether they are happy with the direction that Europe is taking have received a resounding no as an answer. But the reaction of European politicians to the results of the Irish and Danish referendums has been to bury their heads in the sand and pretend that they did not happen.

This Bill and the Bill that we shall debate tomorrow are supposed to pave the way for the enlargement of the European Union. No one is more passionate about enlargement than I am; no one is more anxious than I am to see the countries of central and eastern Europe brought in from the cold, and welcomed fully into the concert of democratic European nations. Let me declare an interest: I am part-Hungarian. My grandmother's family fled to Britain from Budapest just after the war because they had lived through the devastation of the Nazi tyranny, and wanted to escape the tyranny of Soviet rule. In 1956, their house in London became a home for refugees from the Hungarian uprising.

The lessons that I learn from my family's past are these: one must not impose political systems on peoples who are unwilling to accept them; one should not allow a gap to open up between the governed and the governing; and one cannot afford to stop listening. The situations are of course very different, but the lessons are ones that we in Westminster, and those who are shaping the future of the European Union, would do well to remember.

I thank the people of Tatton for sending me to this House.

6.21 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). His maiden speech was elegant, and deserves compliment. He dealt graciously with his predecessor, who, obviously, had proved a substantial embarrassment to his party in many ways, and drew out many of the strong aspects of that Member's participation in the House's affairs. He also made several points drawn from his family's experience, notably that there is something to be learned from this country's willingness to accept people from troubled states, support them and look on them with tolerance rather than suspicion. That is certainly a message that I take from his story, and I am sure that he takes it as well.

I also welcomed the speech of the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), partly because, like him, I was preceded here by another member of my family.

[Mr. Mark Todd]

My grandfather was a Member of Parliament, and I appreciate some of the difficulties of following in political footsteps within the family. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will face the same task.

Before turning to the debate, I should mention two items of personal history. First, shortly after I was elected, a hit list of newly elected Labour Members, along with their supposed weaknesses, appeared in *The Observer*. I was described as being, among other things, a maverick Euro-sceptic. I do not know with what substance the description had been given—I certainly had not communicated any of my views to anyone who might have been the author of the piece—but my speech may provide at least some basis for an understanding of why it might have appeared.

Secondly, I have some direct experience of dealing with a tiny part of the budget of the European Commission, which forms the basis of this debate. For about three and a half years, on behalf of the company for which I then worked, I ran a small business in Scotland as part of my activities. Its main marketplace was the European Commission. It sold services comparing databases for the Commission's research and development budget, and also made bids for a variety of research and development projects of its own.

That experience showed me a number of things. First, although this was the core activity of my business and I therefore pursued it with vigour, as a taxpayer I found it hard to defend the projects in which we were invited to engage. I could not see any obvious value in them; and the careful way in which they were audited by the European Union, which indicated some of the user bases, rather bore out my impression that very few people engaged with the databases that we produced or learned anything from them. That concerned me.

Secondly, there was the process by which decisions on the budget were made. The individuals involved occasionally let slip their national preferences regarding the way in which decisions ought to be made, and the partners who should be chosen in the putting together of successful projects for bids. That disappointed me. The process was not always objective; certainly, it was important to listen carefully to the language of the person with whom one was dealing, and to messages that might have been communicated about how best to seek a successful bid from the European Commission. I never encountered corruption, but I did encounter practices that I considered to stray from true objectivity, and projects that I found difficult to defend as a taxpayer, while defending them vigorously as chairman and managing director of a company that thrived on winning.

I have some direct experience, then, that confirms some of what was said by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). He made a surprisingly forceful speech, on behalf of his party, about the need for reform in the European Union and a tighter focus on its processes and objects. I share that view 100 per cent. There are some aspects of what the EU does that it will inevitably do ill—activities that, as far as I can tell from my experience, are largely carried out to foster the aspirations of individual members of the Commission and some of their supporters in individual member states. I do not believe that those activities were part of the core purposes of the European Union, to which I certainly subscribed when I voted in favour of joining the Common Market in the 1975 referendum.

I have described my experience of the research and development budget, but I am sure that there are other cases in which what appeared to me to be peripheral expenditure could have been tightened and sharpened, in a downward direction, towards clearer objectives that had more to do with the propagation of free trade and common-market principles within a single trading area.

As for the Bill and its mechanisms, the first element is that we are being invited, rightly, to applaud the Government's performance and their success in controlling the European Union's budget. It contrasts sharply with the supposed successes of the Conservatives when, in government, they had the opportunity to act rather than talk. We often observe a striking contrast between the Conservatives' rhetoric on European matters and the delivery of what they promised when they had that opportunity.

In 1988, when there was negotiation for the setting of the EU budget, a real-terms 17 per cent. increase was agreed by, presumably, the Government led by Lady Thatcher. The handbag wielded in anger apparently did not deliver a defensible outcome, given some of the Conservative speeches that we have heard this afternoon.

In 1994, under the perhaps less robust leadership of John Major, there was a 22 per cent. increase in the budget agreed in real terms. The contrast is marked, therefore. The success of the recent budget negotiation was to hold the budget in real terms over the period of the agreement, which is to be applauded.

The second element touches on the foundations of the agreement—common agricultural policy reform. There, it is possible to overstate what was achieved. Some modest and welcome steps were taken, but modest is the word. The gentle progress towards free-market prices was incomplete. Most commodities traded within the CAP area are substantially more expensive than those in world markets. One can argue whether those market prices are entirely relevant, but there is a significant imbalance. One of my hon. Friends mentioned the substantial burden that consumers in this country and the rest of the EU bear to maintain that subsidy for agriculture throughout the EU.

The agreement will not be a rational basis for defending agricultural policy in the forthcoming World Trade Organisation round. Whenever that gets going, we will find ourselves under immense pressure to make further progress towards liberalisation. Among the more shocking omissions was the failure to progress at all with liberalisation of the sugar regime, which guarantees higher prices in this country, albeit not at a direct cost to the taxpayer. Furthermore, the ludicrous milk quota system acts as a means of controlling production and impeding free markets. No progress was made with those initiatives, which could have been taken, and that is unwelcome.

Nevertheless, some progress has been made. There was a welcome delivery of some savings to consumers, some steps towards a truer free market position and greater transparency in agricultural support. Those should all be applauded, but perhaps with one hand and not as vigorously as they might have been.

The third element is the reform process, which brings me back to my original argument. From my experience—perhaps the position has profoundly changed—there needs to be a thorough reform of the way in which spending decisions are taken, of spending priorities in the EU and of the management of that process. I found it to be inefficient in many respects.

I welcome the fact that Commissioner Kinnock has been given that brief, which is demanding—I would love to have it myself. It is a challenging task and I am sure that he is relishing it. He is certainly making some progress, which is to be commended. I would be most uncomfortable about agreeing a long-term funding basis without some clear understanding that a reform agenda is being followed through by those who are sent by this country to serve on the European Commission.

The concern about reform provides a platform for certain doubts, but this is not a debate about the euro and I would not want to make it one. At issue in the decision about whether we should take that further step in European integration are the concern about EU institutions and the way in which they work and whether we have a sufficiently flexible and transparent arrangement for managing European policy. I hope at some other stage to expand on some of the arguments that are outside the scope of this debate. One issue that is certainly relevant, however, is whether the institutions and the reform agenda that has been agreed are sufficiently robust for us to feel comfortable about taking that further step of integration.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Without going beyond the bounds of the debate, will the hon. Gentleman give us his reaction to the recent statement of Chancellor Schröder that he would like the European Commission effectively to become the Government of Europe?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I know from the hon. Gentleman's earlier remarks that he is aware of what I was about to say. Perhaps, I need not say it.

Mr. Todd: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You need not.

First, we need a sharper definition of the purpose of the European Union. We need to decide what it is most efficient for the European Commission to deliver, and much tighter administration of the Commission's tasks for which we are deciding the funding today.

Secondly, we need far better scrutiny in this country and this House of the matters that we are voting on today and the financial implications. I read with interest—I only read it this afternoon because of this debate—some key aspects of the House of Lords Select Committee report on the funding of the European Union in which a Commissioner had been quoted as saying that the subject of today's debate was a very small matter. Indeed, one of my hon. Friends said that the budget under discussion was small in relation to the UK public spending budget and that one could exaggerate the significance that it should be given. That neglects the argument that, in total public spending terms, the UK contribution is probably worth between 2p and 4p on income tax in net terms—our net contribution to the EU. That is of some weight and significance and we should take careful measure of it. We debate some matters of much less weight at considerable length in this House, so the matter deserves tighter scrutiny.

The systems that are in place clearly do not work well enough. Many hon. Members do not engage properly in scrutinising EU legislation. Constituents tell me that such legislation is nodded through and I can hardly dissent. Many provisions that are adopted on our behalf are not properly scrutinised. We should make a better hand of that.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. It gives us the chance to applaud what the Government have done; I genuinely do so, as we have taken important steps. I am a committed European and strongly endorse the European Union, but I want Europe to be run more sharply, with a clearer focus on objectives that we can all share, rather than on aims that seem to engage minor interests throughout the continent of Europe. This is also an opportunity to set some more challenging tasks for future negotiations, which I hope that this Government will lead.

6.38 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I rise to make my maiden speech during an important debate on Europe and our political place in this great continent. Without having to resort to convention, as the new Member for Moray, it is a great honour to speak about my fellow Scottish National party parliamentarian, Margaret Ewing. Margaret still represents the constituency in the Scottish Parliament and she will be remembered across the Floor of the House, I hope, as a passionate advocate for Scottish independence and social justice and as a supremely diligent constituency Member.

Margaret's commitment to her constituents was a hallmark of her 18 years in the House, as was her work, in particular, with the fishing and whisky producing communities. The warm homes group, which she established, is one of her legacies in this House and it goes from strength to strength. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will wish her well in her continuing work in the Scottish Parliament.

Moray has of course been inextricably linked with the independence struggle of Scotland over the centuries. Robert the Bruce was taken with the loyalty of the men of Moray who fought for liberty. The Bruce family is still linked with the area through the title of the Earl of Elgin.

More recently, the area and the independence movement have been closely associated with the Ewing family; through my predecessor Margaret, obviously, but also through Winnie Ewing. The current president of the Scottish National party represented the area as Europe's longest-serving Euro-parliamentarian and is known affectionately as Madame Ecosse. Before that, she represented the then seat of Moray and Nairn. As the first non-Ewing to represent Moray for the SNP in the fourth decade of SNP victories in the constituency, I face a daunting task but I shall pursue it with relish.

Tradition in this place dictates that a new Member should make mention of the geography and nature of his or her constituency in a maiden speech. That is not difficult for me as Moray is, without doubt, one of the most beautiful parts of the country. It stretches from the Moray firth coastline in the north, with its dolphins and porpoises, through the laich of Moray into Speyside and

[Angus Robertson]

to the Cairngorms in the south. It takes in the fishing towns of Buckie, Lossiemouth, Hopeman and Burghead; the cathedral city of Elgin; and ever-blooming Forres, which never seems to stop justifiably winning prizes for its beautifully tended flower displays, gardens and parks.

Moray is also known internationally for its place on the religious and spiritual map. Apart from active congregations of all major Churches, the area boasts both the world's most northerly Christian monastery at Pluscarden, which is run by the Benedictines, and the Findhorn foundation which attracts visitors from around the world.

The area is also blessed with its own pleasant micro-climate, so while the roch wind might be blowing elsewhere in Scotland and the rest of the country is dreich, the chances are that it is sunny and warm in Moray.

Many Members have made great play of the fact that their constituencies or towns are sited on seven hills. However, I am blessed with a happier variation in one of the main whisky producing towns. As locals boast to visiting Italian tourists, "Rome might have been built on seven hills, but Dufftown stands round seven stills." As if seven stills were not already enough, I can make the happy claim to represent more than 50 per cent. of Scotland's distilleries, which is something that I plan to research fully.

As well as my cautious plans for whisky tasting, I intend to be a strong advocate for that industry and for those constituents who work in it. I shall also seek an end to the discrimination sanctioned by the House against Scotland's greatest export through penal and discriminatory rates of duty.

It is a great pleasure to turn to the debate, and I do so as a proud Scot and European. I share with everybody in my country the positive benefits of immigration, which has made Scotland a diverse, multicultural and outward-looking country. Like the rest of Scotland, Moray has benefited from the welcome addition of Scots Chinese and Scots Asian communities. The many service men and women who serve at RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Kinloss—predominantly from England—have also boosted the area.

In my case, immigration to Scotland is immediately relevant as my mother and grandmother came from the continent in the wake of the second world war. Perhaps that is one reason that I feel so strongly about the development of Europe, not only as a vehicle for greater social, political and economic progress in this time of globalisation, but as the institutional guarantor of peace.

The treaty of Nice is the mechanism that will help facilitate the enlargement of the European Union and reunite our continent after the false division maintained since the middle of the previous century. My only regret about the impending, welcome accession of countries from central and eastern Europe is that Scotland still lacks that equality of status in the international community and a direct seat at the top table of the EU. Shortly, both the Czech and Hungarian Governments will join those great sea-going powers, Austria and Luxembourg, with more direct say over the Scottish fishing industry, despite not having a single centimetre of coastline.

Ironically, the treaty of Nice makes it clear for the first time that, with the planned realigned weighting of votes, the different constituent parts of the UK would have more votes jointly were we directly represented within the EU. I look forward to the day when we can support each other's needs on this island not only as good neighbours, but as equals.

As a first step, I very much welcome the recent political declaration of constitutional regions and nations involving Bavaria, Catalonia, North-Rhine Westphalia, Salzburg and Scotland. The declaration was signed in the spirit of the Nice treaty, which also seeks greater democracy, flexibility and transparency in European institutions. Among other key pledges in the declaration, the Scottish Executive approved the text which considers it "vital" that constitutional regions and nations should be able to refer directly to the European Court of Justice when their prerogatives have been harmed.

I am grateful to Members on both sides of the House, especially those Labour and Liberal Democrat Members representing English and Welsh constituencies, who have already signed my early-day motion 3 on the subject. It would be a shame if no Members from Scotland, outside the SNP, were prepared to support the Scottish Executive on the subject, but I look forward to some of them signing the early-day motion.

The Nice treaty also displayed other challenges—as was shown by the recent referendum result in Ireland. I do not mean a challenge in the conventional sense of treaty ratification, but turnout in that plebiscite was little more than 30 per cent. Turnout has been consistently down in almost all European democracies, including the UK. If European co-operation and our domestic democratic processes and political legitimacy continue to be undermined by a growing sense of cynicism and apathy, we face the dangers of extremism, as has been seen in Austria and elsewhere.

That is why I devote my concluding comments to democratic involvement. I very much welcomed the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris)—unfortunately he is not in the Chamber—as he addressed the challenge of encouraging more people back to the ballot booths. However, although I pose the same questions as he did, I do not share his opposition to fairer voting systems.

Speaking as the youngest Member of the House who represents a Scottish constituency, I am convinced that one change might help to engender an interest in voting among young people: lowering the voting age to 16. That has the support of Members on both sides of the House and I make the suggestion in the non-partisan hope of boosting democracy.

Does it not strike hon. Members as ludicrous that we can raise and spend tax money levied on 16 and 17-year-olds? Is it not ludicrous that we can pass legislation that affects their working lives and economic well-being? Is it not obscene that we can send young service men and women into hazardous situations where they may give their lives for their country? It is obscene that 16 and 17-year-olds are judged old enough to pay tax, get married or die for their country, but are not granted the equality that enfranchisement brings. As Ministers in this place and in the Scottish Executive consider suggestions for boosting the teaching of civic life and modern studies, would it not help to show 16 and 17-year-olds the relevance of the democratic process if we gave them the vote?

Finally, 34 years ago, SNP president Winnie Ewing made her maiden speech in this House after her victory in the Hamilton by-election. She took that opportunity to call for the voting age to be lowered from 21 to 18. It gives me great pleasure to progress that debate. It might help to restore interest in and relevance to the democratic process in this country and act as a positive development in the wider European context.

6.48 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Berlin summit was a special day for me. It began on 23 March 1999—my 50th birthday—so it sticks with me as I grow older and, perhaps, a little wiser.

We have heard first-rate speeches from new Members: my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) and the hon. Members for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and for Moray (Angus Robertson). The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) and I might take issue with the hon. Member for Moray about places of beauty—Cheshire can match anything that Scotland has to offer—but as my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) is the Whip I had better not develop that point.

I share the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Tatton about one of the greatest mathematicians who ever lived. Alan Turing was treated disgracefully by Britain. It is great to hear a Conservative Member express those sentiments so strongly.

I have a great deal of knowledge of the centre of the hon. Gentleman's constituency, Knutsford, as my office was there for a considerable time in a previous incarnation. He is absolutely right—it was Canute's ford, Elizabeth Gaskell wrote there, and it is a very interesting place. I noticed that the hon. Gentleman airbrushed out the last-but-one representative for Tatton, but perhaps we can discuss that some time with a pint at "The Bells of Peover". It is a pity that he drifted into the Eurosceptical note at the end of his speech, but never mind; it was an excellent speech, reflecting the very interesting constituency that he now represents.

When my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary opened the debate, he referred to points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire—

Mr. Todd: South Derbyshire.

Mr. Miller: I am sorry; I meant my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd). The 1988 and 1994 agreements allowed for considerable real-terms increases—17 per cent. in 1988 and 22 per cent. in 1994. The contrast with the treaty that we are debating today is that Berlin stabilises EU spending.

It would be worth while for the House to reflect on the history of such agreements over a number of years, and specifically on what happened in 1980. It is brilliantly set out in Sir Ian Gilmour's book, "Dancing with Dogma". I have heard it said that it should have been called "Dancing with Wolves", but I believe that the book came before the film. The book sets out how, at that time, the contribution for the first two years of the process for that negotiation was reduced, by skilled negotiation, by two thirds. However, when Ian Gilmour and Peter Carrington returned to Northolt, they were harangued.

To put the matter into perspective, I shall read a short paragraph:

> "We landed at Northolt and drove straight to Chequers where Mrs. Thatcher was holding a seminar on the Middle East. She had been sent a flash telegram telling her what had been provisionally agreed . . . Had we been the bailiffs arriving to take possession of the furniture, or even Ted Heath paying a social call in company with Jacques Delors, we would have probably been more cordially received. The Prime Minister was like a firework whose fuse had already been lit; we could almost hear the sizzling."

That was the result of a very skilled negotiation, which the then Prime Minister distanced herself from until the said two gentlemen used a brilliant wheeze by leaking the story to the press, in the context of Mrs. Thatcher's great success in getting her money back. When she saw that, suddenly she saw things from a different end of the telescope. I commend that book to hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is extremely well written and it is in the Library.

There are those in the House who believe that we can avoid our trading relationships with Europe. That is certainly not the case in the context of my constituency, where a very significant part of our manufacturing base depends totally on two-way relationships with the mainland of Europe. Although many of those companies are also global players, they all tell me in no uncertain terms that their relationship with Europe is strengthened by a stable economic framework, and a number of players have given credit to the Government for achieving the success that they have. After all, half the United Kingdom's trade—I believe that it is £132 billion—is with Europe, and at least 3 million jobs are affected by that trade.

Particularly important in the context of the financial arrangements are the parts of the agreement that impact on waste and fraud. I listened with great interest to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). Having heard him rant about the processes that apply, I ask, why did the Conservatives, when in government for so long, do nothing about that very serious matter? In any large organisation, let alone an organisation as large as the European Union, there will inevitably be an element of waste and an element of fraud, and it is up to us, as a member state, to take a strong role in combating such activities.

In the context of the treaty, the Government have had a remarkable success. I hope that not only the Government but every person in the House believes that any level of fraud against the EU budget is unacceptable, and I hope that the root and branch reform that the Prime Minister called for will be accepted by all Members of the House. I hope that we also all support the Commission's reform proposals, which involve a radical reform of financial management. We must continue to put pressure on the Commission to ensure that they are deliverable.

The new European anti-fraud office was the initiative of our Chancellor. The Commissioners have already introduced a code of conduct for Commissioners and Commission officials, published a whistleblowers' charter, established fairer arrangements for appointments to senior posts, and started a major modernisation of financial management procedures that will establish clear lines of responsibility for preventing waste and fraud. Just compare that with the previous EC finance Bill—the European Communities (Finance) Act 1995, introduced by the Conservative party, which did nothing to tackle

[Mr. Miller]

waste and fraud. This Bill is tougher and takes tough action to tackle fraud. It may be a simple Bill, but its implications are far reaching in that area.

Of course the Commission's reform proposals cannot be implemented overnight, and in-depth reform will take some time, but we need to continue to put pressure on the Commission to ensure that these reforms are delivered in full. I hope that, despite the fragmentation of the Conservative party at the moment, there is general support for that principle, because it goes without saying that when our Ministers attend summits, the knowledge that it is not just their party but the whole of the British Parliament that is taking a stance strengthens their position.

The body that has been set up in this field has the almost Scandinavian-sounding name of OLAF, but of course it comes from the French: Office Lutte Anti-Fraude. Its first annual report, which has just been published, is worth reading. It describes the organisational activities and analyses the types of fraud detected during the period. It says that 241 new files were opened, as were 68 administrative investigations and 181 co-ordination files. The total value of the cases under consideration was 264 million euros. That is not to say that that degree of fraud exists, but examinations are being carried out into these matters.

There have been a number of high profile cases that hon. Members may have seen in the press. The press in different parts of Europe give a slightly different perspective, and it is worth examining the facts with some care. The body that has been set up as a result of the Chancellor's initiative is clearly having successes, ranging from the illegal importation of bananas from Ecuador, adulterated butter, a series of issues around flax production in Spain and irregular wage payments in the Commission office in Sweden. These are extremely important issues and will have an impact on the economic probity of the Council and the Commission. Together with other member states, we have made it clear that such activities must stop.

Taking one of the examples that I cited, there was a major fraud involving some 16,000 tonnes of adulterated butter that had been sold for 45 million euros, if I am allowed to use that word in the presence of some Opposition Members. The entire cycle has been traced by the public prosecutors office in Naples and the Italian revenue police, thanks to the co-operation of the European anti-fraud office and the serious financial crime office of the French judicial police. We have created a mechanism that, in co-operation with existing authorities in other nations, has produced some important gains, to the benefit of the European taxpayer. Those who argued that because of the nature and scale of the institutions and the complexity of dealing with them, one could not tackle fraud successfully have been proved wrong.

In February last year, a protocol was signed with the Italian anti-mafia directorate that establishes, in the light of article 280 of the European Union treaty, regular co-operation between the anti-mafia directorate and OLAF, aimed at more effective action against illegal activities in economic and financial areas. In the context of organised crime, whether in Italy or elsewhere, that body represents an important step forward. It is perhaps not the world's best-known body, but it has a free telephone hotline in all member states to encourage members of the public to pass on information about fraud and irregularity, and the question of whistleblowers is dealt with within the treaty. I thought that, at that point, someone might leap up and challenge me to give the telephone number. If hon. Members want to try it, it is 0800 963 595.

These are incredibly important financial reforms and the Bill helps to build on the foundations for the proposed enlargement. These measures were needed, and some have been horrendously delayed. One wonders what happened with the previous Administration in this regard. Perhaps they were so wrapped up in their anti-European rhetoric that they forgot their way.

There must be continuing reform and, like the hon. Member for Moray and others, I want expansion to become possible. I can understand his frustration about some of the issues surrounding fishing regulations, but unless we look at the bigger picture, get the structures right and reform the CAP and fisheries policy, it will be difficult to address the details to which he referred.

I want the process of expansion to continue. I have some great friends in some unlikely places; some might say that they are the only friends I have. But whether they are in Slovenia, Estonia or Malta, I want Europe to expand and the common bonds that have been created strengthened as a result of greater economic co-operation. This Bill is an essential prerequisite to that, and I commend it to the House.

I ask all hon. Members to put aside their views about Europe. Unless one is a member of one of the Tory camps that wants us to come out of the EU altogether, we should all realise that this Bill is an essential building block for the future of Europe.

7.7 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I have been reminded tonight of what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller). We disagreed often in the Parliament of 1992 to 1997 and we will do so again in the future, but his warmth and courteous approach are always welcome in this House, even if he did try to butter us up tonight.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on his excellent maiden speech, and also my hon. Friends the Members for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) and for Tatton (Mr. Osborne). They endeared themselves to the House tonight by speaking in this important debate with such eloquence and command of their subject. Their praise for their predecessors and their constituencies will reflect well upon them all. I am sure that all of them will have excellent careers in this place. It was a pleasure also to listen to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who showed, as always, a uniquely accurate and detailed grasp of European finances.

The Bill is yet another missed opportunity. The Government should have taken the opportunity today to get to grips with Europe and to tackle the thorny issues of European financing. Instead, they ducked that opportunity. The Government should have used this opportunity to promote wholesale reform of the financing structures and mechanisms, which are costly, wasteful and regressive. The Chief Secretary said that the effect of the

Bill is neutral. I do not agree, but even if it were that would be no reason for hon. Members to roll over and accept it.

I do not agree that shifting the balance from VAT to GDP will necessarily be less regressive. I see it as a stealth-based way to transfer funds from those member states that work hard and generate wealth to those that are, shall we say, less prosperous. That fact has not yet emerged in this debate. This is a socialist, redistributive measure; it will enable new taxes to be imposed on our citizens, and it deserves closer scrutiny than it seems to have had so far from those on the Government Benches.

Every hon. Member knows the emotions that flow when one rises to make a maiden speech—the intoxicating blend of honour and humility, of trepidation, yet pleasure. I have now learned that the same emotions flow for those who have been described as quasi-retreads, but perhaps with a little extra added humility, which can be no bad thing—the humility that comes from having lost and then been chosen again by those who knew one before.

I have not been idle during my enforced sabbatical. There are benefits in extending one's experience outside the ivory tower of Westminster in the real world—or as my constituents often used to put it, earning an honest living. I went back to my old activities in British industry—activities similar to those of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. I hope that that experience will serve me well in future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) said, we are an exclusive group—a group of only two quasi-retreads, who won the election to represent the constituencies that we had previously held.

It is a tradition that I should heap praise on my predecessors, and I am very happy to do so tonight. My most recent predecessor was Mrs. Butler, who cared deeply for the Labour party and for Castle Point. She fought for key issues, such as Canvey's third road and to save the local radio station. She did an excellent job locally and she was very well thought of in Castle Point.

Indeed, Mrs. Butler followed in a line of great parliamentarians—in particular Sir Bernard Braine, whom I succeeded and who later became Lord Braine. Serving as Father of the House in his later years, he brought great dignity and a real sense of caring to that office. It is with no exaggeration that I say that Bernard, after 42 years as a Member, was one of the best-loved Members of Parliament of the 20th century. He once held the record for the length of a speech in the House; I think he spoke for about three and a half hours on one occasion.

I will try to emulate Bernard's indomitable fighting spirit when it comes to the rights of my constituents, to simple justice for individuals and to defending this country, as we should be doing tonight. However, the House will be relieved to hear that I will not copy Bernard in his habit of making three and a half hour speeches—I intend to restrict myself to only two hours tonight. Bernard Braine took the seat from another well known and much loved politician—the Labour Member of Parliament, Ray Gunter, who contributed much to the trade union movement in this country. So my predecessors were indeed illustrious, and one would expect no less of Castle Point given that, in common with most Members, I believe that I represent the very best constituency in the country, and it is a great honour to do so.

Castle Point lies on the north bank of the Thames estuary, nestled between Basildon and Southend-on-Sea. It is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) here tonight. On the mainland are Thundersley, Daws Heath, Benfleet and, of course, Hadleigh, within which lies Hadleigh castle. In the Thames, we have Canvey island, to the east of which is Canvey point. The features of Hadleigh castle and Canvey point give us our constituency name. Canvey lies within the port of London to the east of the great Coryton oil refineries.

In 1605—a date that hon. Members will remember—gunpowder was manufactured on Canvey island and taken up the Thames in boats by Guy Fawkes and packed below the House, to blow up the historic palace. I guess that it is for that reason that the police always pay particular attention to my car when I arrive here from my constituency. However, there is no gunpowder, treason or plot to be found in Castle Point these days. We are a close-knit, sound community and loyal to Britain and our monarch.

We have other historic connections with this palace. Many of the timbers that made the hammer beam roof in Westminster Hall were cut from the great oaks of Thundersley wood. That is where I live today and have lived for many years. We have a varied and beautiful environment in Castle Point and the people are very special. Compared with the average British constituency, we have 30 per cent. more self-employed people, the highest number of owner-occupied houses, significantly more cars per household, and our population is younger than the average—and Canvey island football team had a great cup run this year, under the inspired stewardship of Jeff King. So the picture painted by the statistics and, indeed, by my experience in Castle Point is that of a young, self-reliant, enthusiastic and caring community.

Having heard how discerning my constituents are, the House will not be surprised to learn that the vast majority of them are rather sceptical about Europe. They believe that this country needs defending from the continual erosion of its sovereignty and from economic attack from Europe. I may be skating on thin ice in saying that, but this is only a semi-maiden speech, so I hope that I can semi-observe the conventions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In any event, I must honestly represent the views of the people of Castle Point. Bernard Braine said in his maiden speech that we lived in times of peril. We still do. That demands courage and constancy from politicians of good heart and sound judgment. Our constitution and traditions are being eroded and our economy is threatened by inappropriate European integration. Worst of all, our very sovereignty is dangerously dissolving into the European melting pot. Castle Point people are pragmatic and understand money. They have not been deceived. They know that the Prime Minister has yielded a significant part of the rebate that Maggie Thatcher negotiated for Britain. That abatement should have belonged to Britain as a result of the enlargement programme. It amounted to hundreds of millions of pounds of so-called windfall. That is enough money to pay for 3,000 new teachers, 3,000 new nurses and 3,000 new police officers a year—in all, 9,000 extra dedicated and caring professionals whom the people of Castle Point and Britain dearly need.

My constituents know that the finances of Europe are riddled with fraud and waste. They know that the common agricultural policy, which may have served a purpose in

[Dr. Robert Spink]

the 1960s, is now expensive nonsense and must be fundamentally reformed. We could and should have used this opportunity to start that long-overdue process, but the Government have ducked it. Will the Minister in her summing-up speech say how and when the Government will fundamentally reform CAP financing?

Castle Point people are grateful, of course, for the money that may be provided from European funds—for example, for the Thames gateway regeneration project—but they are sharp; they know that for every pound they get, they must first give £6, based on a net contribution of more than £4 billion and only £667 million in regional development fund receipts for this country. Castle Point people bought into Europe as an economically beneficial trading project, but they now see it for what it has become—a dangerous, expensive political experiment.

Those European financing issues are not the only ones that concern the people of Castle Point. Notwithstanding massive privatisation investment, the railway line still needs to be improved. Our roads need serious investment to reduce the ever-growing congestion in Hadleigh, Tarpots, Sadler's Farm, and especially on Canvey island. The number of police on our streets has been cut, just as our police stations, which I previously fought to keep open to provide 24-hour cover, have been closed or made part-time during the past four years.

We need to secure benefits from the Thames gateway regeneration and P&O port projects, but we must be aware of and defend ourselves from the potential negative impacts of those developments on our environment.

There are also real difficulties in our schools, with the lowest-ever morale now recorded in local schools. That has been exacerbated by massive teacher shortages in the south-east and by the over-burdening bureaucracy that flows from the Department for Education and Skills.

We need to create more employment—but that can, on occasions, conflict with our environmental objectives, so care is needed. The Labour Government have set a massive and, I believe, unsustainable target of building an additional 2,400 houses in Castle Point. I will fight to ensure that the estates of new houses and the necessary industrial development, which must occur, will take place only on brownfield land.

I shall address all those points with Ministers and on the Floor of the House as the weeks and months go by. The 30 or so questions that I have already tabled stand witness to that fact. A Member of Parliament cannot represent the interests of his or her constituency or country without speaking out in this place. The House needs statesmen—politicians who will hold the Executive to account in this Chamber and who can make the public aware that something needs to be done and then persuade them to do it.

I will seek all-party action where possible to resolve our problems. We need more courtesy and co-operation in politics today; but these times also call for strong opposition. Only the Conservative party truly represents the interests of the British people, and never more so than on European financing.

7.21 pm

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I wish to make a short contribution to the debate, but before I do so I apologise for my late arrival. I was detained in my constituency.

Since I have been here, I have heard several interesting maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) made a well-informed, persuasive and detailed speech, bringing to the Chamber his enormous experience as a former Member of the European Parliament. Indeed, he was the leader of the Labour group there. I particularly welcome him as a former fellow graduate of Cardiff university; there should be a few more of us in the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) made an eloquent speech and clearly showed that he is easily making the transition from scribe in one or other of the disreputable newspapers to politician. I welcome him to this place.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) gave a speech of clear conviction and demonstrated much affection for his constituency. I was interested in his remarks about introducing voting at the age of 16. I am not convinced of the need for that, but there is a case to be made and he made it well.

I welcome the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), as a fellow Essex Member, to the Chamber. He made an impassioned anti-European speech. Although I was not convinced by its substance, its style was excellent. He spoke eloquently and movingly about his predecessors.

A debate on Britain's relationship with the European Union and on our membership of the EU is welcome so soon after the general election in which—let us not forget it—Britain's membership of the EU featured prominently. It must be underlined that there was a strong belief in the Conservative party in the weeks and months in the run-up to the general election that opposition to the single currency and vitriolic hostility to the EU and all its works would move opinion massively and significantly towards that party.

For days and weeks, we heard that the final seven days of the campaign were going to be devoted to the single currency and that that would be the issue that would lead people to switch their votes to the Conservative party. At the very least, we should note that that simply did not happen. The more that the Conservative party focused on Europe, the EU and the single currency, the more people began to question why it was not talking about other important issues, such as schools, hospitals, railways and much else.

The campaign and the way in which the result came about convinced me more than ever that the British people are not intrinsically anti-European. I believe that they are Euro-sceptic or sceptical about Europe, but not in the way that the Conservative party has taken over the notion of scepticism. They are sceptical in the true sense of the word. They are questioning, concerned and anxious about the future, and they desire more information, but that does not amount to hostility.

The detailed polling evidence that appeared during the election campaign showed clearly—this was borne out by my experience of talking to thousands of people on the doorstep in my constituency—that there is not a majority for British withdrawal from the EU. Depending on how the question is put and the opinion poll that one consults, there may be a majority for joining the single currency at some stage in the future if and when the criteria are met. That is very different from the prospectus on which the Conservative party campaigned.

Another factor that I found on the doorstep in the election campaign—it relates specifically to the debate—is that, whatever view people take on the EU, its budget and the single currency, they overwhelmingly wanted the issues to be debated and to receive more information. They want the type of honest argument that, all too often, we do not have. Our job as politicians of all parties and of all views is to provide that information. We do not receive it from the national newspapers. On the issues of Europe and particularly the single currency and the budget, their approach is one of crude caricature and prejudice. We need information, facts and details as well as a broad philosophical debate on the kind of Europe we want and what Britain's position in it should be.

If we have such a debate, I am confident that, when the criteria for entry into the single currency are met, we will be able to take the case to the British people in a referendum and win the argument. Whatever views individuals take, we should have a referendum when the criteria are met. I never understood the Conservative party's position of opposing that, because it is the single most important economic issue in a generation. It must be decided.

In the debate, I have heard repeated references to the experience of referendums elsewhere in the EU. In particular, the referendums in Denmark and the Irish Republic have been used to provide justification for the Conservative party's view that the EU is heading for the rocks. I would not go too far down that road, because there were specific reasons that explain why those referendums were lost. Those issues do not resonate in this country.

In Denmark, the overwhelming reason why people rejected the single currency in a referendum was that they thought that joining it would lead to the Danish welfare state being undermined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate on the Bill's Second Reading is tightly drawn and the hon. Gentleman is now ranging rather wide of the mark.

Mr. Rammell: I take your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I take note of the time. I shall move on.

I wish to comment on the interesting remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd)—and they must have been in order because he made them. He referred to the fact that some people have doubts about the single currency because of their doubts about European institutions. That argument is worth considering, and he made some positive points.

My hon. Friend also strongly made a point that relates specifically to the EU budget. He stressed the need for better scrutiny by this Chamber of the EU's budget and affairs. I strongly support him in that view. I served for four years in the previous Parliament as a member of the European Scrutiny Committee and it does very good work, but all Members have a responsibility to scrutinise the EU's work and budget. All too often, we do not take that responsibility and too few Members take a real interest in these issues.

A significant proportion of the laws that affect the lives of people in this country emanate from the EU, but they receive nothing like the scrutiny that we devote to legislation that originates from Westminster, which is a cause for concern. We have to consider providing the European Scrutiny Committee with a procedural device so that it is more able to get its concerns debated on the Floor of the House.

There is often a case for the European Scrutiny Committee to take on the role of a more traditional Select Committee. It is instructive to compare its work on budgets with the role of the European Union Committee in the other place, which carries out more detailed and wide-ranging investigations. We can learn from that.

Dr. Palmer: Is there merit in moving towards the Danish approach of having a committee that needs to give its consent before the Government decide on European Union issues?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not discussing other structures, as I have explained.

Mr. Rammell: I take your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, especially in light of the look on the face of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary. However, it is an interesting point.

The Bill is positive. It cements the outcome of the successful 1999 European Council negotiations in Berlin, which produced constructive proposals. The Bill is a prerequisite to enlargement. That is also true of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill to ratify the Nice treaty, which we will discuss tomorrow. That fact needs to be underlined. I am concerned when politicians say that they are in favour of enlargement progressing quickly, but when it comes to the means and decisions to achieve that there is not so much enthusiasm. That is especially the case with Conservative Members.

Without the changes, we will not have enlargement, which would be a cause for concern. Not only is it in Britain's economic self-interest to enlarge the EU from a single market of 370 million people to 500 million consumers, but we have an ethical and moral responsibility to former eastern bloc countries, which for decades we encouraged to reject totalitarianism and change their societies fundamentally. They did that and are keen to join the EU. The longer the debate about enlargement drags on without—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is not about enlargement.

Mr. Rammell: It is about the financial means to achieve enlargement, and we should introduce the measures to do that as soon as possible.

I welcome the move from own resources to GNP as a result of the deal that was struck in Berlin, which will provide a fairer and more affordable mechanism to fund EU activities in the long term. Despite the claims about the outcome of European Council deliberations on EU budgets when the previous Conservative Government were in power, the two earlier negotiations resulted in significant increases in expenditure. After this round of negotiations, there will be no rise in real terms at the end of the period in question.

It is also noteworthy to explain, as others have done, that we have safeguarded the British abatement. Many other EU Governments were keen to end that, which we avoided by successful negotiation. Indeed, many

[Mr. Rammell]

Conservatives consistently claimed in the run-up to the Berlin Council that we would be forced to give way and lose the abatement, but that did not materialise.

It is worth recognising that the UK's net contribution after enlargement will be of the same order as that paid by France or Italy. That was not the case in the 1980s and early 1990s when the Conservatives were in power and our contribution to the EU was disproportionate to our national wealth. The Bill and the deal reached in Berlin move us firmly in the right direction.

Progress on the common agricultural policy is also welcome. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire said about the need to go much further on CAP reform. However, Berlin represented the most radical reform of the CAP since it was established. There will be significant price cuts for cereals, beef and milk, and the annual contribution will fall by about £70 a year for the average family.

Since 1988, the proportion of the EU's budget spent on farming has fallen from 67 per cent. to 46 per cent. today. That figure is still too high, but it shows that we are making progress. However, although the achievement at Berlin was important and historic, we must consider why we did not go further. Germany is often prepared to support an unjustifiable defence of the CAP by the French Government because of the historic Franco-German alliance. The British Government and British people can learn from that. We have an opportunity to work with that arrangement and provide a tripartite leadership instead of relying on the Franco-German alliance to be the motor of the EU.

The Bill provides us with the opportunity to tackle fraud and financial mismanagement. The new European anti-fraud office was the initiative of the Chancellor and the Government and it has already conducted major investigations. The European Commission's decision to appoint Neil Kinnock with special responsibility for reform is especially significant. Achievements include the code of conduct for Commissioners, the whistleblowers' charter and, in particular, the new and fair arrangements for appointments to senior posts so that we do not continue with Buggins' turn, which happened too often in the Commission. When we talk about fraud and financial mismanagement as the responsibility of the EU, we should note that 85 per cent. of its spending is delivered by individual national Governments. The responsibility to tackle fraud lies not only at the centre, but with national Governments.

The Bill is an achievement. It takes us forward and provides for sound and well-established EU funding. If we pass the Bill and the European Communities (Amendment) Bill tomorrow, we will lead the way to EU enlargement, which will be one of the most significant and historic developments on our continent in the next decade. I hope that all hon. Members will support it.

7.38 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): One of the joys of being a final speaker is that it is possible to hear many interesting speeches, and today I have had the pleasure of hearing four splendid maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) made a re-maiden speech, because he made excellent contributions when he previously served in this place. There is no doubt that he will once again be a great champion of Castle Point. He showed great understanding of, and concern for, its people and all that they stand for. I am sure that we wish him well in returning to that area, which has always had splendid representatives. I was interested, as always, in his speech and look forward to hearing more from him.

The other maiden speakers set themselves serious objectives. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who is a Scottish nationalist, made a fascinating speech in which he said that he was going to fight for the interests of the fishing industry. The Chief Secretary will be well aware from his experience of Europe that, whereas we used to have 80 per cent. of the waters and fish of Europe, we now, sadly, have only 20 per cent. Clearly, the hon. Member for Moray will have a major job on his hands if he is to do something about that. I am not sure that Parliament has any powers at all in that respect, but I am sure that we all wish him well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) also made a splendid speech, in which he said that his objective was the reform of the common agricultural policy. I have had the pleasure of waiting for that reform for about 20 years. We have heard three speeches proclaiming the merits of the reform that has happened so far; we all know that it is a load of codswallop, because all that we have had is a small reduction in some prices and a transfer of subsidy to what are called "area payments", which are being paid for by member Governments. To that extent, it is possible to say that the real cost of the CAP is no greater than before.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) made an inspiring speech, in which he said that he was in favour of extending the membership of the European Economic Community. Despite all the talk, Ministers well know that that cannot and will not happen.

As someone who has had to listen, time and again, to discussion of European regulations and treaties, I know that the same thing always happens: views are expressed about the merits and joys that will ensue, but later, when one looks back, one finds that they simply never emerged.

Remarkable comments have been made today. A Member who represents a Welsh constituency said how wonderful it was that we are to have more objective 1 and objective 2 grants, which will bring pleasure to Wales. We should be well aware that if those grants are linked to EEC enlargement, that will wind up Britain's receipt of them. If, by chance, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania become members of the EEC, the money available to the United Kingdom for grants will be very restricted. We should ask ourselves what the blazes the benefit of those grants is, bearing in mind the fact that if we controlled that expenditure, we could spend twice as much.

Probably because I do not like the EEC, I take pleasure in the fact that my constituency is the only place in Essex that has objective 2 grants. We applied for only three wards, and the EEC insisted on awarding grants for five. It turned down places such as Basildon and Tilbury, and said that my constituency, including the place where I live, was an area of deprivation that needed lots of money, so we got all the money for Essex. There will no doubt be big posters around the constituency saying, "Given by the kindness of the EEC", and I feel like putting a Teddy Taylor poster underneath each one, simply pointing out that every pound costs us two pounds.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) made the wonderful statement that the Bill will improve our trade, which has been an astonishing success. If we look at the facts we see that, far from being an astonishing success, our trade has been an abysmal failure, because our trade deficit with Europe since we joined is £166 billion. That means that for every £10 of goods we have sold to Europe, it has sent us back £11 of goods. We have also been told that by changing the basis for the collection of the money from VAT to GDP, the Bill will reduce fiddling and fraud. That is typical of the comments that we always hear about the joys that will flow from the new powers that we are giving Europe. Experience shows that those benefits will not emerge.

In a splendid speech, the Chief Secretary gave us two new assurances. He said that he accepted that the Governments of Germany, Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands were thrilled and delighted that, under this proposal, they will pay less in contributions, but he explained that, far from Britain making up the difference, it will be made up by other member states. He said also that Britain's position would be stable and settled because we have the advantage of the rebate. My experience of other Bills on Europe tells me that I will have the pleasure of reminding him of what he said when we get the figures for the contributions that we have made.

The Chief Secretary did not explain what the effect on Britain's payments of the windfall payments not being taken into account will be. We know that there are windfall payments that should come to the United Kingdom. I understood the figure to be about £200 million, but one Member was talking about pennies, so I ask the Economic Secretary, in her wind-up speech, to tell us what will be the consequence of abolishing windfall payments.

What worries me most is that although we are told that the Bill will not result in more cash going to Europe, hon. Members will find, if they look back at previous debates, that we have had the same assurances every time. What are the facts? In 1973, the year in which we joined, our net payment was £88 million. Ten years later, it was £796 million. In 1993, the figure was £2,154 million, and in 2000, it was £4,048 million. There has been a massive increase, and that will inevitably continue.

Those are net figures; let us talk about gross figures. I have not had the pleasure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of visiting your constituency more than twice, but I know, as we all do, that everyone there loves having you as their representative. If I were to hand you a cheque for £5.5 million and tell you that you could do whatever you liked with it for your constituency, I am sure that being the kind, caring and conscientious MP you are, you could think of many things to spend it on. It is a lot of money. I am sure that if I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point a cheque for £5.5 million and told him to spend it as he wished, he would think of many causes in his constituency that needed help. I mention that figure because it is the amount that we have sent to Brussels since we started this debate at 3.30 pm. Some £1.2 million goes to Brussels every hour. Daily, the amount is £29 million, and weekly, it is £210 million, and that rate of contribution will increase.

When the Government discussed the financing of the EEC and how the money should be spent, did they wonder what possible good was coming from it? Did they, for example, think about the fishermen to whom the hon. Member for Moray referred ? Our fishermen have been ruined by our arrangement with the EEC; instead of 80 per cent. of the fish and the fishermen, we have 20 per cent., and the figure is falling. What about the businesses that we have been talking about, and the trade that we were told was so wonderful? We all know that trade with Europe has been disastrous, and that the problem will get worse. What about the CAP?

Dr. Palmer: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that trade is valuable only if it involves exports, and that he is not interested in consumers having the opportunity to import at reasonable prices?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am saying that it is not good for a country that has a positive balance of trade with an area to make a change in its trading arrangements which results in a massive deficit. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the deficit is due to the extra costs that, unfortunately, stem from the EEC. He will know that we used to have a positive balance of trade, but we now have a net deficit of, depending on how one looks at it, £166 billion or £300 billion.

Why do we want to spend more money on the CAP? We should look at the figures for the destruction of food. I hope that enthusiasts for the EEC will ask themselves what the point is of spending so much money on destroying food, which is essentially what CAP funds are spent on. We should consider grants, and ask ourselves what is the point of some of the crazy items that we are spending public money on. I suggest that in discussions of grants, the Government should ask themselves whether it would not be better if the EEC had no money at all, instead of simply trying to make changes to give it a little more. I suspect that if we looked at the various schemes that have been implemented, we would find that they do not help Europe or assist its people. Their only outcome is a massive waste of public money, which should worry us all. If we want to help people and countries, we can do it by dropping money from aeroplanes, or sending a cheque through the post, without becoming involved in the ludicrous schemes of the EC.

I hope that the Government will consider the consequences for this country's expenditure of items that are not direct amounts that we have to pay because of the Bill, but—disregarding the Bill—stem instead from our other arrangements with Europe. In connection with one such item, I wish that the Minister would give a straight answer to this question: how much money have Britain, its taxpayers and people lost by the sales of gold and the purchase of euros?

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that Britain should not be a net contributor to the EU budget? If so, which countries does he believe should be net contributors? Obviously, some countries must be net contributors and others net gainers from the budget.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Had I been in charge of the negotiations, I would have said that there should be no budget at all. In the context of Europe, if we ask what benefit comes from the expenditure on gold, the answer is none at all. What advantage does anyone derive from the CAP? It is the biggest protection racket ever devised by man. The farmers had a wonderful time for the first five years, but now farmers in all constituencies are suffering. How has Europe helped the fishing industry?

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

How has it helped anyone? Instead of trying to renegotiate the amounts of money involved, we should ask whether there is any point at all. The hon. Gentleman is an enthusiast for the EEC, but does he really think that Europe would be worse off if there were no expenditure at all? I think that it would be much better for Europe, its industry and its people if there were none.

Roger Casale: In one respect, I agree with the hon. Gentleman: the EU is in need of reform. The CAP in particular is in need of drastic reforms. However, what arguments and tactics would he adopt to bring about such reforms?

Sir Teddy Taylor: To be honest, if the hon. Gentleman is talking about reforming the CAP, he should forget about it—it is not possible, it will never happen. The sort of mini-changes that are being made simply enable us to kid ourselves, because when decisions are made by majority vote, it is not possible to get the sort of structural changes that are needed—majority agreement will never be reached. Governments of both parties have tried to mislead themselves into believing that reforms can be achieved and that renegotiation is on its way, but they are kidding themselves. We have power only when money is being requested—that is the time at which we should promote change.

I ask the hon. Gentleman and the current Government, as I asked the previous Government, to think about the point of European expenditure and to consider whether Europe would be better off if we had no expenditure at all. I mentioned the regional grants that will pour into my constituency and cost this country twice as much as the grants themselves. We ask whether the money will be wisely spent, but when we look around Britain for silly things on which money has been spent, we find that grants have formed the basis for many of them. We must think about carefully about those questions.

Because of our relationship with Europe as set out in the Bill, we have to do some silly things, one of which is to promote or pump up the euro. Everyone knows that all previous single currencies have collapsed: unless we are like America, with one Government, one Treasury and a feeling of nationhood, the single currency will collapse. We all know that that will happen to the euro, but we have been propping it up in various ways, one of which—apart from direct intervention—has been to tell the Bank of England to sell its gold and put 40 per cent. of the money into euros.

The Bank has sold more than 200 tonnes of gold. All I want to know is how much money we have lost. The price of gold has, unfortunately, risen since we sold. We know that the price of the euro today is about the lowest it has ever been and that it has gone down some way since we bought euros. I simply want to know how much we have lost. I think that that is a reasonable question. When I asked Ministers that question, they told me that it would be misleading to give me that information, so I wrote to that terribly nice man, Sir Edward George, Governor of the Bank of England, asking him to tell me. He replied that he was sorry, but that he believed

"that any such calculation would be misleading. I do not see any reason for the Bank to undertake it."

Ours is meant to be a democratic assembly and I think that the taxpayer is entitled to know how much money has been lost by selling the gold, how much has been lost by buying all those euros, how many euros we have, and what is going to happen.

If we look back into history, we will see that it always happens the same way. Say a country—for example, Ireland or Germany—is doing too well and is too prosperous—

Roger Casale: Given that the hon. Gentleman clearly believes that the EU costs too much and that reform is impossible, is it his view that Britain should withdraw altogether from the EU?

Sir Teddy Taylor: That is not possible. I know that the hon. Gentleman has not been a Member of Parliament long, but he must wake up to reality: Britain does not have the power to withdraw from the EU. I cannot be drawn into wider issues, because this is a Second Reading debate, but be should know that we cannot withdraw. Even if everyone wanted to leave the EC and if every Member of Parliament including the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition voted for it, it would not work: we would be taken to the courts for breaching the treaties. We do not have the power to do it. That is why the hon. Gentleman should adopt an extremely cautious approach to all new developments—all the new money spent and all the new powers given away.

The sad fact is that we cannot withdraw—Britain does not have the power. If we passed a Bill stating our intention to withdraw from the EEC, it would not work. The European treaties are not like a treaty with, say, Belgium or France, which can be torn up and that is that. We have handed over the power; it has gone. I voted against every one of those treaties, as the hon. Gentleman will find if he cares to look up my record; I am sorry that we ever agreed to them. Now, because Europe is heading for the horrible problems that always accompany a single currency, we have to be extremely careful about giving away additional power. Most important of all, we must avoid being over-optimistic.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's logic—I am sure it is in there somewhere, but I am not with it at the moment. If he accepts that withdrawal is impossible and he opposes the Bill—I presume that he will vote against Second Reading—he should argue for something else in its place, but no amendment to the Second Reading motion has been tabled. What is the logic of his position? Would we simply be left—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is embarking on a speech, not making an intervention, and I suspect that he is going to lead the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) astray if he is not careful.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to be drawn into those broader issues.

I would argue for the following simple course of action. We should say that we will not agree to any new treaty until an escape clause is written in, so that countries that

want to leave can legally do so if their Governments and their people want that. We do not have that power now, but it would be great if we had. However, that is a wider issue.

I have spoken for far too long, so I shall forget about the rest of my speech and conclude by making one simple and sincere point to the Government. Please stop being over-confident and thinking that everything will be better. Many people have said that they will reform the CAP, but look at the facts—it is not happened. We have only made a tiny change in prices and transferred the responsibility for paying grants called area payments to our national Governments.

The Government should stop kidding themselves—in particular, they should stop kidding themselves that the Bill will not cost more money. Provisions for European taxes have been written in. Such taxes have not been levied yet, but the fact is that everything in previous treaties has happened, because the Europeans say that we have agreed to some proposition and we have to agree to something that emerges from it. We are getting in deeper and deeper. I hope that the Government will stop being over-optimistic and that they will stop trying to pretend that things are happening that are not happening.

I regard the Bill as perhaps the best deal that the Government could negotiate in the circumstances, but it will do us no good. It will open the way to our losing additional power and I am convinced that, in two years' time, our net contribution will be far greater than the £4 billion it was this year.

7.59 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am delighted to speak about the Bill on Second Reading. Although I missed some of the proceedings, including most of the maiden speeches, I picked up the flavour, or tenor, of the debate from the introductory speeches.

I heard part of the very good maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) and what I suppose can be described as the re-maiden speech of the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink). I am not sure what a retread is—I thought it was something that one put on one's car when one could not afford a new wheel—but I am sure that we could use a far more complimentary word to describe his speech. I share some common ground with the hon. Gentleman, who referred to the success of his football team, Canvey Island; their success was achieved at the expense of my football team, Forest Green Rovers, who lost in the final of the Football Association trophy. Perhaps we can turn that around in future.

Before turning to the Bill, I welcome my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Front Bench. I hope that she has an enjoyable time as a Treasury Minister and that I do not make her job too difficult this evening.

I wish to concentrate on reform of the common agricultural policy. Most Members will know that in the previous Parliament my interest was mainly in agriculture, which is not unimportant. If the Berlin Council and the legislation that has consequently been introduced are to succeed, it is through the reform of agriculture that moneys will be allowed to square the circle. I make no apology for concentrating on that part of the package but, in doing so, I am sure that I can comment on the wider package.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) that the Bill is rather opaque and that it is therefore difficult to know exactly how it will work in practice. In particular, I am still struggling with the mechanism by which we move from a VAT contributory regime to one based on the GNP of the nations of the EU. I am sure that that will make sense in due course but, for the moment, it leaves me mystified. I am certain that we will get further clarification as debate proceeds in this place.

In concentrating on the way in which the CAP reform is a crucial part of the whole package, I should like to highlight two possible dilemmas that have to be overcome for change to be handled properly. The first dilemma, as has already been said, is that overall reform is dependent on agricultural reform—one supposes that that involves the reduction of the support mechanism payments through the production mechanism. If the EU is to continue, that system will need radical reform; if it is not reformed, the EU will be bankrupted when the new countries join. I know that there is a strength of purpose and a desire to do good things, and although I do not go along entirely with the remarks of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), I feel that there have been many missed opportunities in reform of the CAP. If we are to get it right this time, reform must be radical and complete; it must recognise that the new countries coming in will want a say in the regime that will come into play even before they sign on the dotted line to join the EU.

The second dilemma relates to the first and concerns the subject that I raised when I intervened on the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats. The changes are predicated on the fact that reform of the CAP regime will mean, effectively, moving towards a free market system, which will further enhance the globalisation of agriculture. I am pointing out that dilemma because the producers and consumers whom I talk to are rather sceptical about the benefits of globalisation. We have only to look at the recent protests which, in some ways, littered the streets of the major European capitals—I do not excuse the protesters' behaviour—to realise that certain aspects of globalisation are, at the very least, questionable.

We are talking not just about the necessary reform of agriculture per se, but about what will come with that. Such reform is linked to the World Trade Organisation and the gradual liberalisation of our trade. There was a dispute about the multilateral agreement on investment and, more recently, an argument about the possible globalisation of services, both of which have led to a great reaction, most of it negative. Agriculture involves a further aspect: in many ways, the markets already trade on it, but it falls between the extreme of the free market and the protected ways in which different parts of the world control the supply and purchase of agricultural products.

We are experiencing a dilemma concerning our handling of that problem. Unless we can resolve that, finance will not be available to allow the EU to continue, expand and take care of existing problems. I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to explain how we can push forward agricultural changes and guarantee that that will take place before there is any further expansion; we must not threaten certain things, as some of us believe that they could have a deleterious effect on the future of agriculture.

[Mr. David Drew]

I know that the easy answer is that we should look at a different way of funding agriculture and encourage different agricultural systems. I certainly welcome what will come with the change in legislation: the encouragement of more rural development and the expectation that the second pillar—which has been referred to as a stump—will grow a limb that can stand up on its own, rather than being supported by other mechanisms. If we are to change agriculture for the better, that cannot happen a day too soon. Certainly, producers, who are currently facing difficulties, want assurance that change will not be achieved at the cost of any further difficulties in their production.

Also, consumers need to be satisfied that the way that they can obtain food is by paying a fair price. I have never been one to argue, in this place or outside, that that should be the lowest price. I worry when people speak of agricultural benefits for the consumer in the form of lower prices alone. Have we not learned enough from recent crises to know that food cannot be produced at a cheaper price without impairing quality or choice? We must make sure that a balance is struck, and I am not sure that free market solutions through the globalisation of agricultural production are the best way to achieve that.

Several other speakers mentioned the fact that, as a result of the Berlin Council, the British rebate will be guaranteed and other countries will not be asked to contribute more. Wearing my agricultural hat, I must say that I have always had reservations about the true benefits of the Fontainebleau opt-out and the fact that we received a rebate of our contribution. Some of the problems visited upon the agricultural industry of late are due to the fact that when we call, as many of us do, for agrimonetary compensation, most of it comes from the British Exchequer, because we are locked into the price and currency mechanisms. It was always said that 78p in the pound would be paid back in that way.

We may find that acceptable, given the wider benefits that have accrued from Fontainebleau, but I do not believe that that is as good a deal as some people would have us believe. We are building upon it, as it is difficult to go backwards and consider a new mechanism. If the UK renegotiates its rebate, other countries will expect to be able to do the same. It is interesting to note that four countries have been able to reduce the amount that they contribute towards our rebate. I wonder how they achieved that; perhaps we can learn from them. If lower contributions are paid and higher rebates are demanded, somebody has to pay for that. Like the insurance principle, if one pays less in, there is less available when one needs to draw the money out. That has cost us dear in recent times.

Those are the two fundamental dilemmas facing us. I would be far happier if we got on with agricultural reform, so that the CAP could meet the needs of both producers and consumers. There are, of course, many other pressures on the system, not the least of which are those that will result from the expansion of the EU in due course.

I do not know whether either or both of the two main Opposition parties intend to vote against Second Reading tonight. In the main Opposition party, there seems to be a split between those who want a plague on all European houses, and who will see the Bill as a further ratcheting up of integration and will therefore vote against it on principle, and those who will take a more pragmatic stance on the Bill. Among some of those bidding for the leadership, there seems to be the view that the party misjudged what the British people would stand for with regard to further European progression. They are therefore seeking a compromise position. When they present their tax and spend proposals, it will be interesting to see whether they aim to draw back money from Europe or take a more pragmatic line.

The Liberal Democrats remain the most enthusiastic Europeans in this place, notwithstanding the views expressed by some of my hon. Friends. The Liberal Democrat view seems to be that an opportunity was missed, and that the changes proposed in Berlin could have progressed further and faster. I am not sure whether that is realpolitik and therefore possible, or just a typically optimistic stance.

Some positive measures have come out of Berlin. If we can get the budget under control—a feature that some of us thought was lacking from previous negotiations—that would be widely welcomed. Only time will tell whether that will be possible and whether it will yield further dividends through more reform in the future. I see the merits of the proposals, but if change is to occur, the process must be speeded up and must carry the people along with it. That will not be easy, because of the scepticism being expressed about globalisation. Perhaps other hon. Members can help me out of that dilemma. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary how the changes are to be made real.

8.17 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) in welcoming the Economic Secretary to the Front Bench. I wish her every success in her new position, and I am convinced that she will be off to a good start today and continue in that fashion.

I challenge the view advanced by Opposition Members, particularly the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir T. Taylor), that although it is acceptable for Britain to be a member of the European Union, it is not acceptable for Britain to make a net financial contribution to the European Community. In other words, I challenge the view that the price of Britain's membership of the EU is not a price worth paying.

I do not argue that Britain should be a member at any price, or that we should not continue to fight for the best possible deal for Britain and for further reform of the EU. However, we should place any assessment of Britain's financial contribution to the EU in the context of the overall economic benefits that accrue to Britain from our continued membership. In debating EU finances, it is as well to remember what those economic gains to Britain and the people of Britain are. They are important to investment and jobs in the UK and provide a substantial boost to Britain's external trade.

More than 3 million jobs depend on Britain's participation in, and continued active membership of, the EU and the single market. More than 750,000 companies in the UK are involved in the single market and more than £132 billion—more than half the UK's total external trade—is linked to our membership of it. It is important

to remind the Opposition Members who seem to be implacably opposed to Britain's continued membership of the EU that we must put our membership in that context. They continually speak about the price of membership without seeing its overall economic value. They do not seem to want to acknowledge the huge economic benefits of being part of the European market.

I say to Opposition Members who hold such views that their vision of Britain and its future is narrow and timid. At its heart is the fear that Britain can no longer stand up for its interests or pay its way in the world. It is not a vision of Britain that I recognise or that could inspire anyone with confidence in the future, and I believe that it leads to the conclusion that we should withdraw from the EU. If some Opposition Members are not arguing that we should consider withdrawal, they should think about whether it is right to flirt with views that lead to such a conclusion. That narrow, sceptical and even hostile view of the European Union and of Britain's relationship with it was put forward at the general election but soundly rejected by the British electorate. I ask hon. Members to imagine how it would have gone down with our European partners and other European peoples if such a vision had had the opportunity to prevail.

I want Britain, like other European nations and our partners in the EU, to be confident and engaged in European affairs. I want it not only to advance a positive vision for the future of Europe, but to make the case for changing the way in which the EU operates and build the necessary alliances to deliver that change. It should also be putting forward the case for reform. I say to Opposition Members that to accept and value Britain's membership of the European Union is not to accept the EU as it is or to deny that it is in need of reform. It is exactly those reforms that the British Government have been working to negotiate. Indeed, they negotiated them successfully in the talks and summits that led to the Berlin conclusions that we are debating.

Reform is needed first and foremost in how the common agricultural policy operates. Despite Opposition Members' sceptical comments, major reform in the operation of the CAP is occurring and was achieved at the Berlin summit. That includes substantial agreement on price cuts for cereals, beef and milk. Spending on the CAP will decline from 2002, which should bring a cost reduction of £70 a year to the average household in Britain.

Mr. Wiggin: How was the common agricultural policy reformed? I did not think that it had been reformed at all.

Roger Casale: I am tempted to give a long exposition about how the CAP has developed over the years. The hon. Gentleman must not think that if the CAP did not exist, other EU countries would not have their own mechanisms and instruments for protecting their agricultural sectors. Not only in the agricultural sector, but in other sectors, including industry, we want trade barriers to be removed through negotiation.

That is exactly what the EU and international co-operation are about. It is no good merely wishing that it was not there. We must deal with the world in which we live and face up to the reality of the historical development of the EU and the CAP, and work with other European nations for a negotiated settlement to bring those barriers down. One of the common features of the CAP is the price support mechanism. It is by reducing the level at which prices will be supported for beef, cereals and milk, bringing them closer to world prices, that we are delivering benefits to consumers in this country as a result of reform.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does my hon. Friend agree that the common agricultural policy has now been cut from about two thirds of the EU budget to less than half? The dalliances of the Opposition put this country at great risk. If they had been elected, decades of treaties and agreements would have been ripped up, which would have done no good whatever for the British people. Does he agree that it is outrageous for them to threaten our relationship with the other 14 member states so irresponsibly?

Roger Casale: I listened closely to my hon. Friend's comments. It is all very well for Opposition Members to shake their heads and say that they would not have torn up the treaties or jeopardised many of Britain's important international relations, not least with our partner countries, but they put forward exactly such views and policies in the election campaign. They went down very badly and would have made a miserable impression on any partner countries that we were seeking positively to influence.

In today's world, we must recognise that many of the problems that we face as a country and many of the concerns of the people whom we represent can be resolved only by working together in the European arena or in an international context. That involves building alliances for the sort of changes that we want to deliver. We must have majority agreement to deliver many changes in the EU, because of the way in which it operates. We must do the groundwork of building alliances with our European partners and engaging positively and constructively with the EU if we are to succeed.

It is all very well for Opposition Members to shake their heads, but we have heard nothing from them about an alternative strategy that could succeed without recognising the need to build up those alliances and build confidence in Britain's contribution to the European debate, so that we can lead in Europe on the reforms that we all want, including CAP reforms. One can sit in the corner and say, "What a big, bad world we live in", or go out into the world and try to change it. The way to make those changes is to work together with other European countries to deliver them.

Reform will not be completed overnight. We are engaged in an historical process and this country has a tremendous contribution to make. We cannot make that contribution if we are always seen as negative and as carping from the sidelines. Unfortunately, for many years when the Conservative party was in government, that is how Britain was seen.

The Berlin Council did several other things apart from introducing important reforms to the CAP. It put paid to the notion that the European Union's finances were spiralling out of control. Let us consider for example the amount that the EU spends on administration. No one can say that the 5.1 per cent. of the budget that is spent on the Commission and the institutions means that the EU is a superstate spiralling out of control. A European Union

[Roger Casale]

that cannot raise taxes directly, except from its employees, or borrow to finance investment, is hardly a fiscal system that is out of control.

Opposition Members raise the spectre of the EU as a Frankenstein's monster that is all powerful and outside our control. That is nonsense. The EU budget has a fixed ceiling of 1.27 per cent. If we consider EU spending for the next five years—the set of consecutive financial budgets that are agreed for a five to six-year period and described as the financial perspective—total expenditure is projected to be less than our expenditure when we entered that period last year.

Our debate this evening should reassure those who support, as we do, a ceiling on EU resources. At Berlin, it was decided to bring spending within tightly defined limits. European Union spending has been stabilised for the first time in its history. That was our Government's objective when we entered the negotiations. We also managed to maintain the United Kingdom abatement in full. Those two achievements would not have been possible if we had started out from the negative, tactically and psychologically flawed, politically misguided position of many Conservative Members. That position would not have delivered any benefits for Britain, let alone reforms of the EU.

Whatever the politics of our debate on the future of Europe and the EU, the technical and financial measures agreed at the Berlin Council are significant. I hope that hon. Members from all parties can perceive some good in them for Britain. They set a good course for the future of the EU, based on sustainable financial foundations as we prepare for enlargement.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House should consider that the Berlin settlement will benefit Britain and set the EU on a sound course for the future. I urge them to support the Bill.

8.32 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Linoleum was invented by a Dundonian. Although I do not find inspiration in the granite architecture of Dundee, linoleum has always assumed a symbolic significance for me as a Member of Parliament. The inventor of linoleum got the idea from watching paint dry. He saw the thick skin form on the top of the paint and realised that it could be put to a useful purpose. I trust that hon. Members from all parties who are following the debate will take heart from that bijou of Scottish industrial history.

How can a measure that enables the United Kingdom to effect revised technical procedures for financial contributions to the European Community budget and leaves the contribution unchanged be greeted with the hyperbole that we have heard from Opposition Members? The Bill was everything from codswallop in the speech of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) to a profound disappointment in the contribution of the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison).

The Bill has 12 lines. They enable us to change the notional rate of VAT that is levied on our proportionate assessment contribution to the Community budget from 1 per cent. today to 0.75 per cent. in 2002–03 and to 0.50 per cent. in the following years. That means that we will reduce our VAT-based contributions. However—I accept that no silver lining is without its cloud—there will be a corresponding rise in the contributions based on our share of gross national product. However, that rate is simply a balancing figure. The net contribution will, as we have said, be unchanged because it will have been balanced by the GNP-based contribution.

What is it in the Bill that has prompted the vitriol that we have heard from Opposition Members? Although they expressed such vitriol, they could not even be bothered to table an amendment to the blinking thing. If we are going to debate the Bill for this many hours, we should enter the realms of reality.

What did the Berlin summit achieve? Will it make a difference to this country and to the European Community? I recall sitting in the House three weeks before the summit took place, when Opposition Members jibed consistently about what was going to happen: Britain was going to be sold down the river; the abatement was going to be relinquished; and the Government were going to come back with at least croissant crumbs, if not egg, all over their chin.

The most notable thing about the week following the Berlin summit was that the Prime Minister came back and was not challenged at Prime Minister's Question Time. None of the disastrous things predicted by the Opposition happened, and they maintained a stony silence on the subject thereafter. However, that does not mean that nothing happened at the Berlin summit. What happened was that we managed to secure an agreement whereby the spending of the European Union would be brought under control.

Let me contrast that with previous agreements on EU spending negotiated by the Governments of 1988 and 1994. Those agreements allowed increases in the European Union budget of 17 per cent. and 22 per cent. respectively—yet here we are today, debating a technical measure that will put into effect the agreement reached at Berlin that European Union spending will not increase at all. Our spending in Europe is not going to increase. Why, therefore, have Opposition Members attacked this extremely small and modest Bill?

Mr. Hendrick: Does my hon. Friend believe, as I do, that the Conservatives' opposition to the Bill has nothing to do with its content, but is caused by the use of the word "European" on the front page?

Mr. Gardiner: My hon. Friend has got it in one. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East admitted in his speech, following an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale), that he believes that we should withdraw altogether from the European Union. Somewhat confusingly, he also said that he thought that it was impossible to do so. I am not sure how he can propose our withdrawal while thinking it impossible to achieve. There is a gut antipathy to all things European among Conservative Members, although not in any great numbers—there are two Conservative Members present, and earlier there was only a sole person on the Opposition Front Bench. I suspect that other Opposition Members do not want to devote time to this matter, because they do not see the importance of putting the Bill through Parliament.

This is an important Bill, as are all Bills in one way or another. It is a modest Bill that will enable a technical amendment relating to our financial contributions to the European Union to take effect. We should put the legislation into perspective.

The Berlin deal maintained the United Kingdom's abatement. We can be proud of that achievement, because we were told that it would not happen. The Bill looks forward to the enlargement of the European Union. We have heard eloquent speeches from my hon. Friends about the need for that. I do not want to go over the arguments that they have adduced. Enlargement is politically important, and we must be clear about that. It is politically important for a generation who saw the events of 1989. Before that, Europe was divided, and we want to move to a Europe that has an inclusivity that has eluded us for 50 years.

I vividly remember in a previous life, before entering the House, working in Germany with colleagues and clients. A German colleague spoke to me passionately about how his grandfather had lost everything in world war one, how his father had lost everything in world war two, and how he had built up his company. He did not want ever again to see Europe divided.

We should be under no illusion. Of course there is a political element to Europe and to the enlargement process—it is not just about markets and finance; it is, importantly, about unification. We should see ourselves as part of Europe, united and working with colleagues on the continent.

I welcome the provisions in the Bill and what they will do to change the way in which contributions are made. I welcome the fact that enlargement will break down the barriers to trade and business that our companies continue to face. I welcome the fact that our generation will see a transformation in the business environment across eastern Europe, and that the world's largest single market will expand to include countries that, not 20 years ago, could never have dreamed that they would be able to do business with us and be part of that single market.

I cannot claim to have an agriculturally based constituency in Brent, North. Were I to stand here this evening and talk of the reforms of the common agricultural policy that took place at Berlin, some of my constituents might wonder whether I was moonlighting in other constituencies at weekends. I assure the House that I do not intend to go into the details as did my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who revealed his comprehensive knowledge of the treaties and the way in which they affected agriculture in this country. What I know is that the reforms—of which the Bill is a small part—of the way in which contributions will be made will enable the average family to pay £70 a year less in food bills.

That is what affects my constituents. I cannot talk about milk quotas or set-aside schemes; what I can say is that I know that my constituents will welcome the lower food prices in our local supermarkets that will result from the process on which we are embarked. I support the Bill.

8.46 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): It is with some trepidation that I, a new Member, follow such experts as my hon. Friends the Members for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) and for Harlow (Mr. Rammell)—and, albeit from a different perspective, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). They have had an opportunity to discuss these issues and study them in detail for the past four years. I would like to say that the good people of Bassetlaw have also been discussing European Union finance in great detail, but if they have it has failed to catch my attention sufficiently on the doorsteps.

I feel, however, that I am able and qualified to comment on the issue of good negotiation—for this, after all, was a negotiation. In my previous incarnation, I taught industrial relations and negotiating skills—in this country and across Europe—to trade unions, but also at Cranfield school of management. The accepted wisdom of those in that rather small profession is that in negotiation one should set an objective and a bargaining range—and, within the bargaining range, a bargaining point beyond which one should not expect one's fellow negotiators to move. The skill of the negotiator, who may have been given the objective, lies in identifying accurately the bargaining range and the bargaining point.

According to my analysis of this negotiation, the bargaining range has been identified and, unusually, the bargaining point is at the extremity of the bargaining range. I note that, following the negotiation, there is no increase in United Kingdom contributions. I also note significant moves to bring European Union spending under control, and I note that issues of fraud and financial management have been properly addressed. I congratulate those involved on achieving what we in my former profession would describe as a win-win negotiation: we win, and Europe wins.

I mentioned the speeches of my hon. Friends and I also commend that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale). I would juxtapose his position with that of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East, who sadly is not in the Chamber at present, but who made an excellent speech. They are at opposite ends of a pole—one is at one end of the see-saw and one at the other.

In 1971, at the age of 11, I made my first political speech. In those days, I would have placed my much lesser bulk on the side of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East. That speech was on reform of the common agricultural policy and what I saw as the scandal of the European Community and the way in which it was bleeding this country dry because of that policy. I note that the parliamentary choir has been active. I can assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I will not attempt a solo or a duet, but at that time there was a song called, "The Beef and Butter Mountains." Perhaps in the future, in more convivial circumstances, I will exchange the words of that song for another with the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East as I think that he would welcome them. However, those words and that song are dated.

I changed my views on the European Community and then the European Union. I was adamantly and vehemently opposed to having anything to do with it. I used to express the same sentiments that I heard expressed from the Conservative Benches earlier. I changed my view because of the growth of multinational companies. The question that I could never answer was how this small island alone could in any way affect the behaviour of multinational companies that were ever greater in size and influence.

[John Mann]

I suspect that I am now one of the strongest advocates of enlargement of the EU in the House. Over the years, I traded with Europe. Although I claim no expertise, anyone who has had to handle value added tax returns on a cross-border transaction will understand the complexities that must be involved in any financial system. A layman would say, however, that the changes that have been made are coherent.

Last year, our business sent a lorry to Hungary. One can drive there, albeit that one starts with high diesel prices here—I have mentioned those in a previous speech in the House and I shall no doubt return to that theme—and one has to pay extravagant tolls to take a lorry across western Europe and, in Austria, one faces Sunday driving regulations that are different from ours. One can overcome those obstacles and cope with the costs to reach the border of Hungary, where one has to spend 24 hours on the way in and another 24 hours on the way out waiting for the bureaucracy of a non-EU country to allow us to trade with it. The case for enlargement becomes absolute in the face of those difficulties.

I was astonished by the sentiments and words of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East when he said that there should be no EU budget. No budget? In my constituency! I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) that my constituency is a rural one. Farmers in my constituency are no great lovers of this or the previous Labour Government or of the Conservative Governments before them, but in their criticisms of the EU there is one thing about which they are adamant—do not get rid of all the subsidies.

As an example, I use sugar levies, which were relevant to the negotiations as part of the reform of the common agricultural policy. The sugar beet industry is, and has long been, probably the most important in the agriculture sector in my constituency. Sufficient attention has perhaps not been paid to it during the current foot and mouth problems. Restrictions on the movement of livestock have damaged the sugar beet industry.

I am pleased about CAP reform. As that reform slowly takes place, we are seeing a roll-over of the present quota systems for five years. That will allow the financial moves towards enlargement to occur so as to give greater stability for the whole sugar beet industry. It will do far better from the negotiations than it could have anticipated a year or two ago.

The European Commission study into the impact of sugar levies on the sugar beet industry is crucial—not least in preparations for enlargement. Who knows whether the applicant countries can create sufficient development in their sugar beet industries to compete with us? I suspect that they will do so. People from the UK and other advanced economies will invest in those countries to make a profit—rightly so, in their view. The study is crucial to the sugar beet industry.

As we move forward when—as I hope—we pass the Bill, it is important that we carefully monitor the role of the large sugar cane barons so that they do not get hold of the industry worldwide and destroy British sugar production. In my constituency, that would be a disaster.

Many of my constituents fled eastern Europe to escape not only Nazi but communist persecution. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North mentioned 1989. I was in Poland in 1980, in the month when Solidarity was formed. In 1983 I was thrown out of Czechoslovakia, which is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia. I was in Hungary, meeting autonomous trade union organisations and what were then described as dissident groups. They were fighting for freedom against the oppression of communism. If there were more time in this debate, I should continue to talk about that. Given the opportunity, I shall certainly come back to the subject in future debates.

After the horrors inflicted on those people, especially young people, battling for freedom from communism, for us to reject moves that would allow the finances of the EU to assist their countries—now freer, now democratic—to join us in reuniting Europe is something of an insult. It is an insult to those of my constituents who fled both Nazi and communist persecution.

I was a Yorkshire lad and spent my holidays in Filey on the Yorkshire coast. My first experience of Europe was in May 1968 when a young lad from Rhodesia, a mining village in my constituency, scored the winning goal against Ferencvaros in the European fairs cup final. That was my first experience of things European. Would that the players of Ferencvaros in Hungary were part of the European Union.

My second experience was more politically telling. That was to see tanks rolling through Prague and wonder, as a boy of eight, what kind of society we lived in. I say, let us make those preparations for enlargement. Let us negotiate our position, and the UK's position, from a position of strength. Let us be hard but fair. That is what I would expect of any of our leaders, and I commend them for what they have done. I hope, in the same spirit, that they will continue to negotiate for British and for European interests in future years.

9 pm

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): It has been a revelation for me tonight to learn that just 12 lines of a Bill could provide such riveting and thought-provoking debate. Listening to the previous two speakers in particular put me in mind of the scenes that filled the Chamber 63 years ago, when a piece of paper was passed along the Front Bench, announcing that Mr. Chamberlain would be invited to Munich to consider another form of treaty. We should compare that with the type of debate that we are having now, which some people may find boring, and which may be obscure and arcane; but the subjects that we are discussing—enlargement and the maintenance of peace in Europe after all these years—are significant and not boring in the least.

There is a danger that people will be alert to the possibility that a Member who contributes to this debate, especially a new Member, is either a Europhobe or a Europhile—because what other kind of person would possibly want to take part in a debate on such an arcane-sounding subject? But I am very pleased to speak from the centre. I want to take a balanced view about the future of the European Union.

It is from the centre that I was earlier forced to ponder on the speech from the Opposition Front Bench by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), which

seemed to suggest that there were no grounds for crediting the present Government with the successful outcome of the Agenda 2000 negotiations. The House was asked to consider who negotiated the United Kingdom's rebate in the first place, and credit was given where credit was due.

However, I also want to give credit to Opposition Members who were around at the time for their consistent support, over 18 years of Conservative government, for this country's net contributions to the European Union during that time, which I calculate, from Library figures, amounted to £30.946 billion. Each year under Conservative Governments, the net contribution increased. I find it odd that now the Opposition seem to have such great concern about the net contribution. As hon. Members have pointed out, one cannot have something for nothing; the idea that it is possible is absurd.

I welcome the changes contained in the Bill, as they are a genuine attempt to make the funding of the European Union fairer and, perhaps more important, to be seen to be fair. A move away from VAT-based contributions to a gross national product base will provide a basis for financing the European Union that more accurately reflects the relative wealth of the member states.

The proportion of income that the European Union will take from each of the own resources may become fairer, but that is not the end of the story. We must also ask, how will this money be distributed and spent? I note that the agriculture and sugar levies account for a mere 2.1 per cent. of the own resources, yet agriculture subsidies still take nearly 50 per cent. of the European Union's budget. We need to ask whether the most important financial aspect of the EU's work—efficient agriculture—is, after all these years, still subsidising inefficient agriculture.

I want to highlight regional disparities. I became aware of this problem when I lived in Hull and served on the city council's economic development committee, where I learned about the hot banana. It was a phenomenon 10 years ago in certain parts of Europe, stretching from the south-east of England down to northern Italy, where there was a disproportionate amount of economic development. We have yet to see other regions in Europe catch up with the so-called hot banana.

I have just read a report published recently by Yorkshire Forward, the regional development association, which reviewed Yorkshire and the Humber region's information technology needs. It makes salutary reading, pointing to the lower skills base, the lower take-up of IT in regional businesses and the lower usage of the internet at home and in business. We need to develop our information and communication skills and improve access to European structural funds.

We need a healthy relationship with our European partners to ensure that Yorkshire and Humber businesses in the single market—they are inextricably involved in European markets—are not disadvantaged by a little Englander attitude that opposes all things European and seems to be based on a slogan that is something like, "Part of Europe, but not in it."

Agenda 2000 means that more money will be invested in regional development and that spending on the CAP will be reduced. I believe that EU spending will be brought under control by the Bill, so far as this country is concerned.

Speaking from the centre, I want to be alert to what lies ahead. For example, if European gross national product decreases, what will be the impact on the structural spending in those regions to which I have referred that are lagging behind? Surely those areas, in those circumstances, might need more structural assistance. I was interested to hear my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary talking about the investment of £10 billion in regional and structural funds. What guarantees come with that £10 billion?

Speaking from the centre, I would like to ask whether the Bill will lead to greater accountability. Will the money that is being spent be easier to draw down? I am familiar with the problems that businesses, voluntary organisations and a wide range of bodies have in accessing European funds. The system seems to be burdened with a great deal of bureaucracy and, very often, bodies in the regions need a great deal of bureaucracy themselves to draw down the funds that are available. Those funds are subject to the vagaries of the exchange rate of sterling and the euro; that may be borne in mind in future debates.

I welcome the Bill, and the fact that it has the vague endorsement of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). That is welcome, although he did not seem to put forward any alternative. Indeed, I have heard no alternative suggested by Conservative Front Benchers. Perhaps in the 50 minutes that remain, we will hear their alternative.

9.9 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): May I welcome the new Economic Secretary, congratulate her on her appointment and comment with some envy on the splendid supply of talented ladies that the Labour party seems to have on the Treasury Bench?

I had to agree with the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) on at least one thing: his criticism of the rather deliberate obscurity and lack of transparency, in language and documents, that all too often make finding out what is going on in EU matters rather difficult.

Hon. Members have asked whether we have an alternative suggestion. The job of the Opposition is to provide a critique, not necessarily to oppose when the balance of proposals may be reasonable. We welcome European enlargement, and the Berlin agreement, in itself, is arguably not an unreasonable deal. However, it is important to remember that, in an obscure way, this little Bill will effectively give our approval to all last September's Council decisions, including those important proposals contained in paragraph 16 of the EU document, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) mentioned. Those provisions would go much further and would empower proposals for EU taxes and further changes to the United Kingdom abatement.

The Government have said that the Berlin changes represent relatively modest, sensible and reasonably fair proposals on EU funding, sensibly reducing the VAT element and increasing the GNP-based element, but they have said absolutely nothing about what they estimate the cost of our giving up the windfalls will be, as and when enlargement occurs.

We all know that Germany, Holland, Austria and Sweden made reasonable requests to reduce their contributions, especially reflecting the fact that the German economy has been somewhat stalled in recent years. However, some people cannot pay less without others paying more, and the net financial deal is that

[Mr. Howard Flight]

although our abatement is set in stone—indeed, we have the power of veto over it—we are likely to pay a little more, proportionately, as things advance.

The Library notes on the matter openly pointed out—whereas the Treasury notes did not—the need to consider all the items in last September's Council decision, not just the highlights of the Berlin agreement. All those issues are relevant to the Bill.

Before turning to Members' comments, I want to ask the Economic Secretary three specific questions, the first of which is somewhat technical. There is a greater use of GNP figures, but which GNP are we talking about? Are we talking about the official figures; or, as in complying with the Maastricht treaty, are we talking about GNP figures in which an allowance is made for undisclosed economies, which differ fairly significantly among member states? The figures used will make a material difference.

Secondly, what is the position on GNP-based contributions in relation to changing exchange rates? At present, we happen to have a weak euro, but sterling is relatively strong, so will we move up and down with the exchange rate, or will a mechanism exist to provide some stability? Thirdly, will the Government comment on what they expect the windfall cost to be? The figure of £200 million has been quoted, but learned papers have suggested that the figure could be as much as £1 billion in due course.

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: If I may, I shall first make some progress.

The unfairness story has been mentioned, but I am surprised that no one has said that the real villain of the piece seems to be France. France's gross contributions have been £9.2 billion, versus our contribution of £7.3 billion, but refunds to France amount to £8.5 billion, versus £3.8 billion to us. The net effect is that France pays £750 million, compared with the United Kingdom's £3.2 billion and Germany's £7.5 billion, but the French economy is broadly comparable in size to Britain's. That seems to be where the main unfairness lies.

I was surprised by the enthusiasm for the agreement, because surely the disappointment of Berlin was the failure adequately to reform the common agricultural policy. I do not understand how central and eastern European countries can join in a hurry until there have been considerably more reforms. We have heard comments about the Polish milk situation, and we are kidding ourselves if we think that enough has yet been done. The iron curtain came down 12 years ago, and it is a disgrace that we are still fiddling away and delaying membership for those states.

I wish to make the fundamental point that the United States, which is relatively homogeneous and has a common currency, has transfer payments of 11 per cent. of GNP. Implicit in the arithmetic before us is that 1.27 per cent. is economically sufficient for the less homogeneous economies of Europe that also now have a common currency. Detailed research does not appear to have been carried out on the fundamental issue of the amount of transfer payments that Europe is likely to need in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) made the serious point that administrative costs are rising fast. After the major expenditure on the common agricultural policy and the structural moneys, there is £12 billion of other EU expenses in the budget of which precious little is seen. If £12 billion were spent on education or the health service in this country, it would make a colossal difference. It may be a small sum in terms of pence per citizen of the EU, but that large sum has manifestly not been well spent.

The Chief Secretary failed to refer to that fact that it was not just the Berlin agreement but, as I pointed out, the Council decisions of last September relating to contributions, and he failed to explain his understanding of what paragraph 16 is all about. It does not empower the levying of new European taxes; it invites proposals to do so and to review the British abatement yet again. Its existence, however, puts down a pretty important marker for the future.

The Chief Secretary said that he thought that Berlin had met the key objectives, but does he really think that that is true of CAP reforms? He also said that the effects on the United Kingdom were neutral, but I repeat my question on the significance of the windfall costs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere regretted the inadequate reforms to the EU budget generally and made a convincing case that the relative position of Britain will deteriorate a little as the result of Berlin. He explained the costs of giving up the windfall and pointed out a small inaccuracy in the Labour manifesto, which had claimed that the UK contribution would fall to a level similar to Italy's. That is manifestly not the case.

Despite all the hullabaloo about the CAP and the fact that agricultural spending has stabilised at 45 per cent. and is down from the proportionately higher levels of the past, my hon. Friend pointed out that, in absolute terms, expenditure is not down much and will rise slightly over the next year or two. In essence, Conservative Members understand the fairness and approve the shift to GNP, but we believe that there has not been enough reform of the CAP and that there could have been a slightly better deal for the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford surprisingly expressed surprise that the stealth and lack of transparency concerning many EU matters leads people to be cautious and to wonder what is going on. That is not surprising, and it would be better if communication were much more transparent. However, it is the objective of EMU to create a European state, although not in the traditional sense of the word. As all one's continental friends are clear, the objectives are not just economic, but political.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) made a gentle, conservative speech that left me unclear about where the Liberal Democrats stand on Europe. I thought that they were much more enthusiastic than the Labour party for full European integration. He said that the Bill is modest and could be expensive for the UK. In addition, he regretted the fact that there were so few reforms to the CAP. Constructively, he wanted to repatriate to nation states expenditure that was not core expenditure. He also challenged the Chief Secretary's assertion that the CAP reform was radical and adequate. We, too, made that point.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) criticised us for arguing that administrative expenses were rising by too much. He made the silly point that just because it was only a penny or so per person, it did not matter. The absolute sums are substantial and hon. Members on both sides of the House are most critical of the waste in the £12 billion. That cannot be overlooked.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham plagiarised the Prime Minister. His contribution can be described as vintage Redwood. He made the robust assertion that camouflage is being used, because the Bill is supported by an underlying document which, at paragraph 16, invites the introduction of direct taxation by the EU and a further reduction in the UK's abatement. Even if the net financial deal is collectively reasonable, we should not deceive ourselves that the Berlin agreement is to our explicit financial advantage. It opens up the unknown, which could produce the fifth resource.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) was keen on central and eastern European membership and enlargement, which we support. He made the fundamental point that it would strengthen a Europe of democratic nations and make them more outward looking. He also made an interesting contribution on tobacco fraud.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on his excellent maiden speech. Having lived in that part of the world, I did not know that there had been two Prime Ministers from Leominster. What he said about foot and mouth and rural industries was moving and important. I hope that the Government will take note of it. He also made a significant point about how the CAP contributed towards some of the problems that spread foot and mouth, as well as commenting constructively on how it was mishandled.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) argued that Berlin was good for Europe. In particular, he argued that it was sensible to have more GNP-based finance than VAT-based finance. However, I question his assertion that the CAP has been brought under adequate control.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) on his equally good maiden speech. He made an excellent and elegant contribution, which demonstrated a gracious handling of his predecessor. *[Interruption.]* I mean, of course, his immediate predecessor.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) made an interesting contribution arising from his business dealings with the European Commission. As a taxpayer, he was critical of the waste of money on what he implied were crackpot projects, and of excessive nepotism in the awarding of contracts—I hope that his comments did not apply to him personally. He echoed the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere that it is bad news when administrative costs rise at a rate much higher than inflation with no justification.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on his maiden speech. For those of us who come from south of Watford, it was an interesting education on the family background of Scottish nationalism. He made the interesting point that if Britain were broken up into separate components, we would have more votes in Europe than we do as one country. That is not a justification for Scottish independence that particularly appeals to me.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) gave an interesting history of the original abatement negotiations, from Ian Gilmour's book. He also focused on the EU's ability to tackle fraud, but it seemed to me that he, too, was over-optimistic about the likely effects of the reforms to the CAP so far.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on his splendid retread maiden speech—I think that that is the correct phrase—and welcome him back to the House. He pointed out that the Berlin summit missed several opportunities, and he gave a vivid vignette of his constituents' sound, down-to-earth views, which rang extraordinarily true to me, being, as many will know, someone who grew up in the splendid county of Essex.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) welcomed an early debate on Europe following the general election, but he almost admitted that he knew that his views were not entirely in accordance with those of the majority of his constituents, even though he has, of course, been re-elected. He said that he understood why a majority of the British people tend to be Euro-sceptic, in the correct sense of the word.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) made a splendid, bluntly persuasive speech, during which I observed Labour Members listening intently and, I think, secretly agreeing with much of what he said. He rightly pointed out that there has been no genuine reform of the CAP. He has been waiting more than 20 years for that and expects to wait at least another 30 years, if not for ever. He was healthily sceptical of all the usual optimistic arguments about the wonderful outcomes that never materialise. I remember that it was argued that the introduction of the euro would add 3 per cent. to GNP, but GNP shrank.

My hon. Friend pointed out that enlargement means that objective 1 and 2 grants to the UK are likely to come to an end. That is the Irish point—that enlargement may be morally right, but we must be clear about what effects it must have that are in our interests. He also seemed to be saying that the EU had attempted to buy his support by making not one but five grants to his constituency, but I feel that there is little prospect of that attempt being successful.

Dr. Palmer: Does the hon. Gentleman's support for the comments of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) imply that he agrees with him to the extent that he regrets that we joined the EU in the first place?

Mr. Flight: No. I said that he made an excellent, entertaining speech, and I think that many hon. Members saw a great deal of hard truth in it. It is good that none of us has falsely glossy views. Whether we should have joined is a different subject from what will happen in future. My hon. Friend's main point was that there is nothing that anyone can do about that at present—a powerful point that was aimed at all of us.

My hon. Friend also asked what the cost of giving up our windfall payments would be. Specifically, albeit on a matter not directly related to Berlin, he asked the Government how much the sale of our gold holdings and the conversion of the proceeds into euros has cost. Many hon. Members, including me, have asked Ministers that question and there is no justification for their not having

[Mr. Flight]

replied. They could give a conditional reply—that the figure is such and such at such a such a rate of exchange—but it is poor not to have replied at all.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend's splendid speech, but is he aware that today I received a reply to a written question that I put to the Treasury, in which I asked how many euros we had bought and what we had paid for them? All I received was a load of codswallop that does not state how many we have bought or the price paid for them. Why will the Government not tell the people how many they bought and what they cost, so that the people can know how much money they have lost? Is Parliament not meant to be a place in which we hold the Executive to account and get information?

Dr. Spink: Hear, hear!

Mr. Flight: My hon. Friend expresses my views entirely. I hope that we have the support of the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford in fighting the European habit of being obscure rather than transparent that appears to be creeping into British Government.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) overstated the extent of reforms to the CAP, especially in relation to what is needed. We heard a lively and most enjoyable speech from the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), but I put it to him that linoleum is as out-of-date a floor covering as the CAP is a way of managing agriculture. He would be extremely lucky if the average family in his constituency were £70 a week better off as a result of the modest reforms that have so far been made.

I welcome the new hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who came across as a decent and down-to-earth Englishman. He made some useful comments about the reality of bargaining power and he is, rightly, a keen supporter of enlargement. I also welcome the new hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen), who made a balanced contribution to the debate in which he emphasised the importance of greater accountability.

The Berlin deal was not unreasonable, although we think that it could have been better. We would have liked more reforms to the CAP and we fear that the lack thereof will further delay enlargement to eastern and central Europe. None the less, we understand that bargaining had to be done and that the deal struck was probably not a bad one. We are concerned about what else has been opened up by the agreements made at last September's Council, and I should be interested to learn about the Government's attitude to paragraph 16—an issue to which the Chief Secretary did not respond.

We shall not oppose the Bill, but we look forward to scrutinising it in a great deal more detail in Committee in about 12 days' time on the Floor of the House.

9.33 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The debate has been very interesting. The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) called the Berlin summit a profound disappointment and a missed opportunity. In fact, it was not only an opportunity grasped but a negotiating triumph.

Before the Berlin summit, the Opposition set the Government three key tests: first, to limit the own resources ceiling; secondly, to secure the United Kingdom abatement; and, thirdly, to increase or improve our level of structural funds. Not only did we deliver on all three tests, but we achieved the most radical reform of the common agricultural policy since its inception and a real-terms reduction in European Union spending.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) has advised his own party to listen and engage constructively with Europe. The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) advised his party to turn down the volume on Europe.

Mr. Forth: No chance.

Ruth Kelly: I can already hear that Opposition Members are unwilling to listen to that advice. In fact, the attitude of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) shows clearly that if, by some chance, the Opposition were in government, there would be a rerun of the situation that existed the last time that the subject was debated, in 1994. There would have to be a motion of confidence in the Government, and the Conservative party would be torn apart by factionalism and rivalry.

I exempt from my remarks, partially at least, the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). I was extremely pleased that he acknowledged that the outcome of the Berlin Council was not a bad deal; that is praise indeed. Respite from the comments and bickering of the Opposition came from several excellent maiden speeches. I apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber to hear all of them all the way through. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on his contribution and his warm tribute to his predecessor, Peter Temple-Morris, and his diligent work in his constituency. The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the damaging impact of foot and mouth disease and the need to reform the common agricultural policy; he also made a passionate defence of farming interests, a sentiment that can unite both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) paid fulsome tribute to his predecessor, Martin Bell—at times the scourge of both sides of the House. The hon. Gentleman referred to the beauty and historical nature of his constituency in an eloquent speech. He is clearly a representative of the new, inclusive Conservative party, but it was a shame that he was caught up in the false rhetoric and claptrap of the anti-Europeanism that dominated contributions from the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) made a passionate defence of his constituents; I welcome him to the House. He too paid tribute to his predecessor, Margaret Ewing, and made a passionate defence of fishing interests, a subject on which, no doubt, he will make many further contributions in the House.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) described himself as a semi or partial retread. He clearly enjoyed making his second maiden speech to the House; I enjoyed listening to him, and I am sure that he will play a full part in the proceedings of the House in future.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere, who opened for the Opposition, made several points and called the Berlin summit a missed opportunity. He pointed out that the United Kingdom's net contribution will be about £4 billion this year and that the position of other member states has improved. However, he fails to appreciate that although Germany, Austria, Sweden and Denmark pay reduced contributions, because their share of the UK rebate has decreased, in fact the money has been reallocated among the other 14 member states, and our contribution has remained unchanged.

I shall set the matter of windfall gains straight once and for all. Opposition Members asked repeatedly how much we forwent. The answer is 220 million euros. The precedent for forgoing windfall gains was set by the previous Administration—first by Margaret Thatcher, then by John Major. Before negotiations on the new own resources decision, two windfall gains associated with changes to the financing system were given up. In 1988, the Conservative Government gave up a windfall gain when the GNP resource was first introduced; then, in 1994, when the VAT contribution was reduced—which increased member states' GNP contributions—the Conservatives agreed to forgo that windfall gain as well. The effect of these has been cumulative.

The only new windfall gains given up at Berlin were an amount of expenditure equivalent to pre-accession aid upon enlargement, and the increasing collection costs against the traditional own resources. The UK gave up those windfall gains to achieve a position that can be described unequivocally as not a euro more, not a euro less.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am grateful to the Economic Secretary for giving way, and I take this opportunity to welcome her to her position. Is the windfall gain a genuine windfall—in other words, is it a one-off gain that Britain would have got, or would it have continued over the period to which she is referring?

Ruth Kelly: The main windfall gain is the windfall gain that we would incur as a result of enlargement. If our spending on pre-accession aid was subject to the rebate upon enlargement, we would have a one-off gain. That clearly would not be fair. We have therefore sacrificed a one-off gain.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere questioned whether the UK's net contribution would be equivalent to that of France and Italy. I can tell him that it certainly will be. By 2006—assuming that six new member states join the EU, as is the common assumption—that will be the case. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs, who called France the villain of the piece, will no doubt be pleased that, as a result of the agreement, France will be paying relatively more towards the UK rebate.

Several hon. Members spoke about fraud. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) spelled out some of the measures that the Government are taking. Any fraud against the European Union budget is, of course, unacceptable, and the UK has been at the forefront of measures to combat the problem. Member states must work with the Commission to ensure that the part of the budget for which they are responsible is administered in accordance with the principles of sound financial management. The UK has supported measures to make member states accept their responsibility for administering Community funds—for example, through the introduction of fines for errors in the structural funds caused by inadequate member state controls.

As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said earlier, the newly established European anti-fraud office was proposed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has independent powers to seek out and investigate fraud against the EC budget. It is doing a good job already and has carried out a number of major investigations.

Alongside the establishment of the anti-fraud office, the Commission is revising its internal procedures to reduce further the scope for fraud to take place. Neil Kinnock has been appointed Vice-President of the Commission with special responsibility for reform, and we fully support his programme, which will modernise the administration of the Commission.

The radical reform strategy that Neil Kinnock proposed must be delivered by the end of 2002, but already it has introduced a code of conduct for Commissioners and Commission officials. It has published a whistleblowers' charter, established new and fairer arrangements for appointments to senior posts, and begun the major process of modernising the Commission's financial management procedures to establish clear lines of responsibility for preventing fraud and waste.

The reforms proposed by Neil Kinnock are far reaching, and we cannot expect them to be implemented overnight. It is important to their success that the reforms are subject to proper consultation and that they proceed by agreement. We are confident, however, that the programme of reform will be completed on time and that it will prove a strong safeguard against fraud.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) called for wider budgetary reform and CAP reform. He argued that the Government should focus on outcomes. He noted that the 2001 EC budget is subdivided into policy areas. I assure him that that is an element of Commission reform that the Government strongly support. We have pressed and will continue to press for clear objectives and performance indicators for all EC expenditure programmes, and timely evaluations as part of the Commission's proposed move to activity-based management.

I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman on reform of the common agricultural policy. At Berlin, we achieved significant price cuts for cereals, beef and milk. The intervention price for cereals was reduced by 15 per cent., and for beef it was reduced by 20 per cent. over three years. Dairy support prices were reduced by 15 per cent. over the three years beginning in July 2005. Those changes do not go as far or take effect as quickly as we would have liked, but they are nevertheless a significant achievement. They ensure that European beef and cereal prices will be brought closer to world levels.

The Agenda 2000 package will mean lower prices for consumers. It will be worth about £70 a year for an average family of four. As a result of the reforms, overall spending on the CAP will decline in real terms from 2002. As well as price reductions, the discussions in Berlin of the common agricultural policy also led to the introduction of the CAP second pillar. That will ensure that the CAP moves away from production-based subsidies and towards a greater focus on rural

[Ruth Kelly]

development. We have so far introduced schemes to improve and conserve the environment, including support for countryside stewardship, woodlands and organic farming.

We are also providing support to develop diverse and sustainable rural businesses. For example, such support is provided through the rural enterprise scheme and through processing and marketing grants. The reform package includes provision for member states to target up to 20 per cent. of direct aid funds on rural development measures. The UK has already introduced that change. Agenda 2000 in Berlin delivered a significant and welcome reform in the common agricultural policy, and we are keen to build on that reform in future rounds of discussion.

When I heard the contribution of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), I thought that he was about to launch his own leadership bid, but he seems to have missed the boat on that issue, as on so many others. Throughout his speech, he referred to paragraph 16, by which he meant article 9. If he had scrutinised his previous actions, he would have seen that he endorsed a similar decision in 1994. The European Communities (Finance) Act 1995 states:

"The Commission shall submit, by the end of 1999, a report on the operation of the system, including a re-examination of the correction of budgetary imbalances granted to the United Kingdom, established by this Decision. It shall also . . . submit a report on the findings of a study on the feasibility of creating a new own resource".

That position did not lead to a new EU tax then, and it will not do so now.

The right hon. Gentleman also questioned the validity of spending structural funds. I emphasise that such funds play a key role in the development and regeneration of areas. For example, they are worth almost £300 million to Cornwall over the seven-year planning period of the EU document. Other areas—south Yorkshire, west Wales and the valleys, as well as Merseyside—will also receive substantial funds.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) about his personal experience of the common agricultural policy, and also about the application to south Wales of objective 1 status and its benefits for his area. We have seen subsidiarity at its best.

Several hon. Members spoke about increases for administrative expenditure in the EU budget, but they failed to note what that expenditure is for. Part of the increase is needed to fund the necessary costs of Commission reform. I wonder whether Opposition Members would question whether that is money well spent. Of course, the United Kingdom wants the same discipline applied to the EU budget as is applied to the national Budget. We shall continue to press for budget discipline.

Mr. Flight: Is there any logic whereby reform should result in rising costs? In most organisations, reform leads to falling costs. Reform and rising costs do not go hand in hand.

Ruth Kelly: The total EU budget will decrease by the end of the planning period in 2006. That will happen precisely because we are reforming the operation of the EU and the Commission in combating fraud and cracking down on financial irregularities. Labour Members would like that to continue.

My hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) and for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) spelled out the benefits of EU membership. My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) spoke with knowledge and interest about the scrutiny of EU legislation. The contribution of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) was interesting. As has been said, he was at one extreme of the debate. He said that five wards in his constituency now benefit from objective 2 funding. He questioned whether the money should be spent there. Does that form part of the Opposition's spending cut agenda? Do they want to cut back on objective 1 and objective 2 spending in this country?

Reform of structural funds is clearly required for the long-term affordability of enlargement. We shall push hard for reform that is fair and in the British national interest and that will deliver value for money for UK taxpayers.

My hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) spoke about the move from VAT resources and Customs payments towards the GNP resource. That is an important move, which is more progressive and will help in the fight against fraud.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that further progress in that direction would be welcome in future?

Ruth Kelly: The move was an important step in reforming the EU budget. It is clearly desirable to move towards a system of GNP financing. I note my hon. Friend's comments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) spoke about his negotiating skills. His strong speech displayed evidence that he is well equipped for negotiating. I do not know how he managed to argue at the age of 11 that the CAP was bleeding the country dry. However, I am grateful that he has moderated his opinions and become an ardent supporter of the EU. He pointed out the importance of building alliances and enlarging the EU.

Mr. Heath: I welcome the Economic Secretary to her new post. I want to revert to the answer that she gave my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) about forgoing the windfall gain from enlargement. Is she convinced that it is not a recurrent gain? Has the Treasury carried out any analysis of whether forgoing it is more advantageous to the UK than, for example, amending or forgoing the Fontainebleau agreement?

Ruth Kelly: The new agreement puts the matter right once and for all. Any new expenditure that is incurred in the member states will qualify for the rebate.

The Bill is short but important for Britain and the EU. It will enact the own resources decisions that were made at the Berlin Council in 1999. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer won a significant victory for the UK and demonstrated how

much both sides had to gain from Britain's constructive engagement with Europe. Passing the Bill will show our continued commitment to reform in Europe.

United Kingdom gains from the Berlin Council are significant. We retained our abatement in full; we maintained the overall ceiling for Community own resources at 1.27 per cent. of European Union gross national product; we secured structural and cohesion funds that will be worth £10 billion to the UK's regions between 2000 and 2006; and we negotiated reforms to the common agricultural policy that will mean lower food prices worth an estimated £1 billion a year to UK consumers. The own resources decision that we negotiated at Berlin means that the UK will continue to make a fair contribution to the European Union budget: not a euro more, not a euro less.

The Berlin Council was an important step forward for the European Union and all its member states. The EU budget was brought under control, stabilising spending following decades of expansion. The introduction of the second pillar of the common agricultural policy will move support from production subsidies to rural development and environmental stewardship.

Of course, the decisions enacted by the Bill are only part of the process of reform in Europe. We still need to push further. Economic reforms are needed to raise the productivity of the European Union as a whole, to increase the effectiveness of the single market and to extend its benefits into new areas such as energy, telecommunications and financial services. There is also an on-going process of reform to the institutions and administration of the European Union.

Roger Casale: Before my hon. Friend concludes, will she add to the long list of important gains and benefits that come from the agreement in Berlin the fact that the reforms to the common agricultural policy, the measures introduced to tackle fraud and the ceiling put in place on the EU's resources will lead to greater public confidence in European Union institutions?

Ruth Kelly: I certainly believe that that will be the case.

The Bill also paves the way for future European Union enlargement. There is an on-going process of reform to the institutions and administration of the European Union to prepare us to meet the challenges and realise the great benefits of EU enlargement.

The Bill shows how much everyone can gain from Britain's constructive engagement with the European Union. It shows that by taking a leading role in reform and working together with other member states, we can achieve outcomes that are good for the UK and that strengthen all member states. I am proud that the UK is playing a leading role in taking this process further. The single market in financial services is a good example of the benefits that constructive engagement can bring. A dynamic single market in financial services is key to achieving fundamental economic reform and prosperity across Europe.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. She has kindly accepted a number of interventions. Does she agree that one of the most important aspects of the impact that the measures will have on our constituents—and on their appreciation of the value of engagement in Europe and the achievements of the Berlin summit—is that most average families will see a reduction of £70 a year in their food bill? That is the bottom line.

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for drawing that to the House's attention. The Bill shows the substantial gains to be made by UK consumers and by everyone else when Britain plays a constructive role and engages with the European Union. The deal achieved in Berlin reduces EU spending by 2006, improves our position on structural funds, reforms the common agricultural policy and paves the way for enlargement. It compares with substantial increases agreed under previous Governments in 1988 and 1994. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (FINANCE) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the European Communities (Finance) Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Programming of proceedings

2. Proceedings in Committee of the whole House and all remaining proceedings on the Bill shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Committee, on consideration and on Third Reading

3.—(1) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed in two allotted days.

(2) An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (FINANCE) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the European Communities (Finance) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the charging on, and payment out of, the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund of any sums which, by virtue of the amendment of the European Communities Act 1972 made by that Act, fall to be charged on or paid out of either of those Funds.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Question agreed to.

HOMELESSNESS BILL

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Homelessness Bill, the Standing Committee on the Bill shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question—[28 June].

Question again proposed,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Friday 20th July, do adjourn till Monday 15th October.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Question agreed to.

Colchester Sixth Form College

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.1 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): For a Government who claim that their priorities are "Education, education, education", Labour has been a huge disappointment for sixth form colleges. Although my debate this evening centres on the Colchester sixth form college, which is one of the top such colleges, the financial discrimination to which it is subject is experienced by every sixth form college in the country, of which there are just over 100.

Indeed, the situation confronting our sixth form colleges is worse now than it was even under the Conservative Government. The gap between the funding given to sixth forms in schools and that provided to our sixth form colleges has widened over the past four years. The variation has grown to 30 per cent. or more, and the projection for the next few years is that the gap will widen still further. Sixth form colleges have been told that they must make further so-called efficiency gains, whereas school sixth forms have been promised increased funding. Where is the fairness? The playing field is not level, and now the Government are planning to make it more uneven. Life will become more of an uphill struggle for sixth form colleges.

Labour's promises to give equality to our young people have been broken. Pledges from Ministers have not been honoured. There is no need for me to rehearse the arguments over the funding of our sixth form colleges. The Department for Education and Skills is well aware of them, yet Ministers have failed to tackle the unfairness.

In April this year, the chair of governors of Colchester sixth form college, Mr. Syd Kent—a former Labour county councillor and former chair of Colchester constituency Labour party—wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to express concerns about funding. In a detailed letter, Mr. Kent said:

> "We have had eight years of funding cuts expressed as 'efficiency gains' which has led to a dramatic decline in levels of real funding."

I invite the Minister to visit Colchester sixth form college to discuss with the principal and others the consequences of the Government's unfair funding policy towards sixth form colleges. No Minister has ever visited the college, which has 2,150 students.

In the first year of the last Parliament, the Select Committee on Education and Employment looked into further education, including funding for sixth form colleges. At the outset, the chairman was the hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), who was followed by the hon. Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), both of whom were subsequently promoted to ministerial office in the Department for Education and Employment.

Sadly, hopes that fairer funding for sixth form colleges would be forthcoming as a result of a new Government promising more investment in education proved to be unfounded, even given the Select Committee's recommendations and the ministerial influence of two people with personal knowledge of the unfairness.

Will the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), deliver where others have failed? He is newly installed,

and thus free to distance himself from those who have gone before. This is his chance to bring justice and fairness to the nation's sixth form colleges. Will he announce to the House that the Government will at long last put right the wrongs of the funding formula, which currently cheats students and staff of the Colchester sixth form college, or will he merely provide warm words, like others before him, and leave the sixth form colleges with a funding formula that results in considerably less funding per student in real terms than that provided for a student at a school sixth form?

According to the Association of Colleges, a student undertaking a three A-level package at a school sixth form is funded on average to the tune of £3,530 per annum. A student at a sixth form college, however, is funded to the tune of £2,520. The difference of £1,010, according to the association, represents underfunding of 29 per cent. for a student at a sixth form college. Others believe that the real difference is more than 30 per cent.

If students at Colchester sixth form college were funded at the same level as sixth form students attending the town's selective Colchester Royal grammar school and Colchester County high school for girls, and Philip Morant school, it would receive a minimum of an extra £1.25 million a year. Why is there a different funding formula? What logical reason can there be for students in the same town and the same age group, taking broadly the same range of subjects, to be funded at different levels? Yet sixth form students at those three schools are funded at a higher level than those attending Colchester sixth form college. There can be no justification for that two-tier disparity.

Given the same level of funding, the college could enrol more students, in line with the Prime Minister's target that more young people should enter further and higher education—currently, it has to turn many applicants away—and recruit more staff to provide a better student-staff ratio to match those enjoyed by sixth forms in three of the town's schools. Pupils from all the 11-to-16 comprehensive schools in Colchester, and from further afield, go on to the sixth form college. Teaching staff at the sixth form college are on lower pay scales than their school-teaching counterparts. That unfairness, which stems from the unfairness of the funding levels, also needs to be corrected.

The root cause of the two-tier sixth form funding provision lies with a Conservative Government who, in 1992—in an act of typical Tory stupidity, rather than one of common sense—removed sixth form colleges from the democratic framework of local education authorities, and established them as quango institutions.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I agree with what my hon. Friend says about the discrimination suffered by Colchester sixth form college. Does he accept, however, that the same discrimination is suffered by sixth form colleges across the country, including Paston sixth form college in North Walsham? Many small sixth form colleges suffer the additional burden imposed by extra financial auditing requirements, which constitute further discrimination in comparison with the arrangements for sixth formers in schools.

Bob Russell: I agree. This is a nationwide problem affecting all sixth form colleges.

One of the less widely known side effects of this education apartheid is that sixth form colleges have to pay value added tax, while school sixth forms do not. Perhaps the Minister can explain the logic of that. If he cannot, will he pledge this evening to arrange with Government colleagues for the status of such colleges to be amended so that, as with school sixth forms, VAT is not levied?

As I have said, this is not the first time that the unfair funding of sixth form colleges has been brought to parliamentary attention. The last time was 15 months ago, on 15 March last year, when the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) secured an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall. The Minister who replied was the present Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Croydon, North then Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I also spoke briefly.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): As the hon. Gentleman says, I spoke about this 15 months ago. I am very concerned about Luton sixth form college, where I am vice-chair of the governors, and particularly concerned about the continuing pressure on sixth form colleges to increase so-called efficiency by 1 per cent. per year. The requirement is not imposed on schools, and I consider it an additional burden on sixth form colleges. I hope that he will address that problem as well.

Bob Russell: I am grateful for that intervention. The hon. Gentleman kindly allowed me to speak in his Adjournment debate and I thought that I should repay the compliment.

In his contribution to the debate, the Minister said:

"I recognise that the previous Administration's disastrous approach to further education funding means that sixth form colleges are now funded well below school sixth forms."

He went on to admit that the disparity in funding between sixth form colleges and school sixth forms was 20 per cent., a figure somewhat lower than in reality exists, but nevertheless an admission by the Government that there is serious unfairness.

In response to my intervention, the Minister said:

"The Government agree that upward convergence for further education colleges, including sixth form colleges, is the way forward."

I have to ask this evening why then, 15 months later, have the Government done nothing to move the funding of sixth form colleges upwards so that they converge with the funding given to school sixth forms?

As for upward convergence for further education colleges, that never happened, with the result that a range of academic courses at the Colchester Institute—on which I had an Adjournment debate on 9 April—will not be provided from this September, with the loss of around 50 academic and support staff. Had the Government acted in the way that they said that they would, the courses and jobs could have been saved. Local people have been deprived of educational opportunity and choice. Who do we blame? The Labour Government or the new learning and skills councils—another tier of quango?

[Bob Russell]

Back to sixth form colleges, however, and, in March last year, the Minister told the hon. Member for Luton, North:

"Clearly we need to move towards a position in which every young person doing A-level or vocational courses at that level—regardless of whether they are in a sixth form, sixth form college or an FE institution—is being treated properly and fairly. That is our objective, but it will take some time to achieve."

It may have been an objective in March 2000, but nothing has been done to make it a reality. Indeed, as I have pointed out, the situation has deteriorated and it is set to get worse.

The Minister also stated:

"We want to bridge the gap positively, with sixth form colleges moving upwards."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 15 March 2000; Vol. 346, c. 94-95WH.]

So why have the Government failed to deliver what was promised?

Recommendation 13 of the report of the Education and Employment Committee, published on 4 June 1998, under the heading "A level playing field for post-16 funding", stated:

"The one area in which genuine harmonisation of funding would appear to be both possible and desirable is in full-time 16-19 provision."

Select Committee recommendation 14 stated:

"We agree with the Minister of State that this kind of harmonisation should be achieved by additional funding for the FE sector rather than a process of 'levelling down'. It should be possible to establish a 'common entitlement' for 16 to 19-year-old students on similar courses in schools and colleges and to fund it accordingly.

We believe that such a 'common entitlement' should include the kind of enrichment activities which have long been regarded as a key part of traditional school sixth form education.

This would ensure all institutions—whether colleges or schools—serving 16 to 19-year-olds would receive comparable funding for providing the same qualifications."

Almost three years later, the Government's response in 1998 makes interesting reading:

"We are attracted to the idea of an 'entitlement curriculum' common to all 16 to 19-year-olds."

The section concluded with a promise of action

"in deciding how it might be achieved in practice."

Nothing has been done to deliver what it was believed was the Government's promise of action based on recommendations made by the Select Committee in a report published on 4 June 1998. The Government have badly let down Colchester sixth form college and the 100 or so other sixth form colleges throughout the country. All that they ask is that the Government keep their promises and fund sixth form colleges at the same level as they fund sixth forms in schools. For a Government who said that their priorities were, "Education, education, education", it should not be too difficult to deliver.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on securing this Adjournment debate. The issue is important and it is one that the House will want to address.

When I prepared for my response, I inevitably looked at a brief about the hon. Gentleman: As a Manchester City fan, I thought that I had difficulties, but when I discovered that he has been a supporter of Colchester United for the past 43 years, I felt that that was worthy of some sort of honour, medal—or even a cheap tie, similar to the one that he is brandishing.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware of the announcement today that Colchester zoo has the first artificially inseminated elephant to give birth in captivity. I do not know whether he is the father, but it is a remarkable, historic moment for the people of Colchester, so I am sure that he will find a way of attaching his name to that great achievement—as Liberal Democrats tend to do.

In my response to the debate, I shall address the general points of concern raised by the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), as well as dealing with matters specific to Colchester. It is important that my response traces the history of sixth form funding and that it is put in the wider context of education funding. As the hon. Member for Colchester said, the approach of the previous Conservative Administration to further education over many years resulted in sixth form colleges being funded well below school sixth forms. As he is fully aware—and has stated—the Labour Government have long expressed the view that we want to address that historical inequality. Indeed, during the election campaign we reiterated our pledge to boost the share of national income spent on education generally.

In our manifesto, we promised that there would be more money for schools, universities and colleges. We also promised to guarantee the real-terms funding of pupils in school sixth forms, if student numbers were maintained in those sixth forms, and to increase the funding for sixth form colleges and further education colleges.

In our second term, we intend to build on the investment in further education of the past four years and to narrow the gap between funding for sixth form colleges and school sixth forms. We shall do that by levelling up the funding of further education colleges. We realise that that can happen only over time—it cannot happen overnight—and that it will inevitably be subject to the availability of resources. Ministers have to make that point from time to time, although of course it is not a point that Liberal Democrats tend to make.

Any policy change that involves additional resources has to be fully costed and subject to the prevailing economic circumstances. However, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that I am confident that our substantial investment in post-16 education will allow significant progress to be made during the course of this Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have had to deal not only with inequitable funding levels between sixth form colleges and school sixth forms, but with the major disparities in funding between individual school sixth forms due to the discretion currently available to local education authorities. The best-funded sixth forms currently receive about one and a half times more funding per student than the worst. We also intend to tackle that inequality.

As stated previously, we will protect real-terms funding levels for all school sixth forms that maintain their student numbers, while increasing the level of funding for the

lowest funded school sixth forms. As with colleges, that will take some time and the pace of change will depend on affordability. However, that guarantee means that convergence will be upward.

The new Learning and Skills Council to which the hon. Gentleman referred, with its overview of all post-16 provision outside higher education, will help us to achieve our vision of a coherent and collaborative post-16 sector. The council will take over the funding of school sixth forms in April next year. The further education sector will move from transitional funding arrangements to the Learning and Skills Council regime from the beginning of the 2002 academic year. That means that by August next year, school sixth forms and sixth form colleges will be funded by the same funding body and through the same funding system. The funding system has national rates for similar types of provision. Although most school sixth forms will continue to receive a higher level of funding to start with—due to the real-terms guarantee—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the system will be a major step forward in achieving a level playing field between the sectors.

I shall address the hon. Gentleman's point about VAT. At the moment, education taught in all schools and colleges is free of VAT. Local authorities are funded through the VAT system for any VAT incurred on purchases for schools, but because sixth form colleges are directly funded by the Government as a result of the changes that were introduced in 1993 they are expected to include VAT in bids for funding. That explains the inequality regarding VAT.

In the meantime, we should not forget that the Labour Government have been responsible for a substantial injection of extra funds into further education and sixth form colleges. We have demonstrated our commitment to the biggest ever investment in post-16 education—almost £13 billion over the next three years. That includes substantial extra resources for the introduction of the new FE pay arrangements, which will help colleges to recruit, retain and reward excellent teachers.

We have introduced a step change in capital investment to develop centres of vocational excellence, and we are promoting higher standards of teaching and learning through the standards fund. This year alone, £527 million extra is being spent on further education—a 12 per cent. real-terms increase. The planned increase in student numbers over the same period is only 7 per cent. That means that funding per full-time equivalent student is increasing this year by 4 per cent. in real terms. We plan a further 3 per cent. real-terms increase next year, and we are confident that our planned investment will provide significant support to those offering 16 to 18 provision in the further education sector.

That is the general situation. I shall now discuss Colchester sixth form college, which was, I believe, opened in the year that the hon. Gentleman was the mayor of Colchester. I do not know whether his name is on a plaque at the college; he may be able to share that with me later. The college has seen its funds increase from £5.2 million in 1996–97 to almost £7.3 million for the coming academic year, and this year the college asked for, and received, more than £500,000 in additional funding for Curriculum 2000. The college has also been allocated its share of the £65 million extra that we are investing in the sector to help with further education teachers' pay. I did not hear him refer to any of those figures.

Of course I understand the calls for even greater investment to reverse the effects of the Conservative Administration's squeeze on colleges. However, we have made a start and, as I have shown, the increased funding levels for Colchester are clearly substantial. I would ask the hon. Gentleman to discuss that information with the governors of the college; I should be interested to hear their views.

As for the future, the new post-16 arrangements mark a step change in the funding and organisation of education and training in this country for young people. The arrangements are designed to drive up standards, to increase participation, to achieve parity between providers and to encourage collaboration. These arrangements will ensure that all young people have a broad range of high quality options from which to choose. From Colchester to Carlisle, the Government will ensure that every young person has access to educational opportunities that help them to pursue their dreams and fulfil their potential.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 4 July 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the present session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it had passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be further considered on Wednesday 11 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Small Arms

1. **Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): What measures her Department is taking to reduce the availability of small arms in developing countries. [679]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): In the post-cold war world, conflict and the suffering arising from conflict are concentrated in the developing world. The widespread availability of small arms is feeding conflict and blocking development. The United Kingdom supports stronger international controls on the supply of such weapons and supports local programmes to destroy weapons and resolve and prevent conflict.

Next week, I will attend the United Nations special session designed to agree an international programme of action.

Mr. McCabe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does she agree that one of the major problems is the lack of licensing controls on arms dealers? Can we expect her to take advantage of the forthcoming Export Control Bill to give us much tougher regulation of this unsavoury business?

Clare Short: Yes, I agree. There are two sets of problems. Many small arms are circulating, for example, in Africa, so we need to extract them. However, arms are also being exported—particularly from the former Soviet countries that have big arms industries—and they are not controlled. Some of those sales do not come through Britain—people are not allowed to sell arms without a licence from Britain—but they are brokered from Britain. We shall take control over that in the forthcoming Bill, and that is a very important change to clean up our act.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): In the previous Parliament, four Select Committees, including the Select Committee on International Development, recommended that there should be prior scrutiny by a Committee of the House of the United Kingdom's defence sales, including small arms sales. Does the Secretary of State support that approach?

Clare Short: No, the Government's view is that that would not be helpful. The hon. Gentleman might know that, since our Government were formed, we have been allowed to object to a licence on the ground that an arms sales would prevent development and the proper spending of money even if the arms were not to be used for external aggression or internal repression. As yet, we cannot cumulate those sales, so the power is not as effective as it might be. That is my greatest concern, and if he could help me with that, I would be very grateful.

EU Development Programmes

2. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): What action her Department has taken to improve the quality of EU development programmes. [680]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): The European Community's record on the efficient delivery of aid has been poor. That is why the United Kingdom has pressed hard since 1997 to improve the effectiveness of EC development programmes, focus their range of activity and make poverty reduction their central objective. The reforms now put in place go some way towards achieving these improvements, but we intend to keep up the pressure.

Mr. Luke: I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. What plans does he have to raise these serious issues with Members of the European Parliament and Commissioners, so that we, the Council, Commissioners

and the European Parliament together can strengthen the EU's significant contribution to poverty reduction and to development?

Hilary Benn: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. In return, I welcome him to his first International Development questions.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, the central problem is that, over the past 10 years, the proportion of EC aid going to low-income countries has fallen from 75 to 51 per cent. We have managed to achieve an agreement that poverty reduction should form the central focus of EC development aid. I will be in Brussels next week to meet Members of the European Parliament to say to them that the EC has now accepted an agenda for reform, but the whole House will want the changes to be implemented in practice.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I, too, congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his elevation to ministerial office. Is he aware that the 1998 Court of Auditors report into EC aid to South Africa showed that significant proportions of money for the AIDS programme went unspent for nearly four years? Does he not think that, if the EU were to add its support to the new global AIDS fund, yet another layer of bureaucracy would be created? Can he also ensure that EU spending on AIDS goes on improving existing projects on health care, education and the development of vaccines and not on delivering cheaper drugs?

Hilary Benn: I also thank the hon. Lady for her kind words. As she is well aware, the basic problem with EU spending is precisely that the EU cannot spend the money that it has. She gave the example of South Africa, which is one of a number to which we could refer. We certainly wish the EU to make a contribution to the global health fund, but the most important thing is to make sure that the money that is allocated is spent effectively. That is what we are working to achieve.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend to his portfolio. Does he recall that the European Union played a significant part in the removal of Fujimori from Peru and in the democratic elections that followed, which led to President Toledo being elected? Given the earthquakes of the past few weeks, and our bilateral contribution, as well as that of the EU, does my hon. Friend welcome the policies to improve the relationship between Peru, the EU and this country?

Hilary Benn: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome. The action taken in response to the earthquakes in Peru, both bilaterally and through the EU, was very important, and it gave me an early insight into the effectiveness of the Department's disaster response arrangements. He makes the important point that the EU has considerable potential to make a difference, which is why we are putting so much time and effort into trying to make sure, through the reform process that has begun, that the EU can fulfil more of that potential than it has in the past.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): On behalf of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, may I warmly welcome the hon. Gentleman to his no doubt rightful place on the Front Bench? I know that he is carrying on a proud family tradition, and I think that he is a sound addition to the International Development team.

One point on which the Secretary of State and I see eye to eye is our desire to end the appalling inefficiencies of the EU aid programme, so I hope that the Under-Secretary will keep up pressure on the EU. Is he aware of the Auditors report of 12 June, which says that the EU decision-making procedures do not allow for a rapid reaction to emergencies? Is he satisfied that the reforms that have just been implemented will speed up the reaction? Does he believe that it is desirable to place a ceiling on emergency payments of 3 million euros per crisis, or does he agree that crises should be evaluated individually? Will he join me in calling for an evaluation? If not, we will be in the absurd position of having an arbitrary financial ceiling elevating bureaucratic rules above the saving of human lives.

Hilary Benn: I thank the hon. Lady for her warm welcome—at the risk of boring the House. I agree that it makes sense for ourselves and the EU to examine the way in which the European Community Humanitarian Office, in particular, operates. ECHO has probably been more successful than other parts of the EU in spending the available resources, but not as good as it could be. There is, in Ms Adinolfi, a new director general who is very committed to implementing the agenda for reform. We will need to reflect on that. The hon. Lady makes a good point about the EU's effectiveness and about the limits on spending to deal with humanitarian disasters.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): I, too, would like warmly to congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and Leeds colleague—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We now come to Question 3.

Primary Education

3. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds, North-East): How she intends to encourage *(a)* more spending on primary education and *(b)* less spending on arms in the world's poorest countries. [681]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): I am sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. I was basking in the glow of all those warm words.

The elimination of poverty will take place only with improved levels of education. The UK has consistently campaigned for universal primary education to be a central focus of poverty reduction programmes as part of the debt relief process, and over the last four years we have committed more than £600 million to support primary education in developing countries.

We are also working to reduce the demand for and supply of weapons, and will be introducing new controls on the export of arms from the UK.

Mr. Hamilton: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I know that the Secretary of State attended the Dakar United Nations world education forum in April last year, when the declaration was made about the establishment of universal primary education by 2015. He will know

that Oxfam has set up its global initiative for a monitoring programme and a budget of £8 billion per annum to ensure that the targets set by Dakar are met. Does my hon. Friend agree that £8 billion for universal primary education is considerably less than the world spends on arms in one month? Does he agree also that it is essential that the targets set for primary education ensure that girls have equal access?

Hilary Benn: I agree, especially with my hon. Friend's point about the education of girls. As the House will be aware, of the 113 million primary age children who are not in school, two thirds are girls. If we can get developing countries to ensure that girls have equal access to education, considerable benefits will flow for development in those countries as a result.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman consider marking his welcome assumption of office by taking an initiative? Will he appoint a special articulate ambassador to go to some of those poorer countries, and will he consider for that role the reluctantly noble and former right hon. Member for Chesterfield?

Hilary Benn: I am being led into dangerous waters. I thought for a moment that the hon. Gentleman's offer was a job application. However, he will not take it amiss if I decline it on the ground that we already have a most formidable advocate on those issues—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Debt Relief

4. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): If she will make a statement on recent progress made in debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries initiatives. [682]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Twenty three countries have now qualified for relief under the heavily indebted poor countries—or HIPC—initiative. More than $53 billion of debt relief has been agreed for those countries, which together owe $74 billion, so most of their debt is written off. The money released is directly linked to poverty reduction.

The impact of that debt reduction means that social expenditure in those countries is projected to rise by an average of $1.7 billion per year. We hope that, in addition, Ghana, Sierra Leone and, possibly, Ethiopia will qualify for relief this year, but most of the remaining 10 eligible countries are affected by conflict or have no commitment to reform. We need greater progress in conflict resolution to bring debt relief to the remaining 10 heavily indebted poor countries.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer and congratulate her on leading the world in a vital initiative which may do more than many other things to relieve poverty. She has mentioned that the money will be spent on things such as health and education. How is that spending being monitored and what can we do to ensure that countries that are benefiting from debt relief do not fall into new debt?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The most important achievement of the enhanced HIPC package is the commitment of countries to preparing poverty reduction strategies, openly consulting their people about all their economic policies, including how they mean to grow the economy and how they will use aid, debt relief and their own revenues to drive forward social programmes for all. The new instrument will be used for monitoring and for countries' better accountability to their own people. That is a transformation of the way in which the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank work in such countries—it is more open, more poverty focused and more participatory.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend that we must make sure that those countries do not get into debt again. We need improved practice in export credit procedures across the world so that loans are not guaranteed for bad projects that bankrupt countries. We shall try to work on that at the export credits committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to try to get higher standards across the world.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on continuing in her important role of spearheading our country's attack on global poverty, which is possibly the greatest moral challenge facing our generation. I pay tribute to the genuine work that has been done on debt relief.

Has the Secretary of State seen the United Nations report commissioned by Kofi Annan, which said last week that debt relief has taken a long time and, in many cases, has not gone far enough? It calls, in part, for a new initiative on debt relief. I pay tribute to the progress that has been made, but does the Secretary of State agree that there is now a need for a new momentum? Does she have any specific plans to give that momentum to this important issue?

Clare Short: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and agree that this is the most important moral issue for the world; it is also the most important issue in terms of the sustainability of the planet. If we do not make progress, we will have increasing catastrophes, so it is in our self-interest to pay much more attention to these matters.

I do not agree with those who say that we need debt relief for more countries, including middle-income countries that have managed their debts badly and need the Paris Club to recycle those debts and get better economic management. I do not agree with the current drop the debt campaign for 100 per cent. relief for those who are already getting debt relief and owe money to the IMF and the World Bank. We should not privilege countries according to whom they owe money; we should go by need. The point of the HIPC initiative for the 41 countries that are so indebted that they can never pay is to relieve the burden of debt so that they can adopt good social and economic policies. They will continue to need aid and other support for years, but we should get debt out of the way and better economic management in place. Then we can support such countries in building up their economies and providing public services, rather than just providing more and more debt relief.

Mr. Streeter: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. Is not this weekend's summit in Genoa an opportunity, however, for our country to continue to take the lead in debt relief? Is she aware that if her Government continue to lead the international community on the forgiveness of unpayable debt and pursue the issue

ruthlessly until all the world's poorest nations receive a real dividend, she and her Government will have and will deserve the full support of Opposition Members?

Clare Short: It is very important in Genoa to drive on and to keep the 23 countries on track. There were wobbles in Zambia and it would be a terrible setback if its programmes fell away. We must move Ghana forward; it has just had elections and needs some help, as do Sierra Leone and Ethiopia. We need to keep everyone to the agreement that, as countries are exiting the initiative, we consider sustainability, as oil price rises are throwing things out of kilter. The other thing that we want to achieve at Genoa is the establishment of a health fund for the supply of drugs and commodities, to bring down prices, increase availability and lever in research. That needs to be complemented by the establishment of health systems through poverty-reduction strategies. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for those efforts.

Intellectual Property Rights

5. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): If she will make a statement on the progress of her Department's commission on intellectual property. [683]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The commission on intellectual property rights promised in our White Paper was established in April. It is tasked with considering how international intellectual property agreements can most benefit developing countries and poor people. Its membership includes an impressive range of experts originating from Argentina, India, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It has embarked on a series of studies and consultations. Its recommendations will be submitted to me in spring 2002.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does she agree that it is particularly important that the views of developing countries are properly heard on all aspects of the intellectual property regime, particularly those concerning access to genetic resources and the development of drugs to treat terminal disease? How will she specifically ensure that the voices of developing countries will be heard in the commission's deliberations?

Clare Short: Two members of the commission are prestigious intellectual property experts—one from Argentina and the other from India—so it is an international body. It will be taking evidence and visiting developing countries to do so.

Many people assume that an intellectual property regime is not in the interests of the poorest countries, but I doubt that. There is no research into the diseases of poverty because pharmaceutical companies would not receive any return for it. We need a reasonable and fair global intellectual property regime and cheaper drugs in poorer countries, with companies able to charge higher prices in richer countries. The commission will consider issues such as a global system. Improving the relevance of intellectual property law to the poor of the world in developing countries is the commission's whole purpose.

EU Aid

7. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): If she will make a statement on delivery of EU aid. [685]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary was saying, the UK has led the effort over the past four years to expose the ineffectiveness and lack of poverty focus in European Community development programmes and to implement a strong reform agenda. It has now been agreed that, in order to increase effectiveness, poverty reduction should be the central objective of EC development programmes, implementation procedures should be streamlined and the EC's range of activity limited. We will continue to keep up the pressure, and I hope that all parties represented in this House will encourage their representatives in the European Parliament, who tend to be silent on these matters, and their sister parties to support that reform effort.

Mr. Paterson: This is all words. Back in January, the European Court of Auditors made a devastating criticism of the delivery of EU aid. With her usual admirable candour, the Secretary of State endorsed that criticism, yet the Government did not ensure that the issue was discussed at Nice, and they have meekly allowed the next review to be delayed until 2006. Why?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman might not have noticed, but Parliaments deal in words. The question is whether the words are implemented. The record of his party in power was to take no action whatever to challenge or reform EU effort, and to increase massively the proportion of British development assistance that went through the EU. We are now starting to put things right. I should be grateful for his support.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): May I take up one point that my right hon. Friend mentioned? She said that we need allies in the matter. What can we do to increase the support that Parliament gives her in the attempt to improve EU aid? What does the European Parliament intend to do? Does she have any proposals for enlisting the assistance of other Parliaments in Europe to tackle this important issue?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. Because the money is committed until 2006, either we get it better spent or it will go on being badly spent. We do not have a chance to review the amount until then, so we must improve performance. The European Parliament tends to think that anything that comes through Europe is additional. That is simply wrong. It is the same money, spent by member states or by the EU. The Parliament is therefore very uncritical, as my hon. Friend knows.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is going to Brussels next week. We need to drum up a body of support in the European Parliament that understands the issues and will push for reform, and we need to build up that support in national Parliaments. I know that the Select Committee on International Development, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie

(Tony Worthington) was a member, tried to do that. We must drive the issue forward in this Parliament to get agreement on the reform agenda across Europe.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Why cannot all our aid be delivered to those who need it most, instead of going in part to the EU and being siphoned off in the process?

Clare Short: The proportion of British aid going through the EU under the previous Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported leapt from 10 to 30 per cent. That is the situation that we inherited. We cannot change the proportion till 2006, but we must try to improve spending before that, and examine whether it is effective. If not, we must reduce the proportion thereafter.

UN Aid Target

8. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What progress she plans to make towards meeting the UN target of national GDP devoted to international aid over the next five years; and if she will make a statement. [686]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are committed to working towards the UN target for official development assistance of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product. At current prices, that would be about £7 billion. The UK ODA:GNP ratio will rise from the 0.26 per cent. of GNP that I inherited to 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04, which represents a 45 per cent. increase since 1997. Our manifesto committed the Government to further substantial increases during this Parliament. I should be grateful for the support of the entire House in ensuring that they are, indeed, substantial.

Kevin Brennan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does she agree that assisting the world's 1.2 billion poorest people is perhaps the highest goal that the Government of any civilised country could have? Is she aware that between 1979 and 1997, the percentage of gross national product devoted to aid under the Conservatives fell from 0.51 to 0.26 per cent., but that under Labour in the 1970s, it went from 0.36 to 0.51 per cent.? Will she endeavour to match that record of a previous Labour Administration in this Parliament?

Clare Short: I should be delighted to achieve that objective, but it is quite an increase. I shall need the help of all hon. Members if we are to achieve it. I agree with my hon. Friend's fundamental point: one in five of the world's population are living in abject poverty. That is a moral disgrace, given the world's wealth, technology and knowledge. It is also a danger to the future stability, sustainability and safety of the world. We must give greater priority to making progress, or we will hand on a catastrophic set of crises to the next generation.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State will be aware that there is another, higher UN target of a 1 per cent. transfer of public and private resources from the developed world to the developing world. That was achieved by only two countries under the previous Conservative Government—the United Kingdom and Holland. What progress has been made since 1997 in meeting that target?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that the investment required for the improved infrastructure needed by developing countries will come largely from the private sector, and that will bring with it modern technology—telecommunications, information and communications technology, better transport and sanitation, and better water and electricity supplies. That is not something that can be delivered by the public sector in an OECD country increasing flows of investment to developing countries.

We must help developing countries to act against corruption and to put in place the law enforcement, better governance and greater stability that helps to attract investment to their countries. Investment has gone up and down, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would want to claim that even his Government, whatever he might want to say about them, directed private sector investment from the UK to developing countries. The world does not work like that.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [709] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 4 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Prime Minister praise the work of the special constabulary? He will he aware that there are 7,500 fewer special constables than there were four years ago. In Lichfield, which is typical of many cities, we have only two or three regular police officers on duty on Friday and Saturday nights. What steps is the right hon. Gentleman taking to restore the balance and recruit more special constables? I am referring not to the regular police but to the special constabulary.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right: we do need to recruit more special constables. As he knows, changes to the health and safety regulations impacted on the number of special constables, but we are taking measures to increase their number. The hon. Gentleman is also right to suggest that those increases run alongside the increase in numbers of the regular police. We need both to police the country properly.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As we are likely to be giving Railtrack between £20 billion and £25 billion of taxpayers' money during the next 10 years, can we not

use it as a lever to block the fat-cat pay-offs to some of the former directors of Railtrack who have so clearly failed the public?

The Prime Minister: We do not have power to do that, but we do have power to make sure that the money that we are putting into the railways—a huge £60 billion investment during the next 10 years—is used to provide not just the track, which is in desperate need of renovation, but the trains and capacity that the transport infrastructure of the fourth largest economy in the world demands.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): The House will regret the resignation as First Minister of Northern Ireland of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who has shown the utmost courage, integrity and statesmanship. Does the Prime Minister agree that we should be in no doubt about what has forced the right hon. Gentleman to take that action? It is the IRA's refusal to keep the promise that it made more than a year ago to put its arms beyond use, despite all the gains that they have pocketed, including the release of prisoners. On a day when another fatal shooting has tragically taken place in Northern Ireland, will the Prime Minister assure the House that no more ground will be given, such as more policing reforms or the scaling down of security, in advance of the decommissioning of weapons, which remains a fundamental obligation under the agreement?

The Prime Minister: First, I join in the condemnation of the killing of the Catholic man by paramilitaries. It is a tragic and terrible event which is a mark of precisely the past in Northern Ireland that we want to leave behind.

Secondly, I agree totally with what the right hon. Gentleman said in respect of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). As leader of the Ulster Unionists, he has shown enormous courage in the past few years in trying to push the peace process on. There is no doubt that decommissioning is an obligation under the Good Friday agreement. It is an obstacle to progress now, and that is why it is so important that we have rapid progress on it.

Mr. Hague: We wish the Government every success in dealing with this problem, but does the Prime Minister agree that it would be wholly wrong to reward republicans for their intransigence and to punish democrats such as the right hon. Member for Upper Bann and others, who have done everything required of them? On Monday, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that a range of sanctions was open to the Government. Can the Prime Minister tell us what any of those sanctions are? In his published letter to the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, on 10 April 1998, he said that if the existing provisions on excluding people from office turned out to be ineffective, he would support changes to them. Will that now include enabling the Government to exclude Sinn Fein Ministers from the Executive if there is still no movement on arms?

The Prime Minister: We have a range of powers available to us, one of which the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned. Obviously, we keep the use of all those powers under review. We are about to go into a process of protracted—I hope not too protracted—negotiation about how we resolve the current impasse. I do not think that it is sensible for me to say what we will or will not do in circumstances that may arise if that negotiation fails, but I do say this: the outstanding issues are absolutely clear. Obviously, we need to ensure that we have a police service that attracts support from all parts of the community, that the institutions have stability, and that, as we can do so, and in accordance with the proper demands of security, we bring about a more normalised situation in Northern Ireland. There has already been huge change in that regard in the past few years, but it is also important that those who sit in government and want to be part of the democratic process are committed to exclusively democratic means. There has always been a point, right from the beginning of the process, when people had to choose between the democratic process and having alongside it a paramilitary organisation that is still capable of exerting force and pressure of an unacceptable kind.

I think that that moment of choice is here and now. We have to ensure in the negotiations in the next couple of weeks that we find an arrangement that allows us to resolve those outstanding issues and to do what I still believe the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want: to see the agreement for the peace process implemented. Even people who may have hesitated in the last election or even voted for parties that were opposed to the agreement did so not because they disagreed with the principles underlying the Good Friday agreement, but because they wanted to see it implemented. Now it has got to be implemented in all its stages and forms.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Prime Minister recall that, in 1997, a Bill was brought to the House to cut benefits for lone parents? It was not the brightest thing my right hon. Friend did, and towards the end of that year he admitted that it was almost certainly a mistake. The press is filled today with stories of cuts in disability benefits. Can I have an assurance that we are not going to travel down the road we travelled down in 1997, because it is bound to be strewn with difficulties? If my right hon. Friend wants a Bill off the shelf to do some good for the Labour movement, he should get stuck into those fat cats like Gerald Corbett and the rest, but leave the sick and disabled alone.

The Prime Minister: Well, the road may be strewn with difficulties, but I must say to my hon. Friend that the proposals made today on incapacity benefit by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions are entirely sensible and justified. It cannot be right that people coming on to incapacity benefit will be paid on average about £4,000 a year for, say, 10, 15 or 20 years, with no one ever checking whether they have recovered from their injuries and are able to work. It is therefore important that we apply a proper test and ensure that the vast amount involved—£7 billion a year—is spent properly, and that we will do.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Does the Prime Minister agree with the conclusion of London Transport Commissioner Bob Kiley that the Government's proposed public-private partnership for the

future of the London underground should now be terminated and that control of the London tube should instead pass to Transport for London?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not agree with that view. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there was a meeting yesterday between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and Mr. Kiley. We will make our position clear on Mr. Kiley's representations to us in due course. Given the vast amount of extra investment that we are putting into the tube—we are prepared to guarantee it over a period which has never before been guaranteed for investment in the tube, in terms of amount as well as the fixed term for which we are putting the money in—it is essential that we get value for money and that we ensure in the building work that is done that there is risk transferred to the private sector. Otherwise, we will repeat the mistakes of the Jubilee line and end up with a huge cost overrun, and the building work will not take place on time. Again, it may be difficult, but it will be done.

Mr. Kennedy: The Prime Minister says that, but in the past 48 hours the talks, according to the commissioner, have been getting nowhere, and commuters and travellers have suffered well-publicised distress on the London underground. After four years of a Labour Government, is that not a pathetic verdict on the right hon. Gentleman's ability to deliver an effective, safe and affordable quality transport system for the capital?

The Prime Minister: Of course the tube is not of the standard that London deserves. For precisely that reason, we are committed to some £13 billion worth of investment in the next few years. It is essential that the money is spent wisely and that we get the best value for money. We need a modern tube that is publicly run but privately built. The Jubilee line is the classic example of the old way of doing things: a cost overrun of more than £1 billion and the work being done two or even three years late. It is therefore essential to get value for money.

Record investment is being made, but, as ever, I must tell the Liberal Democrats that it is not simply a matter of money; we must ensure value for money. We offer record investment to people in London, but the money must be properly spent.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The Prime Minister is aware of the urgent need to equip our armed forces with a modern, reliable and secure communications system, which is fully integrated across our armed forces and inter-operative with NATO systems. I am sure that, in the next two weeks, he will give full and proper consideration to several competing bids from around the world to provide such a system, including one from Thales, which employs 200 people in my constituency. Does he agree that considerable benefits would accrue to the manufacturing base and the skills base in this country, and that our exports in the high technology sector would receive a great boost, if such a system could be built and delivered in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: If it could be built and delivered in the UK, of course it would benefit our manufacturing industry and protect jobs. However, we have to go through a specific negotiating and bidding process. I understand that the decision will be made in a few weeks.

Q2. [710] **Norman Baker** (Lewes): Why did the Prime Minister tell the House in the previous Parliament that incineration was an essential part of a waste strategy? Is he not aware that other countries recycle more than 50 per cent. of their waste, compared with the pathetic 8 per cent. that we manage in this country? Will the right hon. Gentleman rule out incineration and thereby remove the toxic cloud that hangs over Newhaven in my constituency? Will he also undertake not to fiddle the public inquiry system to drive through incineration?

The Prime Minister: It is true that we need to increase the amount of recycling, and we are doing that. However, pulling out of all incineration, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, would cost a great deal of money. That can be done over time, but we face many demands. Indeed, almost every question that I am asked is a demand for money. We have to balance those competing claims. We shall make progress as we can, but if we peremptorily pulled out of incineration altogether, we would have a financial shortfall that we could not cover, and there would be nothing that we could do with the resulting waste.

Q3. [711] **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): On President Bush's madcap scheme for missile defence, may I gently suggest to the Prime Minister that, rather than our trying to act as an honest broker between the United States and the European Union, British interests would be better served by telling the Americans the truth, which is that it will not work, that there are no takers and that the real threats to our security are climate change, the AIDS pandemic and impoverishment caused by the grossly unfair workings of the global market?

The Prime Minister: I agree—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Perhaps I can begin by stating the points on which I agree with my hon. Friend. I agree with him about Kyoto, the AIDS pandemic and the impoverishment of a large part of the world's population. That is precisely why, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development explained earlier, we are doing so much to combat AIDS in the developing world. We are also pushing forward the Kyoto protocol and we have considerably increased the amount of aid that we give the developing nations.

I am afraid that I do not agree that the Americans are wrong to identify weapons of mass destruction as a genuine threat. They are a genuine threat. *[Interruption.]* We need to be prepared to look at all systems that are necessary—*[Interruption.]* Obviously I am delighted to have the support of the Opposition. We must consider all offensive and defensive systems. I also do not agree that it is wrong for us to act as an honest broker between the United States and our European partners. It is an article of faith for me—I believe this deeply—that when the US and the EU cannot resolve their differences properly, the world is a less stable and less prosperous place. It is important that we keep an open mind. We have not yet received a proposal from the United States. When we do,

we shall declare our position on it. In the meantime, we shall do everything that we can to bring the US and the EU closer together.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): May I warmly commend the Prime Minister on that reply? Any remaining puzzle as to why the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is no longer in the Government has been resolved.

Whose fault is it that the Government's policy on involving the private sector in the national health service is so entirely unclear?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that it is. The private finance initiative in the national health service, for example, and with our schools, is delivering huge benefits. That co-operation with the private sector is an important part of rebuilding our schools and hospitals.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister is one of the few people who thinks that that is clear. The head of the British Medical Association has said:

"The Government's thinking is opaque and unclear."

The general secretary of the Trades Union Congress has said:

"There is confusion and lack of clarity from the Government."

The chairman of the parliamentary Labour party has said:

"There needs to be more done to clarify the boundaries."

The general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union has referred to

"a cocktail of policy confusion."

The former Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), said that

"there hasn't been any clarity about what's envisaged."

Is not the confusion coming from the top of the Government? Despite all the statements to the contrary, will primary care groups be able to commission clinical services directly from the private sector?

The Prime Minister: As we have said throughout, there is no intention to privatise clinical services—neither have we ever said that primary care trusts will privatise clinical services. It is important to enable primary care trusts and others, where appropriate, to work with the private sector. For example, 3,000 general practitioner premises are being renovated throughout the country, bringing in more than £1 billion worth of investment with the private sector. The right hon. Gentleman may be opposed to that—indeed, there may be many who are opposed to it—but I think that it is a thoroughly good thing.

Mr. Hague: Well, now we know why everybody apart from the Prime Minister finds his policy completely unclear. We have just had a typical example. The question to which he failed to give a simple yes asked him to support a statement straight out of his concordat with the private sector, which was signed by the Government last October. I shall ask the question again, and I shall read from the document. It refers to primary care groups or primary care trusts commissioning directly from a private or voluntary health care provider. Is that still the position?

The Prime Minister: Of course, and they do it every day. For example, when we have severe winter pressures, they should be entitled to use private sector or voluntary sector providers. There is a difference between privatising a public service, which is the policy of the Conservative party, and providing a better public service in co-operation with the private sector, which is the Government's policy.

The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is that in circumstances where there is a shortage of capacity in the public sector and we can use the private sector to get an operation done within the NHS, free at the point of use, yes, the providers should be able to use it.

Mr. Hague: Well, I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that saying no to one question and yes to the same question a moment later does not constitute a clear policy on behalf of the Government. Is it not time that he stopped facing both ways on this policy? He wants services to be managed by the private sector, but not run by private companies. He signs up to primary care groups buying from private providers, but the Secretary of State for Health says that private companies should not provide any clinical services. The right hon. Gentleman makes bold statements about radicalism, but feeds trade union leaders on a diet of reassurance and asparagus tips. Is it not time for him to admit that his plans to involve the private sector while not allowing it to do anything will turn out yet again to be words without substance and spin without delivery?

The Prime Minister: No, because when we can work with the private sector to provide a better public service, we will. I have given one example: the private finance initiative. When we came into office, it had completely stalled under the previous Government. It is now delivering the biggest-ever hospital building programme and being extended to the new GP premises. If the new surgical units, for example, can be better managed by the private sector—even though the staff are employed by the national health service—to give better value and service to the patient, let it happen. When we can commission private sector care—for example, under winter pressures or in other circumstances—within the national health service, free at the point of use, we do so.

When we can build better schools using the private sector, we will do so. When we need to obtain private sponsorship for schools, we will do so. In every case, however, it will be about ensuring that we deliver a better public service. Let me say to all hon. Members that we were elected on a mandate of investment and reform. We are putting record amounts of money in, but the change needs to happen, too. It is change for a purpose: to put the patient first, to put the pupil first, and to make sure that we deliver better public services, which the Conservative party failed to do.

Q4. [712] **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): Pensioners in my constituency are very pleased that they no longer have to pay £6 a year for their concessionary half-fare bus pass. However, the pass is primarily valid only in the area covered by the local authority—in my case, Suffolk.

Pensioners are, therefore, asking for a concessionary scheme for longer-distance travel. What plans does my right hon. Friend have further to extend concessionary travel for pensioners?

The Prime Minister: We are going to extend it so that it will also be available for long coach journeys. This is all part of trying to provide pensioners with a better deal: the winter fuel allowance, the higher than normal basic state pension rise, the free TV licences for the over-75s, and now concessionary fares for pensioners. It is all part of making sure that they get the security and the dignity that they need in old age.

Q5. [713] **Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): Is the Prime Minister aware that the crisis in social services funding is now so severe that Bristol city council has been forced to adopt a policy of not moving an elderly person from hospital into residential care until two elderly people in residential care have died first? Does he accept that it is not in the interests of elderly people to be kept in hospital when they are ready for discharge? Does he also accept that the bed blocking that results is not in the interests of the NHS? What is he going to do about it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that bed blocking is probably the most urgent problem that we face in the national health service. We need to do two things. First, we need to provide substantial additional funding, which we are doing. There will be some £900 million additional funding for social services. Secondly, we need a far better system of co-operative working between social services and local hospitals. Although it is absolutely true that we have severe bed blocking problems in Bristol and in other places, there are parts of the country in which these problems have been resolved. So, once again, I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that we need the money going in, but we also need the change. I agree that this is an urgent problem, and we are seeing what other measures we can take to deal with it.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to read the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*? On the front page, he will learn what can happen when GPs embrace change. The primary care group in south Huddersfield has embraced real change and, as a result of co-operation, has been able to give a £1.5 million cash boost to the local hospital. By embracing the talents of its own GPs, it has been able to use those talents and to cut waiting lists. Is not that the kind of appropriate reform that we can achieve—unlike what has been said by the British Medical Association, and unlike the failed individual GP fundholding of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: First, may I apologise for not having read the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*? In retrospect, I wish I had. May I also commend the GPs in my hon. Friend's area for the changes that they have made, and say once again that the vast majority of our doctors do a wonderful job in the national health service? However, it is important that we make changes as well as ensuring that the money is going in.

The changes are opposed by certain GPs, and I understand the reasons for that—for example, they might oppose NHS Direct or the walk-in centres, or they might oppose the requirement that we give an appointment to a patient within 48 hours. All those changes can be properly embraced, and we will work with doctors to enable them to do so, but we have to ensure that the extra money that is going in brings about a better service. The doctors in my hon. Friend's area have shown exactly how that can be done.

Q6. [714] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): By way of contrast with the question asked by the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), is the Prime Minister aware of the enormous pressures on GPs on the south coast, and in particular in Worthing, where surgeries have more than three times the national average of over-85s on their books and most have closed their lists? A recent survey of doctors in West Sussex showed that as many as 90 per cent. are planning to leave the profession well before the age of 60, and an alarming number are at their wits' end. What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to make it easier for those experienced GPs to stay on in their profession, rather than constantly giving us those fantasy figures about new recruitment, as if doctors could be grown from packets of seeds?

The Prime Minister: They are not fantasy figures on recruitment. There are about 1,000 extra GPs compared with four years ago. As opposed to the previous Government, who cut the number of training places for doctors, we have increased it. I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's specific problem in a moment, but, overall, in the country, GP home visits have dropped by half and night visits by a third since 1990. The number of GPs seeking early retirement is down, not up. However, it is correct that in certain parts of the country—the hon. Gentleman's may well be one—the position is very difficult indeed.

Precisely for that reason, we are trying to work with GPs to make sure that practices are changed so that they get the money and the resources going in and so that there is better use, for example, of practice nurses and other professionals who can help with the stress that doctors have. We are willing at every stage to consider what more we can do to encourage people to stay in the profession. Indeed, we have already said that we shall offer some £10,000 to those who want to stay on.

Tim Loughton: Not enough.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says that that may not be enough, but, with the greatest respect, it is more than was ever done in 18 years of Conservative government. We still have a great deal more to do, but money is not all we need. We also need to change the way that GP services work in the hon. Gentleman's area and in others. To those who were critical at the BMA, I say that we are prepared to work with them in a partnership for change, but it is important that we have genuine change in the NHS.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is bound to be concern if the severely disabled are forced to undergo reviews every few years? Following on from the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), will he bear in

mind the anxiety that exists among so many of the disabled over what is in the news today? Will he give a commitment now that he is willing to meet the organisations representing the disabled before any firm proposals are put before the House, because we do want to avoid a row, don't we?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to meet groups representing the disabled. However, I will not apologise for the reforms that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has proposed, because they are important. Let me repeat that we are spending some £7 billion a year on incapacity benefit. The numbers trebled between 1979 and 1997. I think every Member of the House knows that people were transferred on to incapacity benefit to disguise the true levels of unemployment in the 1980s. Therefore, it is important for new claimants that we do not leave people on benefit for 10, 15 or 20 years, but that we are prepared to make sure that those who take money from the state have that money justified. If people are severely disabled and cannot work, we will give them every protection—indeed, we will increase it. However, if people can work, it is our responsibility to help them do so.

Q7. [715] **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): Does the Prime Minister recall that, at about this time last week, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) asked him a rather penetrating question about appointments to the peerage? Does he remember trying to put his hon. Friend down by accusing him forgetfulness? He said:

"My hon. Friend forgets that the independent Appointments Commission has taken away prime ministerial patronage".—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 638.]

Will the Prime Minister apologise to his hon. Friend for accusing him of forgetfulness given that he himself seemed to forget that he had appointed his own secretary a peeress without any reference whatever to the Appointments Commission and in breach of the rules laid down by him for the conduct of that commission? Is it not about time that we had more accurate answers from the Prime Minister?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: The independent Appointments Commission has indeed taken away prime ministerial patronage. It is for the hon. Gentleman's party and my party to appoint the people whom they want to be working peers.

Paul Clark (Gillingham): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the teachers and pupils at two of my local schools, Twydall infants and Parkwood infants, for their hard work and commitment, which has been recognised by the award of beacon status? Although many of the measures that we have taken have helped to raise standards, will my right hon. Friend inform the House of the steps that are being taken to deal with the serious matter of teacher shortages, which concerns head teachers in my constituency and elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: First, after years of Conservative cuts, we are increasing the number of people coming into training by between 25 per cent. and 30 per cent. Secondly, we are offering bursaries to teachers. Thirdly, for certain shortage subjects we are writing off student loans for trainee teachers. Finally, we are putting substantial extra investment into schools, which will yield more teachers, more classroom assistants and better buildings. That is all part of the investment-plus-reform programme that is essential for the school service. I pay tribute to the work of teachers, pupils and parents in Gillingham, which I am sure mirrors the achievement of teachers and pupils in many parts of the country.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

[Relevant documents: Treaty of Nice, Cm 5090; Seventeenth Report of the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 1999–2000, The 2000 IGC, HC 23-xvii, and the Government's response thereto, HC 803; Sixth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 1999–2000, on Developments at the Intergovernmental Conference 2000, HC 384, and the Government's response thereto, Cm 4893; Fifth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2000–01, European Union Enlargement and Nice Follow-up, HC 318.]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill implements the key decisions of the Nice European Council enshrined in the Nice treaty. The treaty was signed on 26 February this year, but will not enter into force until it has been ratified by all 15 member states of the European Union. When that happens, we shall have put in place the final institutional reforms that the European Union needs to be ready for enlargement. I wish to open this debate by placing the Bill in its proper historical context.

Few have expressed that context more succinctly than President George W. Bush. Visiting Warsaw last month, he said:

"Our goal is to erase the false lines that have divided Europe for too long".

He echoed his father, who, when in office, talked of building a "Europe whole and free".

Enlarging the European Union to take in the applicant countries of central and southern Europe has been a strategic aim of successive British Governments and our allies for more than a decade. We believe that co-operation in the European Union will bury the memory of cold war divisions just as surely as it has laid to rest the ghost of warfare in northern Europe and the spectre of dictatorship in southern Europe.

That strategic vision carries with it immense practical benefits for Britain and for existing European Union members, as well as for countries that are soon to be new member states. It will make all of us more prosperous, safer and stronger. Enlargement will mean that British companies will be able to benefit from access to the largest single market for trade and investment in the world, with up to half a billion consumers—more than the United States and Japan put together. It will give us more allies to help to counter the cross-border threats that we face: organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration. It will also give us a cleaner environment, because candidate countries are making major improvements in their air and water quality to meet EU standards.

I have described my approach to the European Union as that of a practical European. It is because the Government recognise the practical and strategic benefits that they have been a champion of enlargement since taking office.

We used our presidency of the Council in 1998 to launch negotiations with the first set of six countries. At every European Council since then at which enlargement has been an issue, we have pushed for and secured rapid progress. As a result, 12 countries are now negotiating their accession, and a 13th, Turkey, has been confirmed as a candidate.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the one thing that unites political parties across the spectrum in countries such as Romania is their wish to gain accession to the European Union? Those countries consider accession vital to the area to which he refers.

Mr. Straw: I recognise that. Although there is not complete unanimity on enlargement in every country—nor would one expect that in democratic states—there is overwhelming support for it across central and eastern Europe. In the last two days, I have discussed enlargement with the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic and Croatia. While they are at different stages in their relationship with the EU, both recognise powerfully the benefits that association with it will bring, and has already brought, to their countries.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): During those discussions, did the Foreign Secretary emphasise not just the economic opportunity that the EU might provide, but the fact that membership would make it much easier for countries that have recently advanced towards democratic institutions to maintain them?

Mr. Straw: Indeed. Although the EU began as a limited common market for coal and steel, it is important to recognise today the much wider social and cultural benefits of our coming together in a union of nation states. We should also recognise that our history is shared with the countries of eastern, southern and central Europe. They are European nations, as firmly and as surely as France, Germany and the United Kingdom. We have a common heritage and a common culture, as well as a shared interest in securing a single common market for trade in goods and services.

I was talking about the work that we have put in to pursue enlargement. Most recently at the Gothenburg European Council, just three weeks ago, we argued for and secured an affirmation that the EU's commitment to enlargement was "irreversible". Our aim is to complete negotiations by the end of 2002 for candidate countries that are ready, so that they can participate as EU members in the European parliamentary elections in 2004. When I use the word "our" in that context, I am talking in a collective sense of the decisions made by the Heads of Government in the declaration that followed their meeting.

This timetable is bold and ambitious. If we are to achieve it, we must ratify Nice.

[Mr. Straw]

Some hon. Members argue that the results of the Irish referendum—which, by coincidence, occurred on the same day as the United Kingdom referendum—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): And produced a much better result.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman say that the result in Ireland was much better—from his point of view, that is—than the result in the United Kingdom. I am grateful to him for confirming that the Conservative party made Europe the key issue at the last general election. It was the Conservatives, not us, who said that it was a referendum on Europe—those were their exact words—and I am sorry to say, from their point of view, that their proposition was wholly rejected by the British electorate.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the two contrasting referendums on Europe. One of the key features shared by the Irish referendum and the United Kingdom general election was low turnout. In Ireland, the turnout to decide the country's future within the Nice agreement was as low as 35 per cent. Does that not underline some of the difficulties that we face because Nice has not done enough to make the constitution of Europe clear to the average European citizen? We need further debate on how we can have a written constitution for Europe, and a clearer division of responsibilities and subsidiarity between nation states and emerging nation states in the EU.

Mr. Straw: I will come to that, but I agree that we must do much more to spread comprehension among the citizens of Europe about what the EU stands for. It is not the responsibility of our citizens to make sure that they understand. It is the responsibility of the EU's member states and central institutions—especially the Commission—to ensure that the project is properly and better understood by our citizens. The EU acts in their name and for their benefit. Ultimately, the future of the EU and of each state is in their hands.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition should be cautious about enthusiastically espousing the result of the Irish referendum? Only 18 per cent. of those who voted there voted against the proposition, and the opposition was led by Sinn Fein—not the most plausible anti-militaristic campaigners. Is not the real lesson for all of us that we must connect with our electorates on European matters?

Mr. Straw: I agree. The alliance of forces that formed in the Republic of Ireland was interesting. The environmentalist Green party—whose views I respect, although I do not agree with them in totality—joined with Sinn Fein, one of whose objections to the Nice treaty was that it could lead to the "militarisation" of Europe. Of course, Sinn Fein members know far more about militarisation than many of the rest of us.

I shall deal in more detail with the Irish referendum. I have not concealed from the House my disappointment at the result, but we have to respect it. The question of turnout has been raised. In free democracies where voting is not compulsory, people are as free not to vote as they are free to vote. People must make their own choices about that, but everyone—those who do vote and those who do not—must respect the decision that is arrived at.

It would be hopeless if politicians were to say that a vote was not entirely legitimate because the turnout only reached a certain level. As far as I am aware, with the exception of Australia, where voting is compulsory, all western democracies recognise and respect the rule that people are entitled not to vote but that they must respect the decision reached by those who do vote.

It is fundamental to the democratic legitimacy of the EU that changes to the founding treaties do not take place unless and until the constitutional procedures of all 15 member states have been satisfied. However, for all of us the clear lesson of the Irish result is that we cannot afford to take public support for the EU for granted.

The Irish Government have made it clear that they will need to address particular issues with their electorate, just as the Danish Government did when their electorate rejected Maastricht in 1992. The other 14 member states formally resolved at the General Affairs Council three weeks ago that they were ready to help Ireland to find solutions. In the meantime, all 15 member states, including Ireland, have agreed that we should proceed with the enlargement negotiations and our own ratification procedures. Only by doing so will we be ready by the end of next year to admit new members. If, however, Ireland does not ratify, the treaty will not enter into force. The position is as simple as that.

No member state, and least of all the Irish Government, has followed the example of some Conservatives and called for a wholesale renegotiation of the Nice treaty.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the Nice treaty transfers a further 39 areas of decision making to the majority vote process, and that 90 per cent. of EU decisions are now made by majority vote? Might not the fact that direct democracy is becoming increasingly irrelevant explain why poll turnouts are declining? Should we not warn the people of eastern Europe that the EU path does not lead to democracy, but away from it?

Mr. Straw: I accept, of course, that the treaty proposes an extension of qualified majority voting, but I do not accept, with respect, the hon. Gentleman's political arithmetic. There is a big difference between putting a unit of one on maintaining the veto on tax, which we still do, and putting an equal unit of one on accepting qualified majority voting, in place of a veto, on the registrar of the Court of First Instance. The two are not cognate.

If the hon. Gentleman reads the treaty, he will see that a range of bureaucratic issues on which it was ridiculous for the veto to be applied have been transferred to QMV. The other areas that have been moved to QMV concern trade, on which it is in our interests that other people should not exercise a veto. My experience in the Justice and Home Affairs Council, which does everything by unanimity, has been interesting. On some issues, we could, and have, maintained a veto, but a veto blocks change.

We are in the vanguard of change to reform the European Union. The Opposition's reasoned amendment states that they want reform, but they set out no method or process by which they can deliver it. On a range of issues, we need to ensure that we can override the slowest: those with the deepest vested interest in the existing structures, which everyone agrees do not work entirely satisfactorily.

The achievement of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House, my predecessor as Foreign Secretary, was to ensure that if subjects went to the heart of our status as a nation state—tax, defence, social security and other matters, including the signature of treaties such as the one before us—they should continue to be subject to unanimity. However, in other areas, where we have an interest in progress and reform, the QMV system was sensible.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): The Foreign Secretary said that it was agreed by the General Affairs Council that each country should proceed with its ratification proceedings, notwithstanding the Irish referendum vote. Does he recall that in 1992 the shadow Cabinet, of which he was a member, urged strongly, in the similar circumstances of the rejection of the Maastricht treaty by the Danes, that the ratification Bill for that treaty should be postponed? The then Opposition leader urged the then Prime Minister that the Bill should be postponed until the matter was fully resolved. John Major accepted that urging and the Bill was indeed postponed. Why was postponement right then, but not now?

Mr. Straw: The answer is that life is a learning process, at least for this side of the House. I kept saying in the previous Parliament that Opposition Members should learn from our experience in opposition. I even offered them free seminars throughout the four years that I was Home Secretary, and I would have provided them, because I found it tragic that there were some Opposition Members of considerable talent who could have helped to improve Government by improving themselves as an Opposition, but did nothing about it.

The situation in 1992 was new, but the right hon. Gentleman quotes at me the position of the shadow Cabinet. I could quote back at him the position of the then Cabinet, which took the opposite point of view. The Opposition are now calling for all sorts of responses to the Irish referendum. He was a Minister in 1992. He actually signed the Maastricht treaty and then lost his seat.

Mr. Bercow: There was no causal link.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman still lost. The General Affairs Council, which included his successor as Minister after the 1992 general election, agreed unanimously that the other 14 member states should proceed with the ratification of Maastricht. After discussion with Denmark, including some accommodation by the EU, and a further referendum, the Danes agreed to continue with the treaty.

Mr. Maude: The Foreign Secretary inadvertently misrepresents what the then Government did. They listened to the very proper concerns expressed by the shadow Cabinet and others that the Bill should be postponed, and it was. The House did not return to it until the matter was resolved by the Danish public. There was a consensus in the House that it was wrong to proceed with the treaty's ratification while its final form was unresolved because of the Danish referendum decision.

Mr. Straw: My recollection of the mood around Maastricht in 1992 is that it was anything but consensual. One difference is that there was a Council decision before the Bill was introduced. The sequence of events was that the Council met on 11 June, the Monday after the election. We made a decision, in the light of that meeting, to introduce the Bill subsequently, and the timetable was different.

The other difference, if the right hon. Gentleman wants to argue the case, is that Maastricht, on any analysis, involved more significant and fundamental changes to the treaties and the basic constitution of the European Union than does this Bill.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I have given way a great deal and I should like to make some progress. If there is time, I shall take some more interventions.

I spoke earlier of meeting the Foreign Ministers for Croatia and for the Czech Republic over the past two days. The Foreign Minister for the Czech Republic is Jan Kavan, a man whose own life symbolises the huge change that has occurred in Europe in my adult lifetime. I first met Jan Kavan 33 years ago, in the Endsleigh street headquarters of the British National Union of Students. I was then the deputy president of the NUS, an organisation whose own politics had, to some extent, been dominated by the cold war.

Jan was a student leader too, from what was then Czechoslovakia, but he had none of our freedoms. Instead, he was a victim, along with thousands and thousands of others, of the cold war—of the undemocratic authoritarian regimes imposed on one central European country after another. He effectively went into exile in London to muster support after Dubcek's reforms in the Prague spring had been brutally crushed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Today the Czech Republic is one of the most successful of central Europe's new democracies. Jan told me today of the huge efforts that his country and the other applicants have put into preparing to join the European Union. They see accession as putting the seal on their admission to the family of European democracies. Jan told me how important it was for the Czech Republic and for every other applicant that Nice be ratified on schedule.

If the right hon. Gentleman is interested in enlargement which apparently he is, according to the Opposition's reasoned amendment, he owes it to the applicant countries as much as we do to proceed with ratification. There is no basis for us holding up ratification because of the Irish referendum.

Over the coming years, we expect to complete negotiations with up to 12 applicant countries. I invite the House to imagine for a moment what a European Union of 27 member states would look like if we did not make

[Mr. Straw]

the changes agreed at Nice. The Opposition's so-called reasoned amendment—and if ever there were an oxymoron, that is it—

Mr. Bercow: You spent 18 years doing them.

Mr. Straw: Ours were very much better—they included reasons. They were not contrary to reason.

The Conservatives' reasoned amendment says that the Bill fails to modernise institutions of the European Union. Yet that is exactly what the Nice treaty does. The Opposition have no policies that I have been able to discern that could conceivably command the support even of two or three other member states, still less of 14, on securing the modernisation inherent in the Nice treaty.

Without the Nice treaty and the changes that it makes, as each small new country joined the European Union, so relatively would the weight and influence of the larger countries diminish. Eventually, countries that together could not muster a majority of the European Union's population could, however, form a majority for the purposes of passing EU legislation. That would plainly be unacceptable.

As the Community grew, so, too, would the European Commission, until it resembled a mass meeting rather than the coherent, delivery-focused body that we want it to be. With 27 vested interests capable of imposing 27 vetoes on much new legislation, many areas of collective decision making that are vital to our interests would slowly grind to a halt. Therefore, at last year's intergovernmental conference, we set out with the explicit purpose of solving those problems. At Nice, we achieved a deal that did just that. Nice is necessary for enlargement.

The deal secured by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), was not only good for Europe but excellent for Britain. I normally refrain from quoting from leaked documents, but the European Commission's internal assessment of Nice is now a matter of public record. It said:

> "It was a European Council of strong emotion, with winners (this time the UK and Spain) and losers (Belgium, Portugal, Germany and the Commission)".

There is no question but that the nation state of the United Kingdom achieved what it set out to achieve at Nice.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) *rose-*

Dr. Julian Lewis *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Mr. Bercow: The Foreign Secretary is certainly making the best fist of a poor case, although his heart does not seem to be in it. As long ago as 18 June 1997, the Prime Minister trumpeted in this House the alleged merits of the protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the treaty of Amsterdam. However, since then no fewer than 4,995 European Union directives, regulations and decisions have impacted on this country. Can the right hon. Gentleman identify one practical example of a benefit to this country arising from the passage of that protocol?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I can. There are plenty of issues on which the Commission and the Council hold back, leaving matters to member states. We are Europeans and a huge amount of our trade depends on our membership of the European Union. *[Interruption.]* I am being asked to prove negatives, but there are a huge number of examples, when, by definition, if the Commission has not produced a directive, the matter has been left to individual member states. That has happened in a huge number of areas. Of course, such issues do not appear on the agendas of the Council or the Commission because they have not been brought forward as European legislation. Instead, they have been left to individual member states.

The hon. Member for Buckingham asked whether the directives have benefited this country. One set of regulations and directives that has benefited this country is that on the single market. We have tried to extend the single market into sectors—particularly all kinds of services—that are still the subject of unjustified competition. That cannot be achieved by individual legislation by the individual nation states. It requires that there should be legislation for 15 nations to ensure that practices that we regard as unjustifiable and restrictive are eliminated across Europe. Who benefits from that? Our constituents, this country and our economy. They would not benefit if we returned to the environment which the hon. Gentleman imagines we could achieve in a different world that I do not recognise.

A further important point about Nice was that, for the first time since we joined the then Common Market in 1973, we won an increase in the UK's voting weight. Our nominal voting power in the Council will rise from 10 votes to 29 votes, and although the total votes will increase as well, we shall have significantly more influence relative to smaller countries. For example, we used to have three times as many votes as Denmark, but under Nice we shall have four times as many. That also means that France, Germany and the United Kingdom together will still be able to block any proposal that they dislike. Moreover, the UK will retain voting parity with Germany, despite Germany's greater population.

At Nice, we also succeeded in providing for a smaller and better Commission. From 2005, there will be one Commissioner per member state. Once the EU has 27 members, the number of Commissioners will be capped below that figure and there will be a system of equal rotation. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), we secured more qualified majority voting in areas where that is in Britain's interests. I have already explained why we need to extend qualified majority voting in some areas while insisting on the veto in others.

In Nice, my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and my predecessor secured for Britain all the goals that we had set out in our White Paper in February last year. That was an outstanding result, which was deservedly praised in the national press and media and in most parts of the House.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way for the last time.

Mr. Cash: Will the Foreign Secretary note that, contrary to what he said, Britain's share of the vote has declined substantially, from 11.5 to 8.4 per cent.? Will he, if he is interested, be good enough to reply to the points in a pamphlet that I have produced today, entitled "Constructive Opposition to the Nice Treaty—the Dangers of European Integration"?

Mr. Straw: Of course, I will do my best to read the document, if the hon. Gentleman sends it to me. I am not sure what time scale he was using for his arithmetic. If he was going back to 1973, when the total number of member states was nine, all I can say is that of course we would have had a larger proportion of any qualified majority voting that happened then or shortly afterwards. There are now 15 member states; in future there will be 25, and eventually, if Turkey joins, there will be 28.

My point, which is incontrovertible, is that Nice gives us a relative increase in our voting strength. *[Interruption.]* That is a fact. During the Committee proceedings we can, and no doubt will, talk at great length about that aspect of the arithmetic. I have already given the House the comparison that we now have three times as many votes as Denmark, and under the Nice treaty, we shall have four times as many. It is important that the countries with the largest proportion of the population should be able to exercise, roughly speaking, a proportionate vote.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I need to make progress because many hon. Members, including no doubt the hon. Gentleman, want to speak.

Having set out what the Nice treaty does for the UK and for Europe, I should now like to set out what it does not do. Despite the warnings of some anti-European commentators, the treaty does not mean the end of the British justice system, a ban on political parties or an end to freedom of thought or religion. Nice is not a recipe for federalism, if by that is meant the creation of a centralised entity. It reinforces the role of national Governments and nation states because it ensures that we can go on making decisions in the Council of Ministers and at European Councils even in a greatly enlarged EU.

Nice does not represent a fundamental alteration in our relationship with the EU or a radical restructuring of the EU. Rather, it preserves and enhances the UK's ability to influence decisions and take initiatives for the benefit of our citizens. For that reason, it would be absurd to break with our tradition that Parliament should decide whether and how to amend treaties, and whether to hold a referendum on Nice—the more so since the Conservative Government did not hold a referendum on Maastricht, which involved much more wide-ranging changes.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, if the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I will not.

To revert to the point that I was making about the Irish referendum, we have to find more effective ways of connecting the institutions of the EU to its people. Many activities and services are best carried out at the European rather than the national level, but unless and until the EU institutions become as responsive and accountable to our citizens as their national Governments are, it will always be hard to convince public opinion of that fact.

We need to deal with that democratic deficit. We therefore agreed at Nice that there will be another intergovernmental conference in 2004. It will be different from its predecessors because it will be preceded by a wider and deeper public debate about the purpose and scope of European Union activity.

We need to ask certain questions. Implicit in a question posed by the hon. Member for Buckingham is the important issue of subsidiarity, which has been difficult for the United Kingdom, with a political culture rather different from that of some European countries, to appreciate and accommodate. We have to ask what exactly is the European Union for. What precise purpose does it serve? To get the answer, we need to look at what the EU actually does, and analyse rigorously and frankly the tasks it does well, those it does less well and those that it does badly. Once we have a clear sense of our citizens and constituents' priorities, only then can we sensibly ensure that the EU's institutions are properly organised and equipped to deliver them. The European Union is for Europe's citizenry, not its political elites.

That means focusing discussion not on the process, but on the results of EU co-operation. Only ideologues and specialists are impassioned by esoteric technical issues like the extent of qualified majority voting or the limits of co-decision. People care most about the practical benefits and the added value that they may be able to derive from the EU: more jobs, cleaner streets and less crime. That is where the debate should begin.

The next IGC is an opportunity for us to decide what the EU does best and which decisions are better taken at a national level. It is a chance to simplify the treaties so that they are easier to understand, and to give national Parliaments a more defined role in the EU. We are determined to improve the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the EU.

The first and best way to bring the EU closer to the people is to make sure that they are informed about developments. More than any previous IGC, the Nice negotiations were carried out in full view of the British public and this House. A year before Nice, our White Paper set out the issues at length and outlined our negotiating objectives in detail before the negotiations even got under way. The key documents, including successive redrafts of the draft treaty, were available on the internet at every stage. Members of the Government gave many speeches and took part in debates up and down the country to get the message across and listen to people's views, both before and after Nice. The issues were raised in several debates in Parliament over the past year and a half. Of course, Parliament, as always, will decide whether the UK will ratify the treaty by enacting the Bill and making it law.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I will not, because I am coming to the end of my observations.

[Mr. Straw]

Conservative Members, too, have played their part. Their wish to deny Europe the benefits of Nice—and hence enlargement—was the main plank of their election manifesto. It was they, not the Government, who said that they wanted the general election to be a referendum on Europe—*[Interruption.]* I said a moment ago, to approbation from the Opposition, that we should not quibble with the results of democratic votes. The only thing that I heard from the Conservative party throughout the campaign was that the election was a referendum on Europe. As I drew to the attention of the House during debate on the Loyal Address, that has now become non-history, as the whole Conservative manifesto has been wiped off the internet—[HON. MEMBERS: "It has not."] It is true; I tried it myself. If one calls up Conservatives.com and types "manifesto" into the site's own search engine, one gets a blank.

The Opposition must understand what happened at the election; they decided to campaign on Europe—and, by implication, matters like Nice—and they failed. It is not just me saying that; in *The Times* today, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), the shadow Foreign Secretary's predecessor, made a proclamation. The headline states:

"I will not make the same mistake—Ken Clarke will get my vote this time."

In the article, he said:

"Our position on the Nice treaty became unsustainable."

There we have it; the former shadow Foreign Secretary simply could not stand the contradictions and twists and turns inherent in the Opposition's position.

Passing this Bill is of very great importance. It will give a clear signal to Jan Kavan, Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic, all applicant nations of eastern and central Europe and to Cyprus and Malta that Britain is committed to righting the wrongs of history and to reuniting Europe. It will strengthen Britain's influence at the heart of this Europe of nation states. I therefore have no hesitation in commending the Bill to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the mover of the amendment, I wish to inform the House that Back-Bench speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

4.11 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I beg to move, to leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'this House declines to give a Second Reading to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill because it fails to modernise the institutions and policies of the European Union to meet the requirements of a diverse, enlarged Union; takes no account of acknowledgements from Her Majesty's Government and the President of the Commission that ratification of the Treaty of Nice is not a legal or technical prerequisite of enlargement; works against speedy and successful enlargement by providing for further integration; fails to address reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the single most important obstacle to such enlargement; ignores the wishes of those European Union citizens whose views have been sought in a referendum and fails to offer a similar opportunity to citizens of the United Kingdom; and diverts attention away from the pressing need for Her Majesty's Government to work with other member states and accession countries for the creation of a modern, flexible, reformed European Union.'

The treaty of Nice was a great opportunity for the European Union. It was an opportunity to put and make the case for the modern, reformed, outward-looking EU that its citizens plainly want and which enlargement will require. It could have been the moment to bid farewell to the old dogma of "one size fits all" political integration. It could have been the time to embrace the need for a decentralised and flexible EU. It could have set deadlines for enlargement, which we, as the Foreign Secretary has been good enough to accept, wholeheartedly support. Sadly, none of that transpired. The Nice treaty, I am afraid, was the triumph of old-think; it was locked in the past.

Eleven and a half years after the fall of the Berlin wall, it is shameful that, with the solitary exception of the German Democratic Republic—East Germany—no central or eastern European country has been admitted to the Union. I remember attending meetings with Foreign Ministers from the region in 1990, at which they were told that enlargement was five years away. Here we are in 2001 and most of them are still five years away. Why has enlargement not been achieved?

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): How does the right hon. Gentleman reconcile those remarks with his opposition to a treaty that would allow access? Does he believe that that opposition would gain the support of a single one of the Governments of the applicant countries?

Mr. Maude: I reject the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question—that the treaty is essential to enlargement. He need not rely on my word; the Foreign Secretary himself said at the Dispatch Box during debate on the Loyal Address that he accepted that the Nice treaty is not technically necessary for enlargement.

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Mr. Maude: The point that I suspect the Foreign Secretary wishes to make is that a number of Governments have said that they will not permit enlargement unless the process of deeper integration goes ahead in the meantime. They have of course said that, but it is simply a statement of political preference. The treaty is, in no sense that anyone would recognise, a necessity for enlargement. There is no such legal necessity.

Mr. Straw: This is extremely tedious for most of our citizens and constituents. We can call for the record if the right hon. Gentleman wants, but the simple fact is that, in debate on the Loyal Address, I was asked whether the treaty was technically required for accession. The answer is that technically and in legal theory we do not need this treaty, but we do need a treaty, which would still have to come before the House.

The second point is that, politically, it would be impossible to conceive of accession without the modernisation and reforms of the Nice treaty. The question that the right hon. Gentleman must answer is: how on earth does he think the EU would work with 15, 20, 25 or 28 member states without such changes?

Mr. Maude: I shall have something to say about how the European Union would work without these changes. Other changes may be needed, but the idea that the proposed changes are the only possible changes that are needed to make it work is fantasy.

It is correct to say that even if the treaty goes through, another treaty—an accession treaty—will be needed. No one can deny that. It is not only the Foreign Secretary who has said this. The President of the European Commission said that, legally, ratification of the Nice treaty is not necessary for enlargement. That is clearly the case. I hope that we can have an end to the nonsense that the Nice treaty is necessary.

The previous Foreign Secretary made the same point, although he did not know it, in the aftermath of the Amsterdam treaty, when he announced proudly to the House that now that the Amsterdam treaty had been agreed, all the obstacles to enlargement were out of the way. Suddenly we find that there is another obstacle: the Nice treaty. *[Interruption.]* That is almost exactly what he said. We can call for the record if there is a dispute about it. He said:

"In the aftermath of the Amsterdam treaty, the way is now clear for enlargement to happen."

Funnily enough, it was not clear, according to the present Foreign Secretary and all his hon. Friends. Suddenly there is another obstacle.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Did he notice that only a few minutes ago the Foreign Secretary conceded that if, in the end, the Irish do not ratify the Nice treaty, that treaty will be dead? Would my right hon. Friend be as interested as I would be to hear what the Foreign Secretary would propose with regard to enlargement if the Nice treaty were not ratified? Presumably, he would propose precisely the alternative treaty to which my right hon. Friend is rightly referring.

Mr. Maude: The case that my hon. Friend puts in such a measured way is exactly the case that the shadow Cabinet and the then Leader of the Opposition put in 1992, after the Danish referendum result. They argued for postponement of discussion of the Bill, in order that the difficulty with the Maastricht treaty could be properly resolved, so that the House could know what treaty it was being asked to ratify.

For the Foreign Secretary to take refuge in a decision of the General Affairs Council, and to say, "Oh well, the Council decided that matters had to go ahead, so we had no option" is a little feeble, to say the least. As the right hon. Gentleman made clear, without ratification and without a further referendum in Ireland which gives the consent of the Irish public to this treaty or to a treaty, this treaty is dead. It cannot proceed.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston) *rose—*

Mr. Maude: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, then I must make progress.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. In the light of his earlier remarks about timetables for enlargement, does he agree that timetables for enlargement would have been folly, given that the Irish have not yet given their consent in a referendum? Furthermore, is it not true that, as in the case of Denmark, there can be as many referendums as the Irish Government want?

Mr. Maude: That is a lovely idea, is it not? If one does not like the result, one just keeps on having referendums. On the same basis, I could say that I did not like the result of the general election, so let us have another one. Let us carry on having votes until we get the result that we want. The arrogance of that approach is breathtaking.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West) *rose—*

Mr. Maude: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I must make progress.

There was an active debate in Ireland about the merits of the Nice treaty and the Irish people said no. Which part of that answer did the Government not understand? It is a pretty simple, straightforward answer.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), by agreeing a rigidly integrationist treaty, which the Nice treaty is, we—I mean we collectively, we the European Union—have set enlargement back, for two reasons. One is that more integration sets up more hurdles for the applicant countries to jump. The second is that, as the Irish referendum result itself confirms, proceeding further with the process of integration generates a degree of political controversy which slows the enlargement process.

There is plenty of evidence that enthusiasm in some of the eastern and central European countries for accession to the EU is dwindling. The central European correspondent of *The Times* recently observed:

"Some 68 per cent. of Poles now believe that the country should delay enlargement rather than surrender important positions."

Given the delicacy of the political situation in a number of the countries of eastern Europe—the case that all of us make for enlargement is that it is a way of stabilising those countries and bringing them into the family of democratic free market nations—we should be concerned about that.

The correspondent went on to say:

"Czechs are beginning to think aloud about what would happen if enlargement failed."

Those concerns about enlargement are genuine. They are nothing to do with the Conservative party objecting to the Nice treaty or the result of the Irish referendum. They are due to the fact that the negotiations about enlargement have been extraordinarily protracted and the big issues have simply not begun to be resolved.

We cannot accept the Bill or the treaty in its current form and we will oppose it. We will ask the House to vote for our reasoned amendment. As I said earlier, it would be wrong to proceed with the Bill at present. The Foreign Secretary has clarified for the House that the treaty will fall unless all member states have ratified it.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I want to make some progress.

There seems to be some reluctance through much of the rest of the EU to give voice to concerns about the treaty. Ex-President Giscard d'Estaing said in the French Parliament's debate on the treaty that, if the French people were offered a referendum,

"you can bet that the answer would be an Irish song."

[Mr. Maude]

That is a lyrical way of putting it, but one sees the point that he makes. The French people came within an ace of defeating the Maastricht treaty in 1992. How can we be at all certain that there is popular support in Britain, France, or any other country for the treaty?

There will be a real problem if we in the EU give the impression that we treat the views of the public on these issues with disdain. A modern Europe cannot treat the views of its citizens as an awkward impediment that has to be overcome. We should be listening to the concerns of our people, particularly those raised in the Irish referendum.

The EU and its leaders have failed to dispel the impression that they propose to bash on regardless of public opinion, and nothing that the Foreign Secretary said today in any way draws back from that. It is sad to see that that is the case.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I shall make progress.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that nothing could be more dangerous for public support for the EU, which I agree it is important to promote and sustain, than to treat the referendum result with the kind of contempt that we are hearing from him and from others.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maude: I shall in a moment.

To those who dissent from that, I have to say that the Government's determination to press ahead at full speed with the Bill at this time gives the impression that the views of the Irish public are set at nought. It shows no respect at all for the concerns that have been raised there. It is in that sense that EU leaders are treating the views of the public with contempt.

It is accepted that Giscard d'Estaing said that the French public may well not support this, and I should not be at all surprised. I suspect that the British public would not support the treaty if they were offered the opportunity in a referendum.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I shall make some progress.

There is a real danger here of the political leaders being genuinely alienated from the public whom we are meant to represent.

Mr. Cash: Having taken some part in the French and Danish referendums, as well as the recent Irish referendum, may I ask my right hon. Friend why we on this side of the House are not prepared at this juncture to have a referendum on the whole European issue, given that the single currency is certainly not the only issue at stake? There was no referendum when our referendum campaign managed to get 500,000 votes in favour of a vote on Maastricht. With the involvement of defence and foreign policy, we should be considering a broader referendum to obtain the full consent of the British people.

Mr. Maude: In the broad-ranging policy review upon which I feel the party is about to embark, I am confident that my hon. Friend will want to make that point. I am sure that he will be very active in that respect.

Mr. Straw: What is the right hon. Gentleman's view?

Mr. Maude: I take the view that the British public should have the opportunity to express their opinion on the treaty in a referendum, in the same way as the public in the Republic of Ireland.

Angus Robertson: Why does the right hon. Gentleman think it right for the people of the UK to be given a choice in a referendum on the Nice treaty, but not on the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Maude: Since the Maastricht treaty was decided upon, we have gone considerably further down the path towards full-scale political integration. There is now a growing gap between what the public and the politicians think about these matters. Unless we make a connection by allowing the public to have a direct say on this specific issue, we will be in danger of allowing a big gulf to develop, which will undermine the very democracy upon which we depend.

In such a referendum, we would be very clear about what we favour. We will support parts of the Nice treaty that may be genuinely useful in enabling enlargement to occur. Protocol A of the treaty, to which the Foreign Secretary referred, deals with the reallocation of seats in the European Parliament and the reweighting of votes in the Council. I do not take as much pleasure as him in the fact that we can now override the wishes of smaller EU countries—a point upon which he dwelt rather gloatingly. His attitude did not seem quite in accord with the spirit of harmonious friendship in which we should be approaching the enterprise. The amendment to the size of the European Commission is also a welcome step and we support it.

We would like the reforms to go further. We would like the Commission to revert to an institution whose nature resembles much more that of an impartial civil service. That was very much the conception of its founding fathers. We would like the balance of power to shift from the European Commission to the Council of Ministers. We would also like moves to be made to strengthen democratic accountability. Each country could place a national Minister at the head of its Brussels delegation, to be directly accountable to national Parliaments. That seems to us the right approach to filling the democratic deficit. I hope that the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues will respond positively to such approaches, which are the right direction for reform of the European Union as an institution and will become more necessary as time passes.

Institutional reform is only a fraction of the final agreement at Nice, whose focus clearly lies elsewhere. Tighter integration is the defining characteristic of the treaty, and qualified majority voting is extended in 31 articles. We believe that this one-way process, in

which powers are transferred only in one direction, is not in British interests and is not the right way of creating European harmony. There is a great difference between European integration and European unity, although people have for some time tended to use the two phrases almost interchangeably.

We understand absolutely the desire of our partners in Europe to build structures that make unthinkable the sort of deadly and protracted conflicts that have devastated Europe all too often, but today, surely we could and should be seeking more modern and sophisticated ways of bringing Europe together. If one cares about European harmony, as we do, the very last thing to do is to extend the areas in which the majority can ride roughshod over the wishes of a minority. That is a recipe for discord, not harmony. It is a recipe for division, not unity.

The view from outside the European Union beltway is revealing. The Foreign Secretary referred to the Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic; I shall quote the Speaker of the Czech Parliament, Mr. Václav Klaus. *[Interruption.]* It is worth listening to the quote because hon. Members may learn something from it. Mr. Klaus said:

"The agreement from Nice was in no way about EU enlargement . . . It was about internal changes within the European Union, which might possibly facilitate"

the entry of new members.

However, there was nothing essential about EU enlargement in the agreement. In my opinion, the main thing was that in several hundreds of areas—I mean the regulation of this or that type of business, or the regulation of other matters—a huge shift occurred from a unanimous vote required for these matters until now to a majority vote."

The important part follows:

"This means that the role of an individual country is substantially decreasing while the role of the whole is substantially growing . . . It was yet another distinct step toward unification and toward transferring powers from individual states somewhere to the top."

That is a penetrating analysis with which we agree.

A brief look back at the words of the Government and the previous Foreign Secretary before departing for Nice confirms the accuracy of Mr. Klaus's view of the treaty's emphasis. The previous Foreign Secretary made several statements about what he would do at Nice. He leaves a difficult legacy for his successor. He said that he would not regard a change to qualified majority voting on most of the items on the list of 50 aspects proposed by the French presidency as acceptable. He believed that only a minority would be acceptable. However, he had a change of heart at the negotiating table and agreed to QMV for more than half of them.

The right hon. Gentleman said that extending QMV to anti-discrimination measures would be unacceptable. He had a change of heart at Nice. He said that he was not wildly enthusiastic about the move on European political parties. Again, he had a sudden change of heart in the sunshine of Nice. Perhaps it was not unconnected with the proposal that he would take on the presidency of the European party of socialists. From his first days in office, the current Foreign Secretary knows that agreeing to extend QMV means that we lose influence and power.

The Government agreed to the social chapter in the early days of the previous Parliament. They claimed that it would have no bad effects, and that there was nothing to worry about. However, they had to spend the election campaign trying to cover up the effect of the works council directive. The Government rightly object to it; we support them on that. However, it has gone through despite the Government's opposition because they gave up the veto.

There is clear evidence of the loss of the influence of the House and the British Government through giving up the veto. Perhaps the Foreign Secretary can explain the benefits that accrue from extending QMV to article 13, which applies to anti-discrimination measures. How will it benefit the British public? What are the implications of extending QMV to articles 100(1) and 100(2)? In terms of the article, what does a shortage in the supply of specific products mean? To which products does it apply? What measures can we deploy since the previous Foreign Secretary signed us up to QMV? What great benefits flow to Britain from that?

What would the Government's response be if the Foreign Secretary were outvoted on the choice of a common foreign policy representative? That could arise through a change that his predecessor agreed at Nice. Are the Government happy that, in principle, it is possible for European foreign policy to be run in the name of the British Government, represented by a person whose candidature they did not support?

I have outlined only a handful of the commitments that the Government have signed. It is right to scrutinise them, and we shall do that in Committee. However, surely it is sensible to call a halt to the Bill and broaden the debate on the treaty's implications through a referendum. The public could then participate and express their views on it.

Let us revert to enlargement and the idea that the necessary and desirable—in our view—reopening of the Nice treaty would delay enlargement. I have the direct quote to which I referred from the Foreign Secretary's predecessor, which comes from the debates after the Amsterdam treaty. He said:

"One of the great gains of reaching agreement at Amsterdam is that it has cleared the way forward for enlargement."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 918.]

A year later, the then Foreign Secretary opined that there was no

immense enthusiasm on the part either of Europe or of Britain to commence an intergovernmental conference so soon after Amsterdam."

When that enthusiasm suddenly materialised, the right hon. Gentleman needed an excuse to justify the further intergovernmental conference and the further treaty, and he turned again to enlargement. He said:

"Enlargement will not be possible unless we ratify the treaty of Nice in the meantime."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 797.]

That is what he said earlier this year.

We had earlier warned that further integration and further treaty changes that take us further down the path to political, old-fashioned, one-size-fits-all political integration will not expedite enlargement but delay it, as it is doing, by adding to the burden that applicants have to absorb. By generating political controversy, as evidenced in the Irish referendum, enlargement will be delayed.

I said at the time of the Nice treaty:

"This summit had nothing to do with what is needed to allow enlargement to take place. All the extensions of QMV—some major, some minor—go in one direction only, towards further integration."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 394.]

[Mr. Maude]

We would have been a bit more relaxed if there had been any evidence that at Nice the Government were pressing for there to be a two-way street, with some powers being returned to member states for decision. That is how a modernising European Union should be developing. It should be aiming to decentralise.

When the Minister for Europe was a Back-Bench Member and a strong europe sceptic, he used to make the case for a decentralised EU. As time has passed and the process of globalisation has accelerated, the case for decentralising the EU becomes stronger and stronger. Let us be clear that the Bill is not about enlargement. If anything, it is an impediment to enlargement. That which is necessary for enlargement has not been addressed.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): The right hon. Gentleman says that the Bill has nothing to do with enlargement. Surely he remembers that at the time of the Amsterdam treaty there were various matters that were called left-overs. Those matters were dealt with at the Nice treaty, and there was a clear link between them and enlargement.

Mr. Maude: I do not know whether the right hon. Lady, as Minister for Europe, drafted the then Foreign Secretary's words when he said that agreement at Amsterdam had cleared the way for enlargement. That seems to be fairly unequivocal and fairly unambiguous. He did not say, "By the way, there are all these other things that we must decide in the meantime."

The matters that we are discussing are not needed for enlargement. We know that there is a political desire—this is what really is going on—among some leaders in Europe to take further the process of deeper political integration before enlargement happens. They suspect—for all I know they may be right—that the new candidate countries will be less amenable to proceeding with deepening integration than current members.

It seems an un-European approach to decide to have a tightly closed club where we make our own rules before we open our arms to embrace the entire family of European nations, which is what I regard as the historic destiny of the EU, and which must be done. It seems profoundly wrong to introduce tighter rules and then to say to all candidate countries, "Here is it is, take it or leave it—these are the rules, which we decided while you were waiting outside, and you must accept them as they are." It is wrong that the EU has gone down that path. It is wrong also that the Government have acquiesced in, and in some ways promoted, that approach.

The things that are necessary for enlargement to take place have not been addressed by the Government, and especially radical reform of the common agricultural policy. When I raised the issue during the previous Parliament, the then Foreign Secretary used to sneer and say, "That is completely unnecessary. It has all been dealt with at Berlin. There is nothing to worry about." However, the Prime Minister said—

Dr. Starkey: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: I must make some progress.

The Prime Minister himself said, as long ago as 1995, in his early days as leader of the Labour party:

"Britain could set the agenda in Europe . . . reforming the CAP both because it is right and"—

this is important—

"as a necessary precondition to the enlargement to include the countries of central and eastern Europe."

Then, he was absolutely right: it was a necessary precondition. We know that it still is, because in all the negotiations that are going on there has been no agreement, so far as I am aware, on the chapter concerning agriculture with any of the candidate countries. There are big problems with structural funds as well, but the biggest problem is agriculture.

When one asks someone from one of the Governments in question, "How is it going with the negotiations?", they say, "Oh, it's going splendidly. We've just got agriculture and the structural funds to deal with." Those are the big problems, the really difficult ones. That is why, if Nice had been genuinely a summit to deal with enlargement, it would have addressed those issues. However, it did not, and so far as I am aware, neither the then Foreign Secretary nor the Prime Minister made the slightest effort even to get the reform of the common agricultural policy on the agenda at Nice, let alone tried to get it dealt with. Yet by their own admission—now conveniently forgotten—they have accepted that that reform is essentially necessary to enable enlargement to take place.

Dr. Starkey: May I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, if he had read the excellent report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, he would know that six of the applicant countries had closed the chapter on agriculture?

Mr. Maude: This has been the longest-standing problem and it has delayed matters immensely. It took so long because it was necessary to negotiate immensely lengthy transitional proceedings, as there had been no serious reform of the CAP.

Everyone agrees that the European Union has to change. It needs to turn the challenges facing us, which concern many people, into opportunities. The European Union needs to be more relevant and more immediate to its current and future members. The answer is not simply to steam on regardless in the same dogmatic direction. We must require the European Union to re-examine itself. It has already succeeded in building the biggest single market in the world, and I think that the previous Conservative Administration can take some credit for that. I spent two happy years in the late 1980s negotiating a number of the directives that opened up—not in a perfect way, of course—that single market.

The European Union must now adapt to the era of decentralisation and to the network age. At present, too many of its structures are rigid, and too many of its aspirant members are being forced to sign up to the approaches of the past. In the network age, this rigid and centralised model of European power is not only inappropriate and outdated but a recipe for division and fracture. In today's world of global economic integration, the creation of big centralised blocs simply does not make sense any more.

We in the European Union can no longer afford to be impervious to the trend of change across the world and still expect to succeed. Through low turnouts in European

elections and falling support in opinion polls, the people of Europe have sent a clear message to their Governments. It is that real unity across Europe cannot be imposed by integrationist treaties or by diktat.

Last September, the Danish people made their views clear in their referendum on the euro. In March, the Swiss rejected early membership of the EU by as many as four to one. Whatever the merits of the case for Swiss membership of the EU, that result ought at least to give us cause to stop and think, "Why did this happen?" Plenty of people might say, "The Swiss have just got to make the necessary changes to allow them to join." But should not we in the European Union, when we consider a stable democracy as prosperous as Switzerland, ask ourselves, "What is it about the European Union that makes a country as successful as Switzerland decide so overwhelmingly that it does not even want to contemplate negotiating to join it?" Of course, if Switzerland were to join the European Union, it would have to make a lot of changes. However, it is worth our while to reflect for a moment on whether the European Union could effect any changes to make itself an attractive place for a country as successful as Switzerland to join.

We need a fresh and more modern approach to Europe. In this electronic age, the EU needs agility, adaptability, flexibility and a light touch from the state if we are to realise the goal of a stable, prosperous, outward looking, free market, democratic Europe. We have a positive vision of an EU of constant change, constant bargaining and constant negotiation. We believe that that vision is true to both the spirit of the goals of Europe's founding fathers and the demands of our age; and that it would free Europe to prosper, rather than bind it with rigid rule and diktat.

A constitution for the EU, which has been proposed by some, would prevent that continual process of renewal, bargaining and change from happening. Far from lumbering from treaty to treaty, as the EU is increasingly prone to do, our vision would achieve a multi-system Europe in which groups of countries—different combinations for different purposes and to differing extents—would proceed to integrate and co-operate in different ways according to their different choices. That vision represents a more modern, more sophisticated, decentralised EU.

We want an open, flexible, free enterprise Europe that is ready to serve the whole of Europe—a Europe that celebrates diversity in culture, ethnic background, language, history, outlook and perspective and which does not try to stifle and submerge that diversity. I am afraid that the Bill and the Nice treaty take Europe in the wrong direction—back to the old world of tightly integrated, centralised regional blocks. That is wrong, and we shall vote against the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, I should tell the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches. It applies from now on.

4.47 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Unlike the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who spoke for the Opposition, I welcome the Nice treaty and the fact that we are beginning the ratification process in the House today. I warmly congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench on their appointment and wish them well in building on the work done by the Foreign Secretary's predecessor in the important sphere of European policy.

The Nice treaty is fairly modest, but it makes real improvements, particularly in terms of vote reweighting in the Council of Ministers, sensible changes in the European Parliament and sensible reforms in the European Court of Justice. Overall, the Government promoted and safeguarded British interests in the negotiation and built on both the success of the Berlin settlement, which we debated in the House yesterday, and the gains that they achieved in the Amsterdam treaty.

In all three negotiations, the Government showed that they could successfully negotiate for Britain without being isolated, and there was certainly no repetition of the disastrous policy of non-co-operation which the previous Government tried for a time. Furthermore, I find the Opposition's arguments curious. The treaty is modest, so wanting to hold a referendum on it when no referendum was held on either the Single European Act or the Maastricht treaty, for which they were responsible, defies belief.

Conservative Members often refer to attitudes and arguments in Denmark, where there is a strong degree of Euro-scepticism on occasion. I say to them that the Danish Folketing thought the treaty so modest that it did not represent changes in terms of integration. Therefore, the Folketing recommended that a referendum should not be held, and that recommendation was accepted. Indeed, there was a healthy majority in favour of the Nice treaty when it was voted on in the Danish Parliament.

However, the fact that a referendum on the treaty is not being held in this country should not make us shy of having a public debate on Europe. Indeed, I am pleased that Europe, among many other important matters that were debated, was an issue in the general election campaign. I am glad that the result of the general election seemed to confirm that people believe that the Government have been doing a good negotiating job in Europe, and I strongly agree with that.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Was it a referendum on the euro?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have interventions from a sedentary position.

Joyce Quin: We should not be frightened of a big debate on issues such as the euro and enlargement. Enlargement is a tremendously important opportunity for the future of the European Union. Existing member states should prepare for enlargement, just as they prepared for the entry into force of the euro.

I was fortunate recently to have the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Günter Verheugen, visit my constituency and address a conference of representatives of the private and public sectors from urban and rural parts of the region. He encouraged people in the region to prepare for enlargement, and to build the necessary economic, political and social links with new member countries, so that we make a success of enlargement.

[Joyce Quin]

I suggest to the Government—they are likely to do this in any case—that they go out to the people of Britain in the different regions and explain why enlargement is important and why it will bring enormous benefits not just to new member countries but to existing members. They should try to convey a sense of excitement about this historic project.

I am glad that the Government have already highlighted the benefits of enlargement, and have drawn attention to the fact that previous enlargements have brought economic benefits, such as jobs and the expansion of the gross domestic product in both the applicant and existing member countries. Those trends will continue with future enlargements.

I strongly support the provisions in the treaty on the European Parliament and co-decision. I believe that the European Parliament has used its powers responsibly. I also welcome the fact that the European Parliament can influence the decision-making process in the European Union.

However, as a former Minister, I am allowed to be a mild heretic. I think that we should examine the old-fashioned distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditure, which I hope will become increasingly irrelevant with the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Although there is no hope of this, I would also like the European Parliament to be able to decide for itself where it meets, rather than be subject to the unanimous decision of the Council. I know full well the realpolitik behind that: no one will challenge the one or two countries for which this is a vital national interest. None the less, it is a modest power for any organisation to be able to decide where it holds its meetings. Most of the organisations with which Members of Parliament come into contact have that modest power.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Is the right hon. Lady aware that the writing into the treaty of the provisions on where the Parliament sits—thus making it impossible now to change that without a treaty change—was agreed to by the Government under the treaty of Amsterdam?

Joyce Quin: Indeed, and I am aware of the politics behind that decision. Many years ago, some German social democratic MEPs argued with their then leader, Helmut Schmidt, that he should push for a change of attitude on this matter in the Council. He told them firmly that it was not a vital national interest, and that there were many more important issues for him to promote and pursue. I understand why, in negotiations, Governments promote their most vital national interests, and why some of the other issues which, on a reasonable judgment, may be worth pursuing, are left to one side.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary mentioned some of the changes that have taken place in agriculture. I believe that the time is right to push for agricultural reform. Although it was not part of the Nice treaty, it was certainly part of the Berlin agreement. I believe that—not just because of the pressures of enlargement but because of changes within certain European Governments, particularly the German Government—we now have a chance to build up an alliance for agricultural change and reform, which will itself give us a unique opportunity. I urge my right hon. Friends to push ahead with agricultural reform at this juncture: if we can achieve it, it will make enlargement that much easier to achieve as well.

I think that the Nice treaty is helpful, and represents a positive although modest way forward. I believe that it will help us to build on what we have already achieved. I commend the Government on their attitude in European negotiations on economic reform, and on the social chapter—the job-destroying social chapter that has actually resulted in the creation of extra jobs in our country. I commend them on their positive approach to environmental policy in Europe, and to enlargement.

If these are our priorities post-Nice, we will not only make a success of European Union membership for the British people; we will help to create a European Union that will be to the benefit of all new and existing member countries.

4.56 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): In European matters, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) speaks with rare authority and experience. Her speech encapsulated in a most persuasive way the issues with which we ought to be concerned today.

I was not here at the time of the Single European Act, but I was certainly here during the Maastricht treaty proceedings. In comparison with the Maastricht treaty and the proceedings that surrounded it, the Nice treaty is little more than housekeeping. It justifies neither euphoria nor hysteria. It is certainly not a grand plan for the European Union; it is a framework treaty for enlargement. It is also true to say that the housekeeping has done little to bring Europe closer to the citizen. That may create a bond between those who speak in this debate, from whatever part of the House.

The fact is that the decision-making process in Europe remains impenetrable to the ordinary observer, and almost daily makes a powerful case for reform. The patchwork of powers and responsibilities that have grown out of a number of treaties—not all of which are easy to reconcile with each other—still requires a healthy dose of transparency and openness.

I do not believe that the Nice treaty is a great constitutional watershed, as Maastricht was and, indeed, as would be a decision to join the single European currency. Few would dare to suggest that the overall outcome of Nice has contributed much to the quality or efficiency of European governance. Nice represents at best a holding position until such time as the leaders of Europe find the will to adapt the institutions of the European Union to the realities of the kind of Europe of which the shadow Foreign Secretary spoke towards the end of his speech—with a great deal of which I found myself in agreement.

Nice is about providing a framework for enlargement. It is about effecting the institutional reforms that are necessary to allow a union of up to 27 members to function. Of course, 27 members may not be the high water mark of enlargement. There are 13 applicant countries at different stages of the accession process, including Turkey. Reference was made during the debate on the Gracious Speech to the difficulties of accession for

Turkey. As the Foreign Secretary noted, we have held out to Balkan countries such as Croatia the possibility of future EU membership because we want to help them move away from a period of political indecision—and, in some cases, chaos—towards a more rational structure. The possibility of EU membership has also helped ensure that the fledgling democratic institutions in those countries are better nurtured and sustained.

The shadow Foreign Secretary prayed in aid a somewhat improbable ally in Mr. Prodi, but he was right to say that, in technical terms, the treaty of Nice is not required for enlargement. In theory, enlargement can happen without the Nice treaty, but what sort of EU would it be if we did not use the framework that that treaty contains?

Moreover, as the Foreign Secretary noted, if we were to put the Nice treaty to one side and say, "We will now consider the question of enlargement," the target date of 2004 simply could not be achieved. Political considerations would mean that enlargement would be delayed for a very long time. That would be poor reward for the countries of eastern Europe, many of which have worked hard to achieve democratic standards and to move towards market economies in anticipation of early EU membership.

We must ask ourselves whether the EU is outward-looking and willing to share the benefits and advantages of membership for the purposes of peace and prosperity across the continent. If the answer to that question is in the affirmative—as it ought to be—we should then ask ourselves how we can allow those benefits to be shared by others quickly and effectively.

I share the Foreign Secretary's view that there can be no enlargement without ratification of the treaty by Ireland. Ireland provides an interesting illustration of the need to make the case for EU membership. Liberal Democrat Members have criticised the Government's timidity when it comes to making the case for Europe, although the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech in the City on the eve of the Gracious Speech foreign affairs debate presented a positive case for Europe—despite the fact that he took what I believe to be an unduly reticent approach to the question of membership of the single currency.

The Irish result is a warning that politicians must make the case for Europe, and it shows that the requirement for unanimity in some matters means that a small country has the power to block, or even derail, the EU's progress. That rather gives the lie to the argument that we are on an unstoppable escalator, on the way to something that some describe as a superstate but rarely define.

For example, the treaty extends qualified majority voting to 31 of the 70 or so articles that require unanimity. However, 17 of those articles refer to technical portions of the treaties dealing with appointments to the European Parliament, European committees and courts, and with those bodies' rules, procedures and management. Four of the other articles to which QMV has been extended cover matters on which Britain has an opt-out. The remaining 10 extensions deal with matters such as anti-discrimination practice, support to industry, priorities for structural funds, and environmental measures. In some areas, we are talking not about enforced harmonisation but about the exchange of information to encourage best practice. I see no case for a referendum on the treaty of Nice, as no issue of fundamental constitutional importance is at stake.

I confess that I have a little difficulty with the Conservative position on the matter. Before the general election, the Conservatives said that a Conservative Government would not ratify the treaty of Nice but, in opposition, they now call for a referendum. It seems to me that that position can be interpreted as, "The people must speak—but not if we're in government, when we'll make sure that we speak for them."

That is a rather confusing and confused position, and I shall make my opinion clear. Referendums should be employed sparingly for principled reasons of constitutional significance. If fundamental constitutional change is involved, as it was in the Maastricht treaty and would be were we to join the single European currency, the approval of the British people should be sought in a referendum. Indeed, it was the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown, who was the first to call for a referendum on entry to the single currency.

Where do we find such fundamental constitutional change in the Nice treaty? Where are the marching legions besieging the alleyways of Westminster with their calls for a referendum on Nice? Where are the crowds demanding delay in ratification? People are breaking into Menwith Hill because they feel so strongly about missile defence, but I have not been accosted on my way to the House of Commons by anyone even passingly resembling an ancient mariner wanting to ensure that I did not help to pass legislation to ratify the treaty of Nice. I cannot even remember receiving a single letter on the topic in the past four weeks, except for those from members of parties that are overwhelmingly opposed to any further integration into the European Union.

The Irish vote makes it even more important for the EU to undertake a serious round of reform. We have to reconnect the EU with the citizens of the nation states that make up the Union and move away from that rather remote elitism that can often be detected in the air surrounding Brussels institutions. I happen to think that an overwhelming commitment to, and a determination to press ahead with, enlargement will help to provoke that very discussion. We want a European Union that is more democratic and more liberal, and one that concentrates its energies on doing what it does best, not on interfering in every area of national legislative competence. The EU should stay clear of areas where its writ is unnecessary.

One of the achievements of the former Prime Minister, John Major, is that the principle of subsidiarity is ruthlessly applied by the EU. I have no difficulty with decentralisation—after all, my party argued for decentralisation in the United Kingdom for some time while those who now think that decentralisation in Europe is so important put up bulwarks against the notion that the Welsh should have an Assembly or the Scots a Parliament.

Mr. Bercow: The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that nothing of constitutional significance is imperilled by the extension of qualified majority voting, but why will not he accept that the merits of the case against discrimination in general, and the merits or demerits of particular anti-discrimination measures, should pre-eminently be matters for determination by

[Mr. Bercow]

democratically elected Members of the British legislature? Those matters should not fall within the rubric of the European Union.

Mr. Campbell: If I interpret that intervention correctly, the hon. Gentleman is saying that he does not believe that the European Union should take a position on, for example, the discrimination faced by women. That is precisely the sort of issue on which the EU should take a position. There should also be an EU position on discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity. The hon. Gentleman and I may exist on two different planets on the issue, but the progress of events since we joined the European Coal and Steel Community—to give it its technically correct name—has favoured those who share my view, not those who share his.

One of the more positive aspects of Nice was the pledge of member state Governments to launch a debate about the future of the European Union. That will result in the convening of an intergovernmental conference in 2004, specifically designed to establish a more precise delimitation of competencies between the European Union and the nation states upon which it relies for its legitimacy.

I do not shrink from the notion that there should be a constitution for Europe. The shadow Foreign Secretary set himself against that, but I believe that it is only by being clear and open about structures and aspirations that the European Union can hope to retain the support of the people of Europe. People have to be comfortable with the institutions designed to represent them and they are most comfortable in such circumstances if they understand the limits of the powers of these institutions.

In short, we need to know in clear and simple language what the European Union can and cannot do. The treaty of Nice does not achieve these objectives. It was, as the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West pointed out in an intervention, designed to deal with what were rather ungraciously described as the Amsterdam leftovers. However, the treaty of Nice provides a framework for enlargement and in my view it should be supported for that reason.

There is one point to which I hope we shall return in Committee. The enabling provisions in clauses 1(2) and 1(3) are, as I understand it, unprecedented. They raise the possibility of changes of law based on affirmative procedure. We will seek to inquire of the Government what is the justification for that apparent innovation in dealing in this House with matters connected with the European Union.

We should be swift to offer the benefits of European Union membership to those who wish to avail themselves of the opportunity to become members. We should ratify the treaty as soon as possible, which is why Liberal Democrat Members will support the Government in the Lobby this evening.

5.12 pm

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Bill seeks to amend the European Communities Act 1972 to incorporate into the laws of the United Kingdom various parts—most parts, it seems—of the treaty of Nice. The 1972 Act has been amended many times over the past 30 years, and some of the amendments to it, especially those made in the 1980s and 1990s, could be said to provide a map of the long march from the Common Market of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to the centralised European state that is emerging.

It is fair to say that on the scale of integration, the treaty of Nice is not as high as, for example, the Single European Act, the Maastricht treaty or, indeed, the treaty of Amsterdam. Nevertheless, it is a further step in the integration process. That process can be effected and completed only by taking away powers from the Parliaments and peoples of member states and transferring them to the institutions of what I see as the emerging European state.

In the aftermath of the Irish referendum on the Nice treaty, Mr. Michael McDowell, the Attorney-General of Ireland, describes clearly—as one would expect from an Irish Attorney-General—that process of integration. He said in *The Daily Telegraph* that there is a widespread perception that developments in Europe were taking a turn, or moving in a direction, that caused deep unease. The article continued:

"He said 'a narrow class of activist office-holders, elected and unelected', were charging ahead of public opinion with proposals for a European constitution, a justiciable Bill of Rights, EU direct taxation, a defence arm, a judicial machinery to prosecute and punish citizens, an elected EU president, and an EU government."

He said that few if any of those proposals carry popular significant support and continued:

"While many have been put forward separately, they constitute, in the round, the indicine of a European state in substance.'"

That is the view of the Irish Attorney-General, whom I should have thought understood these matters very well.

The most integrationist aspect of the Nice treaty is that in about 31 of its articles, the unanimity rule in the Council of Ministers has been replaced by qualified majority voting. We have heard the Government line: "Who cares who becomes the registrar of the European Court? Why should those Poles be allowed to veto the appointment of a registrar?" Perhaps the appointment does not matter, but several articles from which the unanimity requirement has been taken away are quite important. For instance, there are the measures that allow the EC to give financial assistance—the payment of money—to states in "severe difficulties".

Negotiation, completion and conclusion of agreements relating to trade in services, which is very relevant to the GATT negotiations and the World Trade Organisation, are also now subject to qualified majority voting. Health and safety at work, working conditions, social exclusion, industrial policy, economic and social cohesion, certain environmental measures, and economic and financial co-operation with third countries are surely important matters, but we are losing the unanimity rule in respect of those as well.

Unanimity has also been removed from proposals to establish enhanced co-operation, as it is called. In the strange language of this Byzantine organisation, that is known as a "deepening" of the Community. Again, the veto has been taken away. Those matters are not trivial; they are of considerable importance, but a democratically elected British Government can now be outvoted on them.

The case for the veto lies not just with the importance or otherwise of the subject matter of the veto. In any international or supranational institution, the veto protects, and is the badge of, the democracy of the member state.

That is why, in most supranational organisations, unanimity is usually the rule. The veto is under pressure not just because of enlargement but because the EU is moving away from what has been described as a supranational body, and is gradually moving towards an emerging state. As we have seen with other treaties, this is the beginning of the end of the supranational phase, and the beginning of the EU as a state in its own right. The veto is simply not compatible with such an arrangement.

Once the veto goes, a democratically elected British Government can be outvoted by a group of states whose Governments are not accountable to the British electorate; those Governments might not be of the political hue or persuasion for which the British electorate would vote. Let us consider France. It grieves me to say so but, from reading the newspapers every day, it is clear that financial corruption has been endemic at the highest levels of French Government for a very long time, regardless of which party is in power. That is a matter for the French electorate—they might like it or they might not care about it. However, I hope that the British electorate would not tolerate such financial corruption from a British Government. Yet a French Government, together with others, will be able to outvote a British Government, even though the other Governments are not responsible for, or in any way accountable to, the British electorate that put their Government into negotiations.

I am sure that the Italians are happy with the Berlusconi Government. However, I venture to suggest that a British electorate would not vote for the policies that Berlusconi stands for and that he has submitted to the Italian electorate. However, the Italian Government, together with other Governments, could outvote a British Government and impose polices on a British electorate that would never countenance supporting a Government such as Berlusconi's. What if—perish the thought—a neo-fascist Government were democratically elected in a European country? Recently, the Austrians had a wobble and perhaps such a Government could be formed again.

Apparently, we are not going to give up any more vetoes—we are going to fight to the death over the next lot. The next time, Ministers will be like the Spartans at the pass of Thermopylae. The corridors of power will be piled high with the corpses of British Ministers, as they fight for the remaining 31-odd vetoes.

Are we really saying that we are prepared to accept the votes of a democratically elected neo-fascist Government in Europe who will then, along with other countries, be able to impose their will on a British electorate, who would, I hope, never countenance the election of such a Government? The issue is not the exercise of the veto in votes on registrars, or even the importance of the veto in itself; the veto is the badge of, and the bulwark and protection for, the democracy of the nation state within a supranational or centralised European state.

To add insult to injury, I note that clause 3 will allow some vetoes to be given to the European Parliament. The Parliament does not call them "vetoes"; a veto is nasty, but a co-decision is wonderful. The Parliament is to be given the power of co-decision. A decision will be made by the Council of Ministers using majority voting and sent to the Parliament for a co-decision. If the Parliament says no, that is not a veto; it is the Parliament failing to exercise its power of co-decision. The Bill takes away our vetoes and gives some of them to the European Parliament. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will accept a few amendments in Committee to restore those vetoes to this Parliament or, if we do not want to call them "vetoes", to give us the power of co-decision.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): My right hon. Friend asks whether we will be giving power to democratically elected Governments with whom we do not agree. My quick calculation shows that to get an agreement on qualified majority voting, we would need about 120 votes, and as even the largest country would have only 29 votes, self-evidently we are not giving power to any one nation.

Denzil Davies: Not at the moment, but Governments change. I was making a point of principle: we are giving away power because at the moment we can stop things, but in future we will be unable to do so. The British electorate will be unable to have any influence on that process. I was making a democratic point, and if my hon. Friend cannot understand it, we really are in some difficulty over the European Union.

The Bill will lead to further diminution of the powers of this House and of the democracy of the British people. I do not believe that the majority of my constituents, or of the British people, want further integration. The Danes did not want that, and nor did the Irish—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.22 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): It is always a particular pleasure for me to follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who represents my home town, in which I spent the first 18 years of my life and where I went to school. That pleasure is greatly enhanced by the fact that I entirely agree with so much of his speech, and I congratulate him on it.

The treaty that the Bill will enable the Government to ratify is extremely wide ranging and far reaching. In addressing its provisions, it is difficult to know where to start and where to end. It is a treaty without a theme. Ostensibly, it is all about the enlargement of the European Union, and we are all in favour of that, but the most cursory glance at its provisions makes it clear that most of them have little, if anything, to do with enlargement.

Moreover, the important changes that enlargement would involve, such as reform of the common agricultural policy, are completely ignored in the treaty, as was pointed out by my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. The treaty of Nice is, as treaties go, a great pretender. It purports to lay the ground for enlargement, but fails to do so; it contains many provisions that have nothing to do with enlargement and that we should not embrace.

The declarations that accompany the treaty cover many vital issues, some of which I have addressed before in the House. I shall not touch on them this evening because they are not part of the body of the treaty. There is more than enough in the body of the treaty to occupy the attention of the House, and it is on some of those provisions that I wish to concentrate. Some of them are welcome. They may be unnecessary for enlargement, and

[Mr. Michael Howard]

do not therefore have to be included in the treaty, but I have no particular difficulty with the provisions relating to the number of Commissioners or the weighting of voting.

I am also an enthusiast for what has come to be called variable geometry and what, in the Euro-jargon to which the right hon. Member for Llanelli referred, is known as enhanced co-operation. It is through variable geometry and enhanced co-operation that the EU can develop a new, essential dimension of flexibility. If those countries that wish to integrate more closely are permitted to do so without it being a requirement that every other member state should join in, we have the beginnings of an imaginative and innovative structure that may well prove to be the model for other parts of the world to follow. It would enable the United Kingdom to say to our partners, "We have no desire to stop you doing what you want to do, so long as you do not make us do what we don't want to do." It would mean that the UK could stop saying "no".

Nevertheless, some aspects of the provisions relating to enhanced co-operation in the treaty of Nice cause concern. The original provisions in the treaty of Amsterdam include what became known as the emergency brake—a kind of veto, as the right hon. Gentleman said—which enables member states to refer contentious proposals for enhanced co-operation to the European Council, where they have to be approved unanimously. That provision is deleted by the treaty of Nice, which is a mistake. Particularly in its early stages, it is important that enhanced co-operation has the blessing of all member states. The treaty of Amsterdam appeared to secure that; the treaty of Nice does not.

The provisions on which I wish to spend most of the short time available this afternoon relate to the extension of qualified majority voting. Two reasons are usually given in support of the proposals. Unfortunately, as is often the case, they are contradictory and mutually inconsistent. First, we are told that an extension of QMV is essential if the EU is to be enlarged. How can important decisions continue to be taken on the basis of unanimity, we are asked, if the union is to include so many new member states? Unanimity, it is said, would lead to paralysis, so an extension of QMV is essential.

The second justification is that, if one examines the areas to which QMV will apply, one finds that they are all technical, narrow and inconsequential. No essential national interest is involved, the areas concerned are of little importance and it is sensible for them to be treated in that way. However, many decisions that need to be taken by an enlarged EU will be important and will involve member states essential interests. If QMV is an essential means of preventing paralysis and enabling the decision-making machinery of the union to work when it is enlarged, why restrict it to technical areas? The flexibility which, indeed, will be essential when the union is enlarged, can be provided much more effectively by enhanced co-operation than by QMV. That is the best way forward; I hope that the EU will follow that path.

Let us examine in a little more detail the proposals for QMV and, in particular, the extent to which they are technical and unimportant. In doing so, let us give at least a passing glance to what has happened in the past. There have been many occasions when QMV has been extended, often under a Conservative Government, to areas where, we thought, it would not give rise to any problems. I shall give one specific example. I was a member of the Government, though not of the Cabinet, who extended QMV to decision making on issues relating to health and safety. I am not for one moment suggesting that I would have opposed that extension had I been in the Cabinet at the time; it seemed a sensible thing to do. Were we not, after all, enthusiastically in favour of proper health and safety provision? And were our provisions not among the best in Europe? Might it not have been the case that some of our partners with less stringent requirements were stealing a competitive march on us by avoiding their proper obligations? From every point of view, was not that measure clearly in our national interest?

I would have answered those questions in the affirmative. As we know, they were answered in the affirmative by the Cabinet and, in particular, by the Minister with responsibility for those matters, who was none other than my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I emphasise that I do not criticise him for agreeing to that step, which I supported at the time; I am sure that I would have done the same thing myself. But what happened? Far from restricting the scope of the relevant provision to legitimate questions of health and safety, we discovered, not long afterwards, that the provisions were being used to force through the working time directive, which has only the most tenuous connections with health and safety. Those of us who were concerned with these issues in the previous Conservative Government were outraged; outraged and impotent.

Indeed, I recall a discussion in which my right hon. and learned Friend, just as resolute in his opposition to the working time directive as the rest of us, said that had he known that the health and safety provisions were to be used to impose, by a qualified majority, the working time directive, he would not have supported the extension of QMV. So, in examining what may appear to be technical or innocuous measures in respect of which QMV is to be applied, it is as well to bear in mind the mischief that they may contain.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I shall not give way; I am afraid that I have no time to do so.

I shall mention just one such example of the extension of QMV by the treaty of Nice. Article 100, on which the right hon. Member for Llanelli touched, provides that appropriate measures, including financial assistance, may be agreed to aid member states in severe difficulty. What might that mean? Let us explore hypothetically what it might mean.

We all know that pensions will be a considerable problem for many countries in future. We all know that, in the United Kingdom, we have made better provision for our pension liabilities and obligations than others. What if in future article 100 were used to provide for financial assistance to countries that get themselves into severe difficulties because they cannot meet their pension obligations? There is nothing in article 100 to rule that out.

If I am wrong in my analysis, I hope that the Minister who winds up the debate will point that out. If there is a flaw, I would like it to be identified. If I am right,

however, can there be any doubt that it would be seriously and fundamentally contrary to the interests of this country that article 100 of the treaty of Nice should be permitted to go through?

My opposition to article 100 and other similar articles owes nothing to dogma, doctrine or any anti-Europeanism. It is based on the only principle that we should apply to every measure that comes before this House: is it in the interests of this country and the people whom we are here to represent? Any objective application of that principle to this treaty and this Bill would lead to but one conclusion. That is why I hope that the Second Reading of the Bill will be rejected.

5.32 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The Nice treaty is the latest of a number of treaties on the role and competence of the European Union. The EU has changed its name over the decades. It has evolved, but insufficiently to meet the changing world and even the objectives that it set itself 50 years ago.

For many people like me, the Common Market of the 1970s was a liberator. We could work in member states without work permits—the free movement of labour. The EU of today is too often perceived as an institution that stops people from doing things or tells them what to do.

The recent rejection of the treaty of Nice by the people of Ireland in a referendum should not be brushed aside lightly. The motives of those voting against it were no doubt mixed, but we do not have a right to interpret what voters really meant. "Comrades, there must be no compromise with the electorate", is not an appropriate response.

Three basic questions should be asked of any democratic institution. Does it solve problems? Are those affected by decisions represented? Do those affected by the decisions know who made them? The EU must improve as a democratic institution. If I were to choose just one example of how it could do so, it would be the system of weighted votes, which was one of the most contentious issues at Nice. The qualified majority threshold, the blocking minority combined with the population safeguard, cannot be explained in such a way as to argue that they bring Europe closer to the people by making European decision making clearer.

The current mood towards the EU is in marked contrast to the hopes and enthusiasm that surrounded its birth at the end of the second world war. However, it is fair to say that 50 years ago people would have been astonished by the degree of political and economic integration that has since taken place on our continent. There have been significant changes—most notably the unification of Germany, the end of the cold war and prospects for enlargement to the east. However, there are a number of issues that must be addressed now if the EU is to retain, let alone increase, the confidence of electorates.

In the debates surrounding the EU and the potentially enlarged Union, politics and economics are mixed. That has always been so, ever since the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community. In general, the path of economic integration has been clearer than the political destination of the EU. It is often not clear whether politics or economics is in the driving seat. Indeed, the priority has varied from time to time, but one thing was always clear: monetary union was to follow political union. The order has now been reversed, which has added to people's confusion about where Europe is heading.

I shall deal first with economics. With some justification, Monnet can be seen as the father of the EU. He was certainly a visionary, but he was always a practical man. He believed in the benefits of what might be termed liberal capitalism, and he admired America. We should note both those facts.

While there is much to learn from America, European countries are different and they do not have to become mirrors of the United States. Whatever the framework chosen to reflect different cultural and political traditions, there are certain economic imperatives to be met. In recent years it has been noticeable that the people who were most sure that Europe and its new currency would soon and easily challenge the dollar were often those most hostile to the basis that underpins the dynamism of the US economy and the dollar, particularly the emphasis on the market.

The European Coal and Steel Community was essentially a liberal market solution that could be followed as an example in a broader economic context in the treaty of Rome, the single market programme and subsequent reform agendas. Before embarking on any new economic or social initiatives, Governments in Europe would be better employed in ensuring that labour, product and capital markets function in the way envisaged in the Spaak report.

The report, tabled in April 1956, remains a key document and was the basis of the treaty of Rome. It is the main philosophical antecedent of the approach to economic integration which has been prevalent in the EU ever since, yet if we look at the progress made in the past 45 years, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor might ask their opposite numbers to stand and deliver what has already been promised. That has not been delivered. For example, there is no genuine single market in financial services, and recent German opposition to the take-over directive shows how far we still are from accepting the logic of the Spaak report.

I turn now to politics. Broadly speaking, for most of modern history there have been two alternative ways of organising society—a nation state or an empire. Neither is an attractive model for the EU. The EU is said to be a unique construction. It was a deliberate pooling of national power or sovereignty in a clearly defined area, and the placing of that power under the control of an entity that was common to the member states, but none the less legally independent.

The route followed by the EU—via the original ECSC, the EEC, then the EC—is, we are told, towards ever closer political union, which has never been tried before and which has an unstoppable momentum. It is not always clear where this momentum is taking us, but it is like riding a bike—we cannot stop, and we must keep going forward or we will fall off. That is not my experience of riding a bike. It is possible to stop. We can put the brakes on. We can put our foot down. We do not fall off. We can look around and decide where we want to go.

On the whole, the lack of precision about the political endgame and its institutional framework has not seemed to matter much up till now. At the end of the war, everyone in Europe shared a widespread feeling that things could not go on as before. A new order was needed.

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

If anyone had asked what the EU, in one of its previous incarnations, was for, the answer would have been obvious: to stop Germany and France ever again going to war against each other.

That objective has been achieved and no longer provides a credible basis for taking Europe forward. To the question, "What is Europe for?", we must provide an up-to-date answer that people can support, in language that they understand. To the cognoscenti, posing such a question lacks sophistication and subtlety, but they are wrong. The question must be addressed.

The structure of the ECSE and the function of the high authority followed clearly from the answer in 1951, and I suspect that the same is true today. Providing an answer for present member states will not be easy, but I am certain that one of the purposes of the existing EU is to help to underpin democracy and economic prosperity in central Europe.

Whatever the justification for the Nice treaty and whatever its failings, it has been determined as the channel for moving forward with enlargement. The presidency conclusions of the Gothenburg Council in June 2001 state:

"Enlargement and globalisation present the EU with great opportunities and challenges."

It does. Enlargement will test the hinge of national interest and genuine European solidarity. Often, in Eurospeak, the latter is a cloak for the former.

Enlargement is a challenge for some recent entrants, for example, Spain, Ireland and Portugal, who have been major recipients of European assistance. It is a challenge for France and Germany—perhaps particularly for France, for whom the EU is often seen as an extension of the French state. It is a challenge for us here too. In meeting all those challenges and others it will be essential to be able to state clearly Europe's basic function and purpose.

I might be seen as an example of the forces that shaped modern Europe. I am German by birth, my mother is a refugee from eastern Europe, and I am now a British Member of Parliament representing Neville Chamberlain's old constituency. I hope that no one is in any doubt of my fundamental commitment to Europe.

However, before we move to the intergovernmental conference in 2004 we, as politicians, will have to be able to answer some fundamental questions, such as what the EU does for its citizens, how those are citizens represented, and who can they hold accountable for decisions.

In other words, if we are to engage people in debate and take them with us, we need to be able to state in simple terms the direction, role and competence of the EU. In plain language, the fundamental question that we need to able to answer is: what is the European Union for?

5.42 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) for one very good reason, which is that she asked the right question. The problem is that she came up with the wrong answer. The difficulty is that Europe's purpose is ever greater integration, and whether democracy and accountability can exist in such an environment is the question that we face in the House and throughout Europe. The Irish and Danish referendums clearly demonstrated that, as did I in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) earlier today with respect to the Conservative party's refusal to engage in proper referendums on the question of further integration from Maastricht onwards until the Nice treaty.

I want to deal with a broader question. I speak as one whose father, who received the military cross, was killed in the last war in Normandy. That adds a certain poignancy to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston. Those of us who want a peaceful and stable Europe must ask whether that is what the arrangements will provide. Nothing would be worse than for the EU, for which I voted in 1975 in the context of that time, to implode because of the tensions that are created by going down the wrong route towards an undemocratic and unaccountable Europe. We have only to consider the low growth and job difficulties in the eurozone to understand that point.

We have only to look at what went on in Gothenburg to understand the alienation that exists between the electorates of Europe and the elite, and how the EU is embattled and imprisoned by the force of political concern about what is going on. No one who is responsible could possibly ignore that, any more than Romano Prodi could possibly argue with any legitimacy that the Irish people must have another referendum because the original referendum was undemocratic.

The first Danish referendum, in which the Danes voted no, was disgracefully overturned with my Government's connivance. In "German Comments", produced by Konrad Adenaeur Siftung, an editorial at the time said that elections had become a form of protest and must be stopped. It is incredible for such language to persist from those days until Romano Prodi's recent disgraceful remarks in Ireland. We must take the matter seriously. By renegotiating, it is possible to get the whole ramshackle, undemocratic, unaccountable and idiosyncratic kaleidoscope back in focus.

I am arguing not for withdrawal, but for a proper intergovernmental conference at which member states can, instead of making proposals such as the Nice treaty, sit down and ask themselves the question that was rightly put by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston: what is Europe for? How will we have a stable Europe when it is perfectly clear that the direction in which it is going is being rejected by its electorates left, right and centre? I do not believe for one minute that that view is confined to the countries that I have mentioned. It is not confined to the United Kingdom, where the decision would be clear if a referendum were held now.

The same view prevails in central and eastern Europe. I have served on the Select Committee on European Scrutiny for 17 years, so I have visited the countries and met people there. Although the elites have been blackmailed into accepting the acquis communautaire—that is basically what happened—and their parliamentary processes have been absorbed for an entire year in adopting something that the people do not want, they are now signing up to join a European Union that will frustrate and undermine the democratic spirit that gave rise to the enormous burst of freedom that we saw in the

springtime of nations. That is why I want enlargement, but not on the basis of crushing out the democratic spirit. Believe me, that is what will happen.

We must also consider a further question: the broader picture that lies behind those circumstances. It is about the balance of power in Europe. Nobody should have any misunderstanding about that. As Bismarck said, it is those who speak about "Europe" who should be most distrusted. The bottom line is that we are now engaged in a tectonic movement in the balance of power in Europe, which is being carried out through the mechanism of institutional change. The reality is the driving force of national interests, based on an apparent political union that will become a legal framework. Through the legal processes of the European Court of Justice and the European Communities Act 1972, that framework will impose upon this country and others a requirement to obey laws that are, for example, passed by majority voting.

I must differ from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) in respect of the variable geometry and flexibility that he advocated. When one engages in the concept of enhanced co-operation, as the treaty does, one should consider what happened under monetary union, which was described by the European Commission as the best form of flexibility yet produced and which led me to table 200-odd amendments to the Bill on the Maastricht treaty. We said that we would accept the framework, but not prevent the other member states from going ahead. That is the implicit basis on which the enhanced co-operation will operate in relation to all areas, including, despite the Government's denials, defence, foreign policy and all the other matters to which the Nice treaty refers, following and based on Maastricht and Amsterdam. It is an accumulative, aggregate process of an undemocratic and unaccountable Europe. Anybody who misunderstands that is missing the target altogether.

I believe that what is happening is the creation of a Europe that is based fundamentally on the predominance of Germany. The German people know and understand that. I have many friends in Germany and they tell me the same thing. The problem is not simple; it is about the aggregate of power, not only in relation to the majority voting increase that Germany has clearly acquired in the treaty, but to the countries that depend on Germany. We must be careful about the direction in which we are moving. Many people may disagree with me, but that is my judgment.

We are moving towards a more deeply taxed Europe. The functions that are being created, including those under flexibility and enhanced co-operation, are increasing exponentially. They must be paid for. That is why Hans Eichel recently said that a much more invasive tax policy is needed in Europe. That is why Romano Prodi has asked for £60 billion. All that will remove the House's ability to resist. Public services in this country are constrained by European Union monetary rules. If we subscribe to the increased functions, the whole process will continue to invade the rights and privileges of the House. We are moving dangerously further down the road of an undemocratic, European Government—that is what we are considering, not a confederation of nation states.

I wish that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was here today. I shall be interested to know how he will vote. He said that he supported the Nice treaty. I dedicated my pamphlet to him today, and I hope that he will enjoy a little light reading matter.

We are in danger of taking a one-way ticket on a route to an undemocratic and unsustainable Europe. I shall fight against that with all the heart that I can summon.

5.51 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I strongly agree with all the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary when he opened the debate, especially those on the negotiations about the Nice accession treaty. Britain has secured most of, if not all, its objectives, and it would be profoundly against the United Kingdom's national interests if enlargement proceeded without ratification of the treaty. Again, the lesson is that it is better to be in there, fighting convincingly and competently for our British national interests, and using alliances and influences, than to stand isolated on the sidelines, as the previous Government did for many years.

The choice for Britain is not between a Europe that we find unacceptable and the Conservative delusion of being in Europe but not run by Europe, whatever that means. It is between being out of Europe—Conservative policies would inevitably lead to that—and playing a proper role in shaping the reformed and changed Europe that we need and want. That is the central point of my remarks.

Nice is essential to bring about reform so as to pave the way for enlargement, but it only gets us to first base in the wider task of EU reform. Pro-Europeans should be the first to recognise and argue that today's Europe, with its institutions, working practices and policy priorities, is not perfectly designed for the challenges ahead. Enlargement will profoundly change the European Union.

The EU's overall direction needs to be clearer, and I sympathise with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart). Our objectives for Europe need to be much clearer. There should be a much sharper focus on the core tasks that form the EU's priorities. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, Europe can add value through those tasks. We should also focus on the way in which we secure a proper balance between the responsibilities of the EU and those of member states and national Governments, and between the EU's institutions and those that rightly remain the responsibility of member states.

The EU is facing up to those issues and to the sheer practicalities of the way in which a new EU with 25 and possibly more members will work in practice. It behoves all member states to be brutally realistic about the paralysis that threatens the EU if we do not get enlargement right. When unanimity is required, it will be much more difficult to reach a meaningful agreement with such a large number of members. Even when the EU makes decisions through QMV, it will be much harder for 25 than for 15 member states to reach a good decision. How do we avoid paralysis creeping into the operation?

It is the job of the 2004 intergovernmental conference to grasp the nettle of fundamental reform in the EU. It will be difficult for Britain to grapple with much of it. There will be no easy debates or issues to resolve when we tackle fundamental reform in the EU. However, it will not be so uncomfortable for our country or our Government that we should stand aside and leave others to lead the debate. What are some of the key pointers that we might identify in distilling a British approach?

[Mr. Peter Mandelson]

First, we should not get hung up on semantics and words such as federal or federalism. They mean different things to different people. Federalism means decentralisation to the Germans but centralisation to the British. The EU is a confederation of nation states; it is a hybrid, which is part intergovernmental and part supranational. Sovereignty is pooled but not lost. That will remain the permanent basis for the EU, and we should not therefore go up hill and down dale in pursuit of semantic argument.

Secondly, an EU constitution is already set out in its treaties. It needs greater clarity and it needs to be fastened down. We need to work hard to derive some basic rules from it. However, we should do that instead of starting to rewrite an EU constitution from scratch.

Thirdly, the Commission fulfils an essential role. It is the motor of the EU, for example, in policing the single market and competition policy. However, the Commission should not have carte blanche to exercise its competence as it chooses simply because it has such competence in specific matters. It should conform to EU priorities that have been set out by the European Council. It should respect subsidiarity in our arrangements.

Fourthly, the European Parliament plays an important legislative and scrutiny role, and I want it to be effective. However, it lacks the legitimacy to set the strategy for Europe. It has been suggested that the European Parliament should be given the power to elect the President of the Commission. I believe that that would confuse the Commission's primary accountability, which is to the Council, not the Parliament.

Fifthly, the Council needs radical reform to be effective. It needs a fewer number of councils. It should have four or five instead of the current 17. It needs a co-ordinating group of senior Ministers to meet regularly to prepare and follow up Council meetings. The rotating six-month presidency should be replaced, and the way should be opened for the European Council to decide when it is willing to accept more QMV for specific decisions.

Sixthly, like others who have spoken, I support enhanced co-operation in an enlarged Europe. However, there should be no permanent inner group or presiding core, for which the French Government are canvassing. It would exclude Britain while we are not members of the eurozone.

Seventhly, in a larger Europe, there is already growing concern about the reach and accountability of the EU in terms of people's everyday lives and its relationship with the general public. We need to reassure Europe's citizens that their rights are respected and that democratic values are being entrenched. Perhaps we need, therefore, to reconsider the status of the charter of rights, as revised so as not to conflict with the European Court of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998.

There is no doubt about the challenging and extensive agenda that the points that I have raised—and many others—represent in the coming months and year: an agenda which we must all address. There is much to confront. There is an enormous amount on which to find agreement among some disparate member states.

The future-of-Europe debate is vital. I sympathise with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). Irrespective of any issue to do with the single currency, the debate on the future of Europe should pre-empt or go alongside any separate consideration of Britain's membership of the single currency.

I suggest that the public will be much more likely to engage in any future debate about the single currency if they see that we are facing and fully debating the wider questions that are of great concern to them with the maximum transparency and frankness in the coming months and years. I hope and trust that that is what the Government will be doing.

6.1 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech today. I am conscious of the great honour that my constituents conferred on me in voting for me to be their Member. Some Members may have been slightly surprised at the result at Guildford, but it is important to remember that the people of Guildford are a thoughtful bunch with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

When I decided to apply for selection by a constituency, Guildford was definitely my first preference. We who come from Yorkshire are hard to please. Nowhere else seems as beautiful as Yorkshire. However, in the Guildford constituency, there are lovely Surrey hills, beautiful villages such as Shalford, which is my home, Bramley, and Cranleigh, where there is a lovely food market. There are many nice shops, and little pubs and coffee shops to visit after the shopping has been done. It is a wonderful area in which to live.

We are about to have our own brand of locally produced food, bearing the name Surrey Hills. Look out for it when it comes. Like other farming communities, we have had to delay things this year. We will welcome support when we finally go to market.

There are other good things about Surrey and Guildford. As a Yorkshire woman, I think that I finally have a dispensation from the home camp to support Surrey cricket, and very welcome it is too. It is a fabulous cricket team to support. The Benson and Hedges cup is coming up, and Surrey won the county championship last year. The club is the mainstay of the British team, especially on its winning days. Surrey is a wonderful place.

Surrey cricket club does not represent our only champions. We have an ice hockey team too. I can tell right hon. and hon. Members who have not been to an ice hockey match that it is a lovely family sport which many Guildford families attend. The Guildford team won the British national league championship and the play-offs last year.

Guildford is more than a pretty town and a shopping centre. It is a thriving cultural, academic and social hub. It is dominated by its cathedral. The arts play a strong role in the community, and all right hon. and hon. Members will have heard of the Yvonne Arnaud theatre, which is much in need of support. It is a centre for commercial theatre in the south-east. For those who are still learning their skills in the performing arts, we have the school of acting and the academy of contemporary music.

Guildford has been home to famous mathematicians. We all know of Charles Dodgson, or Lewis Carroll. It was also home to Alan Turing, one of the most important mathematicians of the 20th century. He was born and brought up in Guildford.

The university leads the way in technological advances. There is strong expertise in space technology, human biology and medical sciences. We lead the field in many areas. We have one of the most successful business parks in Europe. Situated between two airports, Guildford is ideally placed for those going backwards and forwards to Europe. Many people are based in Guildford to do just that.

We have a law college that has trained many people to become lawyers. Guildford college has received awards for the quality of its further education and for its vision for teenagers and old people with all skills and all backgrounds.

More important than the lovely surroundings are the people. We are a diverse community. Guildford is not just full of stockbrokers, which is its image. Many residents are on high incomes, but many others can scarcely afford to live in the area, and they are as an important part of the community as anyone else.

Guildford was last represented by a Liberal Member in 1906. It has taken us a long time to recover the seat, and we shall not give it up easily. I know that my predecessor, Nick St. Aubyn, is sad to have lost the seat after only one term, and understandably so. Times change, and so do loyalties. However, Nick worked assiduously in the representation of Guildford, and I share many of the concerns that he had, for which he fought on behalf of the constituency. In some respects we differed as to approach, but we were equally committed on issues such as education and the environment.

Nick cared deeply about human rights and was passionate about his desire for peace in the middle east and the problems faced by refugees. I wish him well for the future, whatever it holds.

In particular, Mr. St. Aubyn strongly supported his constituents in their opposition to the proposals for a large incinerator that would be the same size as Guildford cathedral, which stands on a hill and dominates the town. The incinerator, too, would dominate the town. It is a source of great worry and concern to the entire constituency. Nick put in much work on behalf of his constituents and I shall certainly be taking up the fight. My constituents expect no less.

We need more sustainable approaches to environmental matters, and especially waste management. In Cologne, it is illegal to put empty bottles in dustbins. They have to be sorted and taken to the bottle bank. Perhaps we can learn much more from best practice elsewhere in Europe, which our membership of the EU allows us to do. Austria already recycles more than 60 per cent. of its household waste. Germany manages 48 per cent. and France only 12 per cent., but in Britain we manage to recycle only 9 per cent. of our household waste. We have a long way to go, and much to learn from Europe, before we can compete.

On the doorsteps, I took various questions about Europe. Interestingly, no one disagreed about environmental issues and the fact that we should be looking to Europe to co-ordinate environmental approaches. We will be anticipating and welcoming the electrical and electronic waste directive, which would reduce the number of large items that go into our rubbish. The biodegradable waste directive would promote home and community composting. The packaging directive would require manufacturers to collect and recycle a significant proportion of their packaging. If we could work together in Europe to anticipate these directives rather than wait for enforcement, we would not need a large incinerator in Guildford. We must work with Europe much more closely on these matters, and we need much more Government encouragement for councils, so we can start to become much more sustainable in our approach to waste management.

Guildford is one of the most important commercial centres in the south of England, and has one of the most successful shopping centres. It also has one of the most vibrant economies. However, my constituents are worried about the threats to their health that an incinerator would bring, particularly to local schools and employees. They have strong concerns about that. We must bear in mind the fact that, wherever one looks in Guildford, one sees the surrounding hills, and wherever one would look in future, such a building would have an unacceptable impact.

We need to move forward in Guildford. It contributes enormously to business in Europe, and Europe contributes enormously to business in Guildford. I look forward, as its MP, to working in a much stronger area and, I hope, to bringing forward some of the European directives that will really help us. I started my political campaign in Newbury, opposing the mountains of rubbish there. The people of Newbury eventually saw the light and elected a Liberal Democrat council and a Liberal Democrat MP. I hope that Guildford will adopt a similar position and continue to return its Liberal Democrat MP.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It is always a pleasure to follow—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I am sorry; I called Mr. Doug Henderson.

6.11 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): That is not the first time that there has been such a misunderstanding. My right hon. Friend and I have often received mail intended for the other because of the similarity of our names.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on her excellent maiden speech. She said that the people of Guildford were a thoughtful bunch. They obviously have a thoughtful representative to look after their interests for the next four or five years. She also said that Guildford had last been a Liberal seat in 1906, and had returned to the fold at this election. My own seat was a Liberal seat in 1906 but, thankfully, it did not return to that colour this time. She told us all about her wonderful constituency and expressed an interest in cricket. May I say to her that if Yorkshire does not let her go back, she will be very welcome to join me at the Riverside as a guest of County Durham if she ever needs to return to the northern reaches of English cricket?

This has been a refreshing debate about the bigger pictures involved in the European issue and the way in which the Nice treaty impacts on them. It is highly desirable that we should not miss the big picture by getting embroiled in all the details of the bits and pieces of the Bill. That is not to say that those bits and pieces are unimportant, and I am sure that we shall devote the necessary time to them in Committee. However, I fear

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

that, too often, we get embroiled in the details and the public then fail to recognise what the European Union is about, why it has to change and what its priorities are.

This is a forum for discussion of policy among the British people, and I do not for a minute complain that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) or my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) take a different view from my own. It is important that we have a healthy debate. However, I fear that too many of my colleagues who share my view on Europe have been too quiescent in their support of that view. It is high time that those of us who believe in the European ideal—and who believe that the EU is a crucial part of the future economic, political and social stability of the existing EU and of a much wider area in Europe and in spheres of influence beyond that in parts of the former Soviet Union and north Africa, which must develop to reflect the priorities of the day—acted on our responsibility to make that case more loudly.

I do not know what the position of Conservative Front-Bench Members is on this issue. I know that it is difficult for them to draw up a resolution on foreign policy at this time, particularly in relation to the European issue. Perhaps it will be easier next week, or by the end of July, or perhaps we shall have to wait until September.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Give it a year.

Mr. Henderson: Perhaps we should give them a year; perhaps even longer.

The Opposition amendment is extremely negative and damaging to Britain's standing and interests in the European Union and to Britain's contribution to building and rebuilding the stability of Europe in the EU. It is not enough to argue about whether we shall have a few more votes here or a bit more influence there, although those matters are important and, as I said, we should examine them in detail in Committee.

We must consider how we can guarantee the future of the European Union. Some hon. Members may have been fortunate enough to travel to applicant countries such as Slovakia and Latvia; I think that I have probably travelled to them all. If Conservative Members realised what the response of people in those countries would be to their amendment, I do not believe that they would pursue their stated position. If the Conservative party believes in the enlargement of the European Union, it cannot have the luxury of being negative every time a European issue is placed before the House.

I am not saying that Opposition parties should not be critical, or that they should not be able to dispute with the Government when there are genuine differences. However, we heard from the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) that he was in favour of enlargement but against the Nice treaty. That is a completely untenable position. If the British nation does not endorse the Nice treaty, the treaty will run into serious difficulties.

Important parts of the Amsterdam treaty had to be carried over; not everything could be agreed there. Numerous issues were agreed, many of which were much more far reaching than the provisions in the Nice treaty. However, it was not possible to achieve everything at Amsterdam. The proposals on the reform of the Commission, among others, were referred on from the Amsterdam negotiations to the Nice negotiations.

It is also not enough for the Conservatives to say, "Oh, but if the Irish do not accept the treaty, the whole thing will fall." If the treaty falls, we shall be back the next day, and every provision from the Nice treaty will have to be included in any subsequent treaty if we are to make progress on enlargement. Everyone in Europe knows that. The Conservative position is ridiculous. All the nations in the European Union are backing the treaty. Okay, the Irish have rejected it in a referendum, but the Conservatives' position is tantamount to saying that they know better than all the other parties in government throughout the European Union, including other Conservative parties.

The Conservatives do not recognise that, in countries such as Slovakia and Latvia, change will not take place towards a market economy or a reinforcement of democracy to build on the achievements of 1989 and 1990 unless there is a belief that they can accede to the European Union. Those countries know that there is no future for democracy and a market economy unless they are part of the general regulatory system in Europe. If they do not have the opportunity to join because the Nice treaty or subsequent treaties fall, those countries will not know which way to turn. They will not be allowed to turn towards the European Union, which will have rejected them. The only option will be to look somewhere else. We can be absolutely sure that in Slovakia, for example, members of the previous leadership—which, under Meciar, was strongly totalitarian—will be saying, "Our way was the only way. You can forget the gypsies. We are going back to the system that we had before. That is the only way forward." That would be extremely damaging for the security and stability of Europe.

Before the Conservatives vote this evening, they should think more clearly about those issues. They should forget the bickering in their party. Surely the stability of Europe and of this country is a much bigger issue than their bickering over the nuances of the extent to which they are for or against Europe. That is my plea to Conservative Members. In most other European countries with which I have had dealings, there is a pretty good consensus about the nation's interests in all these issues, and about the contribution that the nation should make to Europe. However, in this country we are perceived as bickering and nit-picking all the time. It is no surprise that the electorate feels remote and excluded from European issues.

I believe that we have a responsibility to rebuild that connection so that people understand that their security is achieved not only through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, important as it is, but through membership and development of the European Union. Enlargement is important to that development and to the economic prospects of our nation, as it will give British exporters a better opportunity to penetrate larger markets, although I am not saying that that is the main argument for enlargement.

The main argument for enlargement is providing stability and security in the European context and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said, building on what has been achieved over

the past 50 years. We must ensure that we look ahead to the prospect of security and prosperity, and that is the main purpose of the Nice treaty.

As colleagues have said, there is an awful lot of work to do and many issues to resolve. When the EU has 25 or more members, it will be much more difficult to reach decisions, to operate the Commission, to decide who will provide and who will receive structural funds and to reform agricultural policy, but without the Nice treaty we will not even get near those issues. I hope that the House overwhelmingly supports the Bill.

6.21 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I begin by congratulating the new hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on her maiden speech and thanking her for her kind remarks about her predecessor. It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who was my predecessor's pair in this place for many years.

It was Benjamin Disraeli who once said that the greatest opportunity that can be offered to an Englishman is a seat in the House of Commons. Having been a Member for only a few weeks, I am beginning to understand what he meant. I have been immensely impressed by the courtesy and helpfulness of all the staff in this place, and, as an ex-Territorial Army officer, it is particularly welcoming to see the Doorkeepers each and every day. I learned in the Army that those who want to know what is going on ask the senior non-commissioned officers. That seems to be as true here as anywhere else.

I do not, however, intend to follow the example of a young cadet at Sandhurst several years ago, who was taken aside by a Guards sergeant major to be told that his performance on the drill square had been "distinctly sub-optimal". The sergeant major thrust his pace stick roughly into the ribs of the poor unfortunate and bellowed at him, "There is a complete idiot at the end of this pace stick." The cadet replied, "Not at this end, sergeant major."

I am delighted and honoured to have been elected to the House as the new Member for Rayleigh. Unlike some hon. Members, I do not claim that my constituency is the most beautiful in the country, but I would humbly nominate it for a place in the top 10. The Rayleigh constituency is named after its largest town, which numbers some 35,000 people and stands roughly in the centre of the seat, just north of Southend.

The historic town of Rayleigh was first recorded in the Domesday Book as belonging to Sweyne of Essex and it boasts the oldest castle in the county—indeed, one of the oldest in the country. West of Rayleigh lies Hanningfield reservoir, which supplies much of the county of Essex, and a series of picturesque villages that surround it, including East, West and South Hanningfield, Downham, Ramsden Heath and Rettendon as well as the slightly larger community of Runwell.

North-west of Rayleigh, close to the beautiful River Crouch, lies South Woodham Ferrers, a town of some 20,000 souls, which is fighting a battle with Chelmsford borough council against unwelcome overdevelopment. I pledge to assist the residents of the town in that fight. East of Rayleigh lie a number of popular communities, such as Hockley, which has its ancient royal hunting forest, Hawkwell, Hullbridge and the smaller rural villages of Ashingdon, the Pagelshams, Stambridge and Canewdon, whose 15th century church tower was erected by Henry V in thanksgiving for his rather impressive "away win" at Agincourt.

Until 1997, the constituency included the town of Rochford, from which it previously took its name, but it was removed in the previous parliamentary boundary review. That has led to some confusion about the revised boundaries. At the general election, a commuter from my constituency got off the train at Rochford station to be met by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who knows what I am about to say. The commuter spied the blue rosette, smiled, walked forward, stretched out his hand confidently and said, "Don't you worry, Mr. Francois, I have already decided to cast my vote for you."

It is an honour to follow in the footsteps of my predecessors, Dr. Michael Clark and, before him, Sir Bernard Braine, who was Father of the House. Dr. Michael Clark is a man of principle who served the constituencies of Rochford and Rayleigh with distinction for more than 18 years. In addition to his duties as a constituency MP, which he carried out diligently, he made a career in this place as Chairman of the Science and Technology Committee and a member of the Speaker's Chairmen's Panel.

While canvassing during the general election, I was genuinely struck by how many people know Dr. Clark personally and by how well they speak of him. I am conscious that I am being asked to step into a very large pair of shoes indeed, although I discovered one person in the constituency who is even better known than Michael Clark—his wife, Valerie. She served in local government in her own right and was a tireless worker for local charities and good causes. For that, she is well loved. Michael and Valerie Clark are an immensely popular couple and everyone in Rayleigh wishes them every success for their new life together down in the west country.

I am in favour of enlargement of the European Union in principle, but not at any price. I have an affection for the Republic of Ireland; I proposed to my wife Karen while overlooking Galway bay. The next time I visit, I would like to congratulate the people of that country on their sagacious decision to vote against the Nice treaty, and by such a clear margin.

Whatever the views of any of Member of the House on the European issue, when a country as traditionally pro-European as the Irish Republic votes against a European treaty, that should, at the very least, give us all pause for thought. I confess that I was not quite old enough to vote in the British referendum in 1975, but I believe there was no real practical discussion of a federal Europe or of abandoning our currency.

The British people were essentially told that they were assenting to a free trade area—a common market—and that is what they endorsed in 1975. The further we move from that position, the greater the risk that we shall exhaust their patience on all things European. We are an historically tolerant people, and we are willing to negotiate and co-operate, but we will not be subsumed by a foreign superstate that ignores our traditions and undermines our laws.

[Mr. Mark Francois]

My father, Reginald Francois, who died when I was a boy, fought in the second world war on the Murmansk convoys so that we could continue to live in a free and democratic county. That point is not lost on his son.

It was Dr. Johnson who said, "Though we cannot outvote them tonight, we will outargue them." That seems to me to be a reasonable motto for an Opposition, and, from what I have seen so far, we are not doing such a bad job. Over the months ahead, I, too, hope to play some small part in helping to win the argument. I am deeply grateful to the electors of Rayleigh for returning me and giving me that chance.

6.29 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) on his maiden speech. He may not be in the same moderate mould as his predecessor, but I am sure that he speaks for a substantial number of his constituents. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty). She said that she was somewhat surprised by her election. I understand that Conservative central office was just as surprised, and sent a note of congratulation to Nick St. Aubyn, whom we miss, as he was a highly popular Member. The hon. Members for Rayleigh and for Guildford have at least learned that their electorates will be far more interested in Rayleigh market and Guildford market than in the Common Market. If they continue to speak for their constituents in that way, they will do well.

The Nice conference was only seven months ago, but it now seems an age away. We have had a general election since then. We should ask ourselves what lessons we have learned from the election, which some people have claimed was a referendum on Europe. Some hon. Members have asked for a clear perception of where Europe is going and what Europe is for. I do not think that that is possible. In the 1950s, we could talk about the historic ending of the enmity between France and Germany, but now Europe is a far more muddled and complex. We are taking part in a great debate, and the conception of this and many northern European countries is somewhat different from that of other states.

I urge those who argue that the Nice treaty is a giant step forward to a federalist state to consider who exulted and who was miserable at the outcome of the summit. I can tell the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that, shortly after the Nice treaty was agreed, I was attending the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee when Mr. Moscovici, the French European Minister, was mauled mercilessly by the federalists in the European Parliament. The hon. Gentleman would have noticed the tears of Mr. Prodi. Neither those in the European Parliament nor Mr. Prodi would share the picture of Nice that the hon. Gentleman and some of his colleagues painted. Few were satisfied. That is the nature of a package deal. None of the great treaties agreed in the past 15 years have been acclaimed—all have been rejected as failures in the days following agreement. The issues addressed—taxation, structural funds, justice and home affairs—are highly politically sensitive and wrangling is inevitable and hardly surprising.

We should consider carefully how decisions were reached in those all-night sessions. I think that we all agree with the Prime Minister's stricture that something must be done to avoid a repetition of those nights in Nice. Tired politicians make tired decisions. Some leaders did not know the details of what had been decided in the far reaches of the night.

The outcome is complex, and I am a little wary of the calls for referendums. In a poll conducted in March and April this year, 41 per cent. of European Union citizens said that they did not see, read or hear anything about the Nice summit last December. We must respect the Irish referendum result, but the 18 per cent. who rejected the treaty were an interesting rag bag. We must respect that decision, although the matter will no doubt be revisited. The decision was made in the context of the beef destruction scheme, and leaders of the European Community made some arrogant speeches. Sinn Fein grossly misrepresented the position by arguing that Nice equals NATO. The lesson that we must all learn is that Europe needs to reconnect with its citizenry.

The key part of the Nice treaty is the historic step towards enlargement. We may have wanted enlargement to come about in a different way, but Nice is the only treaty in town and it is the essential platform for enlargement. It was built on very successfully at Gothenburg in June during the Swedish presidency. We now have a set timetable for the first wave of enlargement in 2004. I was sceptical about artificial time scales because they reduce the pressure on countries such as Poland to reform their agricultural sector. The giant step on enlargement taken at Gothenburg was possible only as a result of what happened at Nice.

Was Nice essential? According to the Amsterdam treaty, only five new members could join the EU under the old structures. Who would choose those five members? It would have been impossible to decide whether to choose the Czech Republic as against Hungary, or Hungary as against Estonia.

The Foreign Affairs Committee met the former Foreign Secretary and his colleagues. We read the White Paper at the beginning of last year, and we saw the aims that the British Government had set themselves. No objective observer could deny that those aims were substantially achieved. We came out of the summit having achieved what we set out to achieve. Mr. Prodi has been quoted, and we have heard the Commission's view of who were the winners and who were the leaders. The *Financial Times* commented that Britain

"made the biggest strategic gains at the smallest cost. The outcome furthers its long-term aim of becoming an influential member of a wider union, rather than a latecomer to what once seemed a Franco-German club."

That was achieved as a result of the constructive engagement that the Government have pursued with our European allies.

As we prepare for enlargement, we must ask ourselves whether we accept that this is an historic opportunity, or whether we should replay the debates that we had before the Nice treaty and the frenzied discussions we had before the election. In a recent speech in Hamburg, Lord Hurd referred to the exaggerations of that time, such as the idea that our European allies are enemies and that we have to win the game against them. I heard an echo of that in the speech by the hon. Member for Rayleigh. We have heard Conservative Members talk about strides being taken towards a wicked, federal superstate or an evil framework. That would isolate us and be bad for Britain. There would be serious repercussions if we were not to press forward.

Looking ahead, there is a major debate on the future of Europe, with the new intergovernmental conference in 2004. The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) made rather a good speech in Berlin, in which he set out his vision. It is not one that I share and, alas, it is not shared by any other serious party in the European Union. That should lend a certain humility to the Conservative Opposition as they approach this debate. They should realise that they are on their own in Europe.

We shall listen carefully to the debate on the implementation of the Nice treaty to discover whether the Opposition will play their proper role in providing a critical analysis of the treaty, or whether they will exaggerate and produce scare stories, as Lord Hurd suggested. If they pander to an anti-European theme, like latter-day Bourbons they will have forgotten nothing and learned nothing.

We all need a certain humility in our approach to the European question. I sometimes shudder when I hear our continental colleagues talking airily about European construction, but I reject the view that the referendum was merely about a minor European getting together. Written into the treaty was "ever closer".

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has used up his time.

6.39 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I welcome the Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), to his new position. I sincerely hope that he will last longer in this post than he did in his last—although I know that that was not his fault. I also pay tribute to the two maiden speeches that we have heard. Let me say in passing that both reminded me of the diversity that we have in this United Kingdom, as well as the diversity that we have in Europe. We were taken on a gallop around the two constituencies, and the place names that we heard were as foreign to my ears as Pontrhydfendigaid and Penybontrhydybeddau would doubtless be to theirs.

I am very pleased to be able to speak in support of the Bill, and also to speak for the first time on behalf of the Plaid Cymru-Scottish National party group in describing our joint approach to the Nice treaty. We naturally have a different perspective from that which has mainly been outlined today. Our initial premise is a fundamental belief that the people of Wales and Scotland must decide the future of those countries. Our view may lead some Members to suspect that we are Eurosceptics, but, although we want the future of Wales and Scotland to be decided by the people of those countries, we want to go into Europe with full national status within it.

We also think it important to issue a plea for the sovereignty of the people of Wales and Scotland when it comes to deciding their future, and a plea for subsidiarity, which has already been mentioned.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: I am afraid not. The hon. Gentleman has not been present for the whole debate.

In the context of the alienation that people sense between European institutions and themselves, it is important for us to try to make subsidiarity work, and try to make a relevant relationship work. We in Wales and Scotland feel that strengthening the powers of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, and strengthening the institutions in those countries—which have an indirect relationship with Europe—is a viable and realistic way of improving relations between people in the United Kingdom and European institutions. I agree with many earlier speakers that those relations have been weakened.

We do not believe that the Nice treaty is perfect, but we welcome its broad aims. We accept that it is necessary if enlargement is to go ahead, and we are very much in favour of that. The treaty also presents an opportunity for us to restate and reinvigorate our arguments about the reasons for Europe. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) made a perceptive speech, although I do not think that we have heard any answers yet: we seem to be stumbling around in the dark looking for them.

This is a time to re-emphasise that we are building peace and co-operation in Europe. If we want just one example of why we need to do that at European level, we should look to Kyoto. We should consider climate change, and the need for European countries to work together. It was put to the Deputy Prime Minister that we had not yet ratified Kyoto, even though we were complaining that President Bush would not do so. The reason is, of course, that we want to ratify it as a European Union, with all the power, resources and expertise that we have behind us and all our extra ability to speak as a large and important bloc—albeit a large polluting bloc—in the climate change negotiations.

What we also see in the Nice treaty is a retreat from any vision—I must admit that our party Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales, once had such a vision—of the development of a different kind of Europe: a Europe of smaller regions, nation states, autonomous regions and so forth. The treaty has, in fact, re-emphasised the central role of the nation state. I do not agree with the criticisms of Conservative Members in that regard. We have heard a great deal about the fact that Britain's interests are observed in the treaty, and I have some sympathy with Ministers who say that they set out to secure a certain amount of the UK interest in it—and achieved that, according to their own lights.

What Nice has not done is review or change the structure. It has rearranged the present structure in order to accommodate more members, rather than creating a new structure that could have been viable for the future.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am not entirely sure whether the hon. Gentleman, who is speaking on behalf of the Welsh and Scottish nationalist parties, would therefore argue in favour of independence for Wales. The parallel view would obviously be held by Scottish nationalists.

Mr. Thomas: It is important to put on the record that what the Scottish National party wants is independence in Europe. We have a core, central approach, as the hon. Gentleman would know if—as I hope—he listened to my opening remarks. Our approach is that the people of Wales and Scotland will decide their future. As the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said in regard to federalism, the word is not important, and means different things to different people; what is important is what the people are working for.

[Mr. Thomas]

As for relationships, the Nice treaty is rearranging the deckchairs on the supertanker, if not yet the superstate. We are not changing the direction of the supertanker: we are still steaming ahead in Europe, but perhaps not taking enough cognisance of public disquiet and alienation among some European institutions and people within European countries.

There is, I think, some good news relating to institutional reforms for smaller and emerging nation states in Europe, such as Wales and Scotland. Let us consider parliamentary reform. Latvia and Slovenia will have eight and seven members respectively in the new, reformed Parliament, whereas Wales and Scotland expect to lose members. Anyone who believes strongly in the unionist tradition, whichever side of the House they may represent, should ask how new structures that are emerging in the new Europe could strengthen the UK's voice. If Wales and Scotland had their own voice in Europe, the United Kingdom level would indeed have a stronger voice in European processes.

A look at what is happening in the Council of Ministers and the changes relating to qualified majority voting is even more revealing. The United Kingdom is currently expected to have around 29 of the 345 votes that will exist on full accession—that is, the accession of 27 countries. I do not count Turkey, because I do not think it will be ready for some time: I certainly hope it will not. On a similar scale, Latvia and Slovenia will have four and seven votes respectively. England on its own could not fall below 27, which is what Spain has now. There is a UK block—consisting of Wales, Scotland and England—amounting to some 38 votes.

There is a question here for anyone who does not believe that Wales and Scotland should not be fully represented in Europe. What do they want for the United Kingdom? We are, in fact, weakening the United Kingdom by not allowing the full expression of the views of Wales and Scotland in Europe. Moreover—this may be a more important question in the context of today's debate—we are weakening the ability of communities and local people to relate more directly to European institutions.

No wonder *The Economist* considered that, when the agreement was eventually reached, it was as hard to understand as it had been to achieve. I do not think that we have changed the position significantly in regard to qualified majority voting. I considered the speech of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) to be misplaced, although it was scintillating intellectually. It failed to recognise current developments in Europe, and it failed to recognise that a new relationship between nation states must be built. We cannot have a veto in the case of issues that are of interest to all of us, such as the environment. We cannot hold out for ever, or we will never proceed to a stronger Europe.

I am glad that the Committee of the Regions is more recognised in the treaty, and welcome the emphatic requirement that its members must hold elected office in local and regional government. That constitutes acceptance of the political legitimacy of the committee, and its relevance to the citizens of Europe.

We welcome the common foreign and defence policy, particularly as it relates to the rapid reaction force. We should recognise Europe's failure to deal with what happened in the Balkans, and our need to appeal to America to sort out Europe's problems. I thought that the reason for our establishing a European Community in the first place was our wish to move away from all that. We really need a rapid reaction force to deal with such matters.

Some of what we are discussing today relates to what must happen after Nice: we must look at the post-Nice scenario. It is essential for us to reform the common agricultural policy, although the treaty does not refer to such reform. The World Trade Organisation must also be involved. There is no clear role for the charter of fundamental rights, which needs to be part of a treaty. We cannot allow the 2004 intergovernmental conference to take place as the Nice process did; we must involve other nations and regions in Europe, and we must involve the people. Nation states on their own will not be enough.

6.50 pm

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this important and fascinating debate. I should like to add my congratulations to the hon. Members for Guildford (Sue Doughty) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), whose accomplished maiden speeches forced me rapidly to rewrite my rather poorer effort.

Although my constituency has been served extremely well by many accomplished individuals, I have the honour to be the first Member for Greenock and Inverclyde to come from Greenock and Inverclyde. I am also the first for almost 50 years not to possess a doctorate, although whether that is an advantage only time will tell.

My two immediate predecessors in a seat that has changed boundaries often have been Dr. Dickson Mabon and Dr. Norman Godman. Dr. Mabon is remembered for defecting from the Labour party to the Social Democratic party—an event that took place a week after he gave me a prize at school, although the two events may not be linked. I am pleased to report that he has since returned to the Labour party. The seat went back to Labour at the election following his defection, when Dr. Norman Godman was returned to Westminster.

Dr. Godman served in the House for 18 years. His great hard work and enduring commitment to the peace process in Northern Ireland earned him a great deal of respect and admiration among hon. Members of all parties and—perhaps uniquely—from all sides in Northern Ireland.

It is appropriate for me to thank the House itself for allowing me to take up my seat. As a former cleric, I was until recently barred for life from membership of the House. I say from the heart that I am extremely grateful that the House saw fit to amend the ancient statute and to allow people in my position to be chosen by the electorate to serve in the House.

I should also like to say a word of thanks to those who helped to bring about that change. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) for expertly steering through the House a Bill dealing with the most obscure statutes, from the time of the reformation and before. I owe thanks also to Professor Robert Blackburn of King's college, London, who is a leading expert on our constitutional law. He was a great source of knowledge and precedent as well as personal support.

The Bill was passed with support from hon. Members of all parties, and I am grateful for the commitment of my party, locally and nationally. In particular, I am indebted to the unwavering support of the Labour party's outstanding general secretary, who will be sorely missed when she moves on to pastures new.

Above all, however, I want to offer my deepest thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). Acting as my constituency Member of Parliament, she did more than anyone to highlight the absurdity of the previous law. With her characteristic persistence, she made sure that the case for reform was unanswerable. If I can serve my constituents half as well as she serves hers, I shall be doing all right.

At that point, I wanted to leave the subject of the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Act 2001, but the presence of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) compels me to mention two outstanding speeches that he made at the Dispatch Box in favour of reform. They were rendered all the more outstanding by the presence beside him of his boss, the shadow Home Secretary. She opposed reform, and sat well within handbagging distance of the hon. Gentleman, who is to be commended for his display of intellectual clarity and courage.

Greenock and Inverclyde is often described as an urban seat in a rural setting. That about sums it up. The constituency is composed of the towns of Greenock and Gourock, as well as the villages of Inverkip and Wemyss Bay. We are surrounded by some of Scotland's most glorious natural beauty. From atop the Lyle hill in Greenock, one can look down to Gourock's Cardwell bay and watch the ferries head off to Argyll. Across the Clyde, one can see the Gare loch, the Holy loch and Loch Long. Beyond the Roseneath peninsula lies Ben Lomond and the majestic Lomond range. To the west, there is the unmistakeable figure of the Sleeping Warrior of Argyll, and to the south lies the Burns country of Ayrshire.

Throughout our history the river Clyde has been the life blood of my constituency. We are a maritime people, either seafarers or shipbuilders, and our two most famous sons are connected in that way. One of them, the great inventor and scientist James Watt, captured the power of steam; the other, the pirate Captain Kidd, captured rather a lot of Spanish gold.

We built the finest ships ever to set sail, but—sadly—those days are long gone, thanks in part to the shortsighted and ignorant policies that failed to see that shipbuilding is a modern industry which, around the world, is growing, not shrinking. Be that as it may, it took us a long while to recover from the devastation of the closure of our shipyards. Our population went into a sort of freefall that is only now showing signs of levelling off.

However, recover we have, and these days Inverclyde proudly boasts the title of "export capital of Scotland", thanks in the main to our thriving electronics sector. We were recently honoured with a visit by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, to mark the 50th anniversary of the arrival of IBM at Greenock. Over the years, that company has been joined by National Semiconductor, FCI and many others.

The Greenock and Inverclyde constituency relies on exports, so Europe matters to us. We have done well out of our membership of the European Community. I therefore welcome this Bill, which paves the way for important new markets to open up for us, and the greater prosperity that they will bring.

Despite the best efforts of some, the issue of Europe did not figure prominently during the recent general election, which in some ways was a shame. In my constituency, it arose as an issue only once during our campaign. I was leafleting outside the Oak Mall shopping centre in Greenock when I was joined by my Conservative opponent. He was carrying a large pile of "Save the Pound" leaflets. He proceeded to brandish them above his head, calling out "Save the pound, save the pound." To my considerable consternation, he was quickly mobbed by people keen to get their hands on his leaflets. However, it transpired—to my relief—that the canny shoppers of Greenock and Inverclyde thought that they were being offered a "pound off" coupon, and were duly horrified once they realised the true nature of what they were being handed.

A maiden speech is no place for the minutiae of the treaty of Nice, but I hope that it is not too glib a point to make that, in all the entirely necessary and detailed examination of qualified majority voting and the precise composition of the European Parliament, we can hold on to the great vision of a Europe that is both prosperous and at peace. That vision crosses party lines—or it used to—and the goal has been striven for by great parliamentarians, such as Healey and Heath, Grimmond and Ewing.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) that, even with all its compromises, frustrations and Euro-fudge, the Nice treaty not only keeps alive the great European vision but extends it to all those nations who wish to share in our union. As such, it represents a wonderful opportunity to extend prosperity and enhance democracy and freedom. It is a great prize, and one that I wholeheartedly endorse.

6.59 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): There is for me a certain piquancy in following the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns). It was a model of its kind—witty, incisive and thought provoking—and I congratulate him warmly on it. He told us, with justifiable pride and no little eloquence, about his constituency and its beauties, about his predecessors and their strengths, and about the principles and values that will inform what I hope will be the many more distinguished contributions that he will make, long into the future.

When I looked at the Bill that became the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Act 2001, it seemed eminently sensible. There was no good reason to deny the hon. Gentleman his legitimate entitlement to sit in this House, if he were able—as he was—to secure the support of the people of his constituency. I wish him well here, and I hope that from time to time we might break bread together.

We have also heard two other outstanding maiden contributions in the course of the debate. I have not met the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) and I doubt that we will agree about much, but she made a measured, sincere and thoughtful contribution. She is obviously a dedicated and committed person who understands the interests of her constituents. On a personal note, I especially

[Mr. John Bercow]

appreciated the generosity and appropriateness of her tribute to my former hon. Friend, Nick St. Aubyn, who was indeed an assiduous and effective representative of his constituents. I trust that she will be, and I wish her success.

I hope that neither of the hon. Members to whom I have just referred will think the less of me or take offence if I say that above all it is a pleasure for me this evening to be able to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). He and I have known each other for 16 years. I knew that he would eventually get into this place and it is to his enduring credit that he has now done so. He delivered a brilliant maiden speech—eloquent, authoritative, passionate and sincere. Rarely is it that one hears a maiden speech delivered with the self-assurance that he brought to bear.

I trust that my hon. Friend will forgive me one other banal but, I hope, valid observation. I have always been supremely untroubled by my 5 ft $6\frac{1}{4}$ in. It has never bothered me in the remotest instance. Nevertheless, it is no bad thing to have a little company and he is probably the only Member of this House, certainly on the Conservative Benches, who is even more vertically challenged than I am. Size is not everything—I know that he will immediately concur with that observation—and he has enormous principle, reserves of energy and outstanding dedication. He will be a brilliant representative of the people of Rayleigh and a formidable addition to these Benches.

In my judgment, the Foreign Secretary was unwise to invoke the result of the general election on 7 June as a vindication of Europhilia in general or the contents of the Nice treaty in particular. If we are honest with each other about the significance of issues during the general election campaign, all the evidence shows—and the Prime Minister himself, in his understandable caution about the euro, has demonstrated that he recognises—that the body of opinion in the country is broadly sceptical about European integration and hostile to British entry to the euro. It is fair for me to say, as a Conservative representative, that the British people did not disagree with the Conservative party's position on the euro or on Europe: they simply did not think that it was top of their concerns. It was not that salient.

The Government were successful in relegating Europe down the list of political issues, not least by the offer of a referendum. Whatever we thought about the likely terms of the question in the referendum or the disproportionate advantage that the forces of europhilia would enjoy by virtue of the legislation on the funding of referendum campaigns, the public did not want to determine the election on that basis. They talked about health, education, crime and transport. However, we would be unwise to ignore the significance of Europe as an issue.

I shall focus on one aspect of Europe that is notably absent from the treaty of Nice, and that is subsidiarity, to which several hon. Members have already animadverted today. The famous, or perhaps I should say infamous, article 3b of the Maastricht treaty defined subsidiarity. What did it say? It said:

"In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community."

That was, of course, a model of the linguistic clarity that we have come to expect from our rulers in the European Union. It was widely and popularly supposed to signify an intention to ensure that decisions were taken at the lowest possible level. In fact, it meant nothing of the kind. It pre-supposed, as it continues to pre-suppose, the existence of a central authority that will decide in its wisdom what crumbs from the table it is prepared to flick in the direction of the autonomy of nation states. The reality is, notwithstanding the support of that principle and the inclusion of article 3b in the treaty of Maastricht, not a single directive or regulation has subsequently been repealed as a direct consequence of the inclusion of that article.

The debate moved on to the treaty of Amsterdam. The Government boldly asserted that they could do much better. As a result of the efforts of the former Foreign Secretary and his Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), from whom we heard earlier, a protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality was included in the treaty of Amsterdam, which stated:

"the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality shall respect the general provisions and objectives of the Treaty, particularly as regards the maintaining in full of the acquis communautaire and the institutional balance; it shall not affect the principles developed by the Court of Justice regarding the relationship between national and Community law, and it should take into account Article F4 of the Treaty on European Union, according to which the Union shall provide itself with the means necessary to attain its objectives and carry through its policies."

If one strips away the verbiage of the protocol, what emerges with crystal clarity is that that protocol was not intended to divert attention from the continued pursuit of an ever greater arrogation of powers to the European Union. That arrogation of powers, in the case of nation states, will be from institutions that we elect and can remove to institutions that we do not elect and cannot remove.

Since 1992, we have seen a constant, remorseless and inexorable ratchet of European integration. Between 1992 and 1997, after the passage of Maastricht, there have been 20,564 directives, regulations and decisions from the European Union that impact on this country, and since 1998, and the passage of the treaty of Amsterdam—for which many, but unjustified claims were made—a further 4,995 such directives, regulations and decisions have impacted on this country. That process cannot continue indefinitely without the most massive protest and resentment on the part of the people of the United Kingdom.

The power of self-government, the right to hire and fire our rulers, and the capacity freely to chart our own destiny as an independent nation are the inalienable birthrights of every citizen. They should not be traded in, now or at any time, for a mess of pottage, otherwise known as a back-row seat at a show called the heart of Europe. That ratchet must be arrested and reversed, because too much power has been taken from too many people over too long a period. That is wrong in itself, it is undemocratic and it diverts attention from the proper priorities of the European Union: to reform agriculture and fisheries, to cut fraud and to re-establish the primacy in independent nation states of national self-government.

7.9 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I wish to add my own warm tribute to the three hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches tonight and to take up some of the points that they made. It was wonderful to hear the warmth and affection that they all have for their constituencies and the generosity with which they described their predecessors. However, their most important contributions were their visions for the future of Europe.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) referred to diversity, and the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) spoke of respect for the Irish. I am relieved that when he conducted his own referendum proposal over the bay of Galway, he did not meet with the same "No" from his wife that the Irish population gave to their Government. Finally, I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) is here and is comfortable about representing both Church and state in the House. However, I am sure that there will be times when he will ask himself who exactly was responsible for saving his soul for Parliament.

The issue about the European democratic agenda—the vision to which my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde referred—is the fundamental test of what we are seeking to sign up to. The tragedy is that although I share that vision and want to sign up to that expanded vision of a pluralist, inclusive Europe that is at peace with itself, nothing in the treaty of Nice will deliver that.

I will not be supporting the Conservative amendment, because I have never signed up to the Conservative vision of Europe, which I believe to be underpinned by presumptions about an economic free-for-all against a backcloth of social insecurity in a Europe never at ease with itself. That is not the Europe that I want to construct, but the one that I want to construct will be fatally flawed if it is pursued according to the Nice treaty.

I want to address three key failings about which we must be honest tonight and as we take the arguments around the country. First, the process of economic decision making is fatally compromised in the proposals enshrined in the Nice treaty. Secondly, we must consider the economic implications of political expansion. Thirdly, we must accept the real cost that we will have to pay for the democratic contraction that will follow from the treaty.

I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was robust in his dismissal of the comments of Romano Prodi following the Irish referendum. A country has the right to hold a referendum, and the outcome must be respected. It is arrogant and outrageous to say, "We don't like the outcome. The public had their say; we had better get rid of the public and find a better one." If the Irish do not endorse the Nice treaty, it will not and cannot proceed. We will be forced to think in wider terms about the basis on which we wish to build a broader and inclusive Europe. I want us to address that; I do not want to retreat from it.

One of the issues confronting the House is why we will not offer a referendum on the same treaty. We have already embraced the notion of referendums—we held them on the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and we are considering holding one on regional assemblies. There is even a referendum in my constituency about whether people want a parish council. Citizens' organisations that gather outside every meeting of the European elite do so to challenge it fundamentally because it presumes to have the right to make decisions from which citizens are excluded. We cut ourselves off at our peril from our lines of democratic accountability to the public who put us here. I would not support the Bill in its final stages unless a condition were included that its final form is subject to the test of a referendum requiring the approval of the British public.

On 25 June, Agence France Presse produced a wonderful report on the concluding negotiations inside the unified Germany about the fiscal transfers between east and west. It was well reported in the *Financial Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* but not reported much elsewhere. It is important for this debate because the issues that almost tore apart the German debate about the cost of unification are a microcosm of those that we will have to address if we are serious about an extended and inclusive Europe.

Following German unification, the West Germans acknowledged that the wealth gap between east and west was unbridgeable. It was no partnership of equals—it was a unification of the soul. That unification had a price that the Germans, to their enduring credit, were willing to pay. We ought to be honest about that price. It was a self-imposed tax surcharge of 7.5 per cent.—7.5p in the pound went on personal and corporate income tax. In 1997, it was revised to 5.5 per cent.

The report at the end of June was significant because the richest states in Germany—Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Hesse—challenged that tax because they had grown tired of the costs of carrying the poor. They felt that it was unfair for the burden of that solidarity tax to fall on the rich, and wanted it renegotiated. The German constitutional court made a decision that shifted the burden away from those states in favour of a greater contribution by the German Government as a whole.

Let us be clear about the figures; they are very simple. Over the next 19 years, Germany has agreed to transfer a further £100 billion from west to east to pay for the solidarity and inclusion that is so precious to it. The total bill will come to £250 billion—the price of unification between rich and poor.

That is important because the gross domestic product per capita of the former East Germany is almost exactly the same as that of people in the Czech Republic, which is in the first wave of would-be entrants into the expanded Europe. The Czech Republic is twice—in some cases three times—as wealthy as many of the other applicant countries that we wish to join the EU. Yet they are all seeking entry without the rest of us signing up to a single penny of fiscal transfer that remotely equates to the scale of support and transfers made from West to East Germany as the price of sustainable unification.

We kid ourselves if we believe that a sustainable, stable, broader European economy and society can be underpinned without one of two things happening. There must be huge fiscal transfers from the rich to the poor to make life viable in the poorer parts. If not, we will go back 200 years to a Europe driven by a view of monetarism based on the gold standard in which people moved in pursuit of cash. Are we prepared for the 105 million people in the entrant states who want to have the right to the same sort of economic prosperity that we wish to share? No, we are not even talking about that.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

My final point is about democratic loss. There was a huge debate in the European Union following the Uruguay round of negotiations with the World Trade Organisation. European Commissioners were hacked off because they thought that they had the right to negotiate on our behalf and that individual nation states had no right to a say. The European Court of Justice ruled that those nations had the right to negotiate over trade in goods but that trade in commercial services, including health and education, is subject to universal agreement among the member states.

The transfer from unanimity obligations to majority voting will remove that right first from member states and then from the Council of Ministers and give it to the European Commissioners. They are the architects of a new European autocracy. They are the agents of corporate control, which will take Europe into a corporate feudalism, in which we will all act—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.19 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I congratulate the hon. Members who have made their maiden speech in this debate. I refer in particular to the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns)—as a veteran of many sermons, I commend him to go back to his former colleagues and tell them about the merits of the 10-minute rule from which we have benefited tonight.

Before I address the Bill before us, let me pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Peter Lloyd. He served Fareham as its Member of Parliament for more than 22 years. He is widely respected in the constituency for his decency and his unceasing diligence on behalf of his constituents. At a time when politicians are only too eager to criticise this Department or that agency in the media to raise their own profiles, Sir Peter preferred his work for his constituents to speak for itself rather than use it to promote himself.

In the House, in spite of serving as a Whip, Peter demonstrated independence of spirit. In the previous Parliament, following his interest in home affairs—which developed when he was a Minister of State at the Home Office—he was very involved in the rehabilitation of young offenders and, just before Dissolution, completed a report on the work of prison visitors—subjects of great importance in the justice system that perhaps rub against the grain of current concerns.

Peter told me that, when he was a new Member in 1979, he was admonished for being far too much of a Eurosceptic—a caution that those of us newly elected to sit on the Conservative Benches are unlikely to receive as we progress in our careers.

Peter and his wife, Hilary, have given my wife and me tremendous support. They have offered wise counsel based on great experience, and their advice has been readily accepted by us both. I echo the words of so many people in the House and in the constituency when I say that he is a hard act to follow.

I remind the House of another Member of Parliament for Fareham, Arthur Lee—Lord Lee of Fareham—who gave Chequers to the nation. Sadly, he did not leave his successors in Fareham a country house to retire to at the weekends. Indeed, the only house in the constituency that bears his name is a public house.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without saying a little about my constituency. Fareham sits between Portsmouth and Southampton on the south Hampshire coast. Part of its eastern boundary is Portsmouth harbour and to the west are the Solent and the Hamble. In his guide to the buildings of England, Pevsner highlights the impact that its location has had on Fareham. He said:

"Senior naval officers found it favourable for retirement in Georgian times."

That tradition remains strong today.

Pevsner also said:

"Fareham possesses a High Street which is largely unspoiled and one of the best country town streets in the South of England."

High street is not the constituency's only architectural gem. There is a fine castle in Portchester that dates back to Roman times, when it was built to protect the coast from invasion by the Saxons. Palmerston, another MP who represented a seat in south Hampshire, built fortifications on Portsdown hill above Fareham to protect us from the French. From Portsdown hill today, one can see the great naval base of Portsmouth that continues to protect our nation.

The constituency is formed of strong, local communities each with its own very clear identity. I have mentioned one already, Portchester, but there are others too, including Titchfield, Warsash and Fareham itself.

The constituency has grown rapidly in recent years. The west of the constituency, where I have the pleasure of living, once consisted of strawberry fields and nurseries but it is now home to about a third of my constituents. Rapid development here and on the other side of the motorway in Whiteley, part of which is also in my constituency, has caused great strains on the local infrastructure. Roads are congested and children cannot attend the nearest school. The Government's policy of imposing housing quotas on this area is making the situation worse, as is their demand that the density of new housing developments should be increased. More housing means more car journeys, more children for already overcrowded schools and fewer green fields. This madness cannot be allowed to continue.

Fareham has a diverse business base. Although many of the strawberry fields and nurseries have been built on, there is still a thriving horticulture industry. It is a great pleasure when in the constituency to buy strawberries picked in the fields around Titchfield. However, Fareham also acts as host to high-tech businesses, particularly in the information technology and defence sectors.

Although it is outside my constituency, many of my constituents work for Vosper Thornycroft, which has an excellent reputation for building warships. It is currently bidding to build a type 45 destroyer alongside BAE Systems Marine so that the work is shared between the two companies. However, BAE Systems Marine has also submitted a unsolicited bid to build the entire programme and, if successful, that would create a monopoly. I therefore ask the Government to think very carefully about accepting that bid, because I cannot believe that it is right for there to be a monopoly supplier of destroyers to the Royal Navy. No competition would mean poor value for money for taxpayers.

Local businesses also benefit from good internet connection links because Fareham hosts the Merlin teleport, which through a satellite links it and the rest of Britain with the world in fractions of a second.

With such an array of businesses, it is not surprising that Fareham enjoys a low rate of unemployment, making recruitment an issue for both business and the vital public services that we need to serve such a growing constituency.

I am very honoured to have been elected to represent Fareham and I hope that it continues its long tradition of returning Conservative Members of Parliament for a long time to come.

During the election campaign, many of my constituents expressed concern about the development of the European Union. They see it taking more and more powers away from national Governments, moving away from being simply a common market for goods and services. They sense that is becoming distant and remote and beyond their control. However, their concern does not mean that they are insular or little Englanders. For many, their service in the Navy means that their horizons are not limited to Europe, let alone to the United Kingdom's shores. They have a global and international perspective on life.

My constituents do not see Britain's role as simply being part of an increasingly introspective and insular European Union, but they see Britain as part of a network of nations, using our historical links and current trading patterns as a guide to how we should develop our relations with other nation states in the future. I share their perspective and their concerns.

There is little in the treaty of Nice to allay my constituents' fears. The treaty is said to be about enlargement and, indeed, it claims to make certain provisions about that, but it fails to tackle key issues such as reform of the common agricultural policy. However, the treaty is principally about deepening the European Union. It extends qualified majority voting to many more articles of the treaty and it facilitates easier co-operation between member states in certain areas of policy. The deepening of the European Union rather than enlargement causes my constituents most concern. They support the enlargement of the EU, which is long overdue, but they object to the deepening of the EU.

The concern about deepening is not restricted to the people of this country. The referendum in Ireland demonstrated that; the treaty was rejected because the development of the EU has gone too far. Let us not forget either the Danish referendum. In spite of a concerted campaign by the business and political establishment, the Danish people stood up and said no to a single currency.

If the European Union is to enjoy the support of the people of its members states, it must develop in line with their aspirations. The Commission and member states cannot simply dismiss the result of the Irish referendum and ask the Irish people to vote time and time again until they get the right answer. That approach will cause dissent and alienation and undermine the EU. The demonstrations that we saw at Gothenburg could become the norm if the EU continues to develop at a faster pace than is acceptable to its people. Let us develop the EU in line with the aspirations of its people, who elect us, rather than in line with the aspirations of the political elite who seem to rule in Brussels.

7.29 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on his maiden speech, and Fareham on its new representative, because he made a powerful invocation of the constituency's needs and problems. A debate that I expected to be a Cook's tour of Europe has turned out, in five maiden speeches, to be a very charming Cook's tour of several interesting constituencies in this country. I congratulate all who made those excellent speeches. It has been a pleasure to sit here and listen to them.

As I sat here, I mused about whether it would be possible for me to share the naive but utterly enduring enthusiasm for Europe that characterises my party. I wondered whether my inability to do so might be the barrier between me and the long overdue promotion that I have been waiting for. As I sat by the telephone in the days after the election, waiting for the call from Downing street, I thought that when the Prime Minister offered me the post that I most coveted—Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the ministry of fisheries—I would in gratitude issue a statement saying, "Tony, perhaps the Nice treaty isn't so bad after all." I felt that it would be a bold move to put myself in line with the mood of the party. I have to tell the House that the call did not come, and this is a lousy treaty. It is time to tell the truth and to abandon the hopes of promotion which have kept me going until now. I am even wearing a Euro-tie because I thought that I had better wear something cheap and trashy to celebrate my conversion.

It is infuriating that a messy treaty is being rushed through the House at such speed. We do not even have a copy of the treaty on European Union as it will read when fully amended, although I asked for one at the end of the previous Session and the then Foreign Secretary refused. We cannot tell what shape that treaty will take once the amendments arising from the Nice treaty have been made. I have been trying to find out. I have here my copy of the treaty of Amsterdam, which consolidates the amended treaties to date.

Article 1 of the Nice treaty replaces article 7 of the treaty on European Union. I looked it up in the Amsterdam treaty and found that article 6 on simplification says:

"Article 7 shall be repealed."

I then turned to the tables of equivalences referred to in article 12 of the Amsterdam treaty, which is the treaty that we are really debating. We are discussing a one-clause Bill and a 16-clause treaty, but that involves many other matters.

The table of equivalences told me that article 7 is article F.1, not F.0. I turned to article F.1 and found that it is a provision for penalising EU states that have been naughty, such as Austria. The new paragraph suspends the states' voting rights on the Council, but it does not tell us which Council. Is it the European Council or the Council of Ministers? I ended up as puzzled as I began.

We are going to have to debate the Bill quickly, finalising its passage next week, without having a full copy of the amended treaty or being able to understand it. Each article of the Nice treaty is a huge container packed with clauses that make amendments. Article 1 amends 23 articles in earlier treaties. It cannot be possible even to understand it. This is a messy way of implementing a messy treaty arrived at by messy procedures.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

European Council meetings are rather like the "Big Brother" house in reverse. Everyone is crammed together in the big Europe house and kept up, well fed, all night. There is a bidding frenzy because they have all come along with demands and offers, and they are pressured by the Commission into botching something together. As the Prime Minister said, it is a stupid way to make decisions. It is infuriating for him because he has a managerial mind and this is chaos.

The small states rebel against the pressure—I note that they were led in this case by Belgium and Portugal—and say, "We are not having this. We demand more." They are told to think again. People are voted out of the "Big Brother" house. By contrast, they are forced to stay in the big Europe house and accept whatever emerges from the shambles. At the end, whatever has been agreed is written up, and then rewritten over several weeks, to tell the countries what they should have agreed if they had been compos mentis at the time, instead of exhausted and half-asleep. It is folly. We cannot, in that fashion, build a workable democratic structure or a pristine constitution that people will accept. We could not even build a garden shed in that fashion, let alone a European superstructure.

Those methods are also inherently undemocratic. People do not understand them. The small states are steamrollered and bullied by the bigger states. It is a pointless and messy procedure. Each time pressure is applied, less is gained. Amsterdam is pathetic compared with previous treaties, and the Nice treaty is pathetic compared with Amsterdam. The next agreement will be made in 2004.

The whole process, including the Nice treaty, is based on a lie. Europe is a culture of half-truths that have corrupted our politics. Damage has to be portrayed as gain; failure has to be portrayed as success, and at every Council meeting everyone is a winner. They all go back to their countries saying, "Game, set and match to us." It cannot all be true.

The biggest half-truth is this treaty. We have been told several times tonight, as we are continually being told by the Commission and everyone else concerned, that this process is about enlargement, but it is not. It is about strengthening the central institutions and weakening the nation states and the power and control of Parliament. We have rushed through the process in the hope of facilitating enlargement, and we have surrendered vetoes that we should never have given up. They are negotiating counters that we should not abandon. They would enable us to stop this rush towards enhanced co-operation, in which the richer states will get together to dominate and shape Europe according to their wishes. That is unsatisfactory to every participant; it is incomprehensible to the public; and it has nothing to do with enlargement.

Enlargement comprises two key issues. The first is the common agricultural policy, which is unreformed. We cannot apply it to Poland, for example, because Poland has more farmers than the rest of Europe combined. How can Poland be included in the CAP without the scheme going bankrupt? Yet how can it be deprived of the CAP's benefits and still be a full member?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) said, nothing has been decided about financing. His point about Germany was very telling. To unite Germany, so that kith and kin could come together, will cost £250 billion by 2004. That is the cost of including in the EU the 15 million people in east Germany. The new entrants have seven times that number of people—105 million. Who will pay for the help and support that those countries will need to sustain their fledging democracies?

Germany is already restive about paying for Europe. We too pay over the odds. Our net contribution is £4 billion, which is the second highest after Germany's. No one else will increase their contribution. Nothing has been decided. Instead, we are fiddling with structures and with the powers of the Commission and the Council of Ministers. That, we are told, is all that will be done to prepare for enlargement.

We are now being asked to bully Ireland, but Denmark was not bullied. We held up proceedings on the Bill on Maastricht for some time while a deal was worked out with the Danes. The Irish, however, have to lump it and vote again. The process is a shambles and the outcome is a treaty that I cannot support. This mess has nothing to do with enlargement, which I support. We are living in a Europe that no one particularly wants, according to processes that no one understands and by methods that have been rejected as totally unacceptable by the people in the only country which has consulted its people.

7.39 pm

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), the hon. Members for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), and my near neighbour, the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), on their excellent speeches. I will do my best to live up to the high standards that they have set.

I should also like to thank the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde for pointing out the magnificent scenery in my constituency of Argyll and Bute. I shall return the compliment by pointing out that a magnificent view in my constituency is the one from Innellan across the firth of Clyde to the beautiful hills in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, behind Inverkip.

I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Ray Michie, who represented Argyll and Bute in Parliament for 14 years and was held in tremendous regard by her constituents. That was evident when I went from doorstep to doorstep during the election; the high regard in which she was held came across loud and clear. Time and again, I was told that if I was successful in being elected to Parliament, I would have a hard act to follow. I met person after person whose case Ray had taken up successfully. To her credit, she has a long list of successful campaigns—for a new hospital, road improvements and new bridges. She was also a robust defender of the Gaelic culture in Argyll—a campaign that I, too, shall champion.

Argyll and Bute is a huge constituency, full of magnificent scenery. I have no doubt that it is the most beautiful in the United Kingdom. It stretches from the Mull of Kintyre in the south to the shores of Loch Linnhe in the north, a distance of almost 100 miles. It extends from the firth of Clyde in the east to the Atlantic coast in the west, and includes the island of Bute in the firth of Clyde, as well as many islands of the inner Hebrides; and there is a total of 26 inhabited islands.

Many hon. Members have told me that they have spent enjoyable holidays in Argyll and Bute, and I would recommend it to anyone who has not been; the scenery is unrivalled. Whether Members want an activity holiday—climbing, sailing or walking—or to relax on one of the many unspoilt golden beaches, it is an unbeatable holiday destination. A variety of holidays can be enjoyed there—for example, at the traditional seaside resorts of Dunoon and Rothesay on the Clyde coast. From those resorts, people can take a cruise through the magnificent waterway of the Kyles of Bute. Part of the Cowal peninsula in Argyll will soon become part of Scotland's first national park, to which Dunoon will be the gateway. Inveraray, with its beautiful picture postcard white buildings, is an early example of town planning. Many tourists have their photo taken outside the historic jail, although that was one photo opportunity that I was advised to avoid at the start of the campaign.

The long drive to Campbeltown and the Mull of Kintyre is well worth it for the magnificent scenery on the way. In the north of the constituency is the magnificent seaport of Oban, with its splendid harbour; it is a base for touring the islands, which are well worth a visit. There is no time to list them all tonight, but they include Islay and Jura, which are world famous for their many whisky distilleries. However, the local economy is in difficulties; the Chancellor could help, and make himself popular, by reducing the duty on whisky and ending the unfair tax regime that discriminates against spirits in favour of imported wines.

The islands of Tiree and Coll are famous for their miles of golden sandy beaches. Indeed, Tiree gets more sunshine than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and is the perfect place for relaxing on a sunny, golden, unspoilt and empty beach. Iona has an historic abbey and is the burial place of many kings of Scotland.

Despite all its beauty, Argyll and Bute, like all rural communities, has suffered economic hardship in recent years. Because of the vast size of my constituency and the sparsity of its population, many rural economic problems that affect other areas are magnified. Thankfully, there have been no cases of foot and mouth in my constituency; nevertheless, the knock-on effects have been damaging for both the tourism and farming industries. We need Government policies that will help the traditional rural industries of farming, fishing and forestry, promote tourism and encourage new investment.

The highlands were largely depopulated by the clearances in earlier centuries. If the free market is allowed to operate without Government intervention, there will be further depopulation; I do not believe that there is a single hon. Member who thinks it is beneficial to have such depopulation and more population movement to the south-east of England. Unemployment in the remote Kintyre peninsula and on many of the islands is a cause for concern. Europe has been a tremendous help, both for the markets that it has provided and the great financial assistance brought about by objective 1 status. Europe appreciates the difficulties of running a business and delivering services in remote islands. Indeed, it has done so to a much greater extent than many British Governments. Not joining the euro at the outset has been a financial disaster for many businesses in Argyll and Bute.

Our farmers, fishermen and tourism industry must sell to other Europeans and they are finding it difficult to compete at the present exchange rate. Prawn fishermen sell much of their product abroad, to countries like Spain and Italy, but are finding it hard to compete against fishermen in those countries because of the high rate of the pound against the euro. European tourists continually complain about our high prices. Joining the euro at a favourable exchange rate is essential if businesses in the highlands and islands of Scotland are to avoid financial disaster. I therefore urge the Government to hold a referendum at the earliest possible opportunity.

As I have said, Europe has invested much in the highlands and islands. We have recently succeeded in attracting a Danish wind turbine factory to Kintyre. That is an exciting new technology and an industry of the future, but sadly, I must relate that all the other agencies involved in the project are unanimous in their view that the Ministry of Defence, on whose former Machrihanish base the factory will be built, has been most unhelpful. I urge the Ministry to realise that it has social responsibilities when it closes bases in remote rural areas; extracting every last drop of public money from other Government agencies that are trying to bring jobs to a remote peninsula is not an achievement of which to be proud.

St. Columba sailed from Ireland to Iona 1,400 years ago and brought Christianity to Argyll. In those days, people and goods regularly travelled back and forth between Argyll and Ulster. Today, sadly, there is no direct link. To travel the eight miles from the Mull of Kintyre to County Antrim involves no fewer than three ferry journeys and miles of driving. A ferry link is essential; it would mean that Kintyre would become part of a European highway, and would not be a cul-de-sac. Efforts to reinstate the ferry link from Campbeltown to Ballycastle must therefore succeed. There is a dire situation in Argyll and Bute; Government assistance is needed and joining the euro is essential.

7.48 pm

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) on an excellent maiden speech. Indeed, it is one of a quintet of excellent maiden speeches that we have heard this evening. I was especially pleased that history and geography were strongly to the fore in all areas of those speeches. When the five speakers finally leave the House, they will all have excellent third-age careers as authors of guidebooks and gazetteers.

I make no apology for focusing on EU enlargement and the implications of the Nice treaty. Despite what has been said tonight, enlargement is enshrined in the protocol of the treaty. With Milosevic in court at The Hague today, we should be starkly reminded of the need to embed the present fragile stability in eastern and central Europe in the EU. Enlargement is a key part of that process, but it will work properly only with the structural reforms proposed at Nice.

In his article today in *The Daily Telegraph*, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to a 30-year link with Jan Kavan, whom he met in 1969 when they were both students. I do not have the same length of pedigree, but my interest and involvement in eastern Europe likewise goes back to human rights battles of student days. In the late 1970s, when I was a postgraduate at London university, I got involved in the east European solidarity campaign and met Jan Kavan. Subsequently, I saw the impact of the testimony of many of the

[Mr. Gordon Marsden]

dissidents at the hearings into Carter's human rights policies in Washington. As co-chairman of the future of Europe trust in this place, over the past three and a half years I have been able to meet many politicians from central and eastern Europe, and to hear about their concerns and their vital need for the enlargement process.

Historically, the United Kingdom has had a strong commitment to enlargement and to the countries of central and eastern Europe. That commitment has been shared by both major parties in the House. I am happy to pay tribute to the support that Mr. Major and his Foreign Office team gave in the early days to that process. It is sad, therefore, that the Conservatives now seem to want to jeopardise the process by unpicking Nice, as the Opposition amendment proposes.

The treaty of Nice is not perfect. Some have said that it is a minimalist settlement, some have said that it goes too far, and the European Parliament has expressed doubt. That probably means that the treaty is just about right. The process is one of give and take, and it is important that we understand that. However, it is also crucial to establish new institutional and decision-making arrangements to prepare the European Union for 27 members. That has to be done.

The Opposition have tried to twist the issue by claiming that, technically, accession does not require a treaty. That is at best disingenuous and naive, and at worst, if persisted with, would endanger the process and momentum. With 26 or 27 EU members, we simply cannot make up structures as we go along. I agreed wholeheartedly with the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, when he said recently that the process is fundamental. Importantly also, the applicant countries believe that to be true.

The interests of applicant countries in joining an enlarged EU cannot be wholly divorced from their interests in an enlarged NATO. The amended article 25 of the treaty of Nice provides for an enhanced role for the EU Political and Security Committee. That is right and just. The status of the European security and defence force in relation to NATO is also dealt with in annexe 6 to the presidency conclusions from the Council. The Political and Security Committee will liaise with NATO and is not a threat to it. What was agreed at Nice will preserve the character of NATO and the front-line position of both applicant countries and existing members.

That balance is important because there is a need to respect Russian sensitivities, especially in the Baltic concerning Kaliningrad. At the same time, Romania and other states that wish to join the EU must not be blocked, particularly if they are not likely to be in the first wave of accession.

There are key questions to be answered about expansion, and they are hard ones. They must not just be ignored in a process of good will and positive rhetoric. Last week, in the *Financial Times*, Charles Grant, the director of the Centre for European Reform, rightly drew attention to such key questions when he said that the EU should insist that applicants meet the highest standards of human rights and civil society, and that enlargement will leave those outside the Union at a disadvantage. New members, he said, will have to impose visa requirements on their eastern neighbours and the EU cannot ignore developments in regions which become unstable or suffer economic crises that will directly affect the Union through migration, for example. Human rights and the building up of civil societies are key elements of the chapters to be completed, but so are those other knotty issues.

I want to give two examples of the issues that we need to address. There was considerable tension between Hungary and Romania during the 20th century over the issue of Transylvania. That is beginning to be resolved through much better relations between those countries, and must not be jeopardised by a disregard for transitional arrangements for migration and visas. The issue of migration is also likely to arise between Poland and Ukraine, as Poland is to enter the EU early and Ukraine's entry is a very long way off.

The Nice treaty is not set in stone; nor should we see it as such. However, it is crucial to embed the applicant states in the process. That is why the Opposition's amendment risks missing the boat. In his speech in Warsaw in October, the Prime Minister rightly recognised the other side of the coin. If we do not embed applicant countries in the EU, we shall face all the issues and concerns over migration and asylum that have so preoccupied debate in this country over the past 12 months.

Our commitment, NATO's achievements in Kosovo and our difficult engagement in Macedonia are possible only because they have been underpinned by logistical, diplomatic and other support and consensus among applicant countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Czech Republic, many of which took considerable domestic risks in moving away from long-standing doubts, ethnic hostilities and shibboleths. We should recognise that, not jeopardise their position in allowing right-wing nationalists to hold up the enlargement process.

That is why I welcome the recent initiative by the Swedish presidency to bring second-tier candidates into the first wave, with a sense of give and take over the free movement of labour. There is give and take; this is a modern, flexible and reformed EU. That makes a nonsense of the Opposition's scaremongering over insensitive integration. Their dog-in-the-manger approach shames their party, which has acquitted itself so honourably in previous times.

Enlargement is of course not just about altruism. An enlarged EU will bring significant financial benefits to this country—and the statistics are there for people to see. We need to engage our people and explain those benefits to them. That is why there is a warning in the Irish referendum result. I agree with the Foreign Secretary that we cannot just ignore it and plough on like arrogant bureaucrats. We need a process of persuasion and dialogue to bring people round. That is why it is necessary to pay some attention to the social and cultural contribution to our common European inheritance that the applicant countries have made.

Enlargement will banish for ever the views of Bismarck, who said that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a Pomeranian grenadier, and the infamous remarks of Chamberlain in Munich about the far-away country of whose people we know nothing. Today, in a globalised, interdependent world, that is not true. There are city breaks to Tallinn, Krakow and Budapest. We

recognise the immense cultural contributions of such countries. One thinks of the contributions during the last century of composers such as Dvorak, Janacek, Bartok and Gorecki. One thinks of writers such as Kafka and Horvath. One thinks of Mitteleuropa and the Hapsburg multiethnic and multinational union, which was viable. One thinks even of Mr. Rubik, with his cube—an apt image for the delivery and finesse with which we shall have to operate in enlarged EU institutions.

The momentum of enlargement will be maintained only by telling our peoples about common heritage, interest and hope. Nice and its ratification is a vital refuelling point in that momentum. That is why this House should give it and the enlargement process that it guarantees its fullest support.

7.58 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I congratulate my fellow maiden speakers the hon. Members for Guildford (Sue Doughty), for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) and for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), and my hon. Friends the Members for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) and for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), who in their own way all gave very informative, lucid and erudite speeches.

It is a great honour and a privilege to deliver my maiden speech as the new Member for Boston and Skegness. I am in fact only the third Member of Parliament to represent the Boston end of the constituency in 64 years. My immediate predecessor was Sir Richard Body. He made Whips nervous, but represented the people and the surrounding areas of Boston for 35 years and, prior to that, the people of Billericay. Amazingly, he made his maiden speech on 6 May 1956.

Sir Richard was a great parliamentarian—a man of great vision, tenacity and expertise, particularly on the issues of Europe and agriculture. The great thing about him was that he was never afraid to voice his views, however unfashionable, awkward or unpopular they were at the time. He has invariably been proved right. Let us hope that in this Parliament we have more hon. Members willing to speak their minds than in the last. Sir Richard is held in great affection in the constituency. He always stood up for working men and women. It will be an enormous challenge to follow a man of such integrity and conviction.

Since the boundary changes of 1995, Boston is now linked in a new constituency with Skegness, which my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir P. Tapsell) looked after so ably for so many years. The change creates two very distinct and diverse parts of the constituency, which is approximately 15 miles wide by 30 miles long. One boundary hugs the Wash and contains some of the best agricultural land in the United Kingdom, although let there be no doubt that even with top quality arable land, those involved and employed in agriculture are suffering severe hardship as incomes evaporate and prices are squeezed. It should be understood that this appalling agricultural depression extends to those involved in tangential and associated businesses which are nevertheless fundamental to the local economy.

There are pockets of severe rural poverty and deprivation, the likes of which I have never seen before. I will, with all the necessary and appropriate local and national bodies, endeavour to assist those who have been left behind by economic growth. I shall be an assiduous advocate on behalf of farmers, packhouse owners and their employees, to create a level playing field allowing them to compete on equal terms with both their European and global competitors. There is great nervousness about the enlargement of the European Union and potential cheap imports of agricultural produce, with associated concerns about quality control and standards.

However, the constituency is not only agricultural. There is a thriving and hard-working fishing fleet, a successful port and many manufacturing businesses. There is also a plethora of small, dynamic entrepreneurial businesses exemplified by the razzmatazz of Skegness. Many of those small businesses are in tourism and the holiday trade and employ no more than one or two people. We must ensure that the resilience of the business men and entrepreneurs is not undermined by excessive regulation from home and abroad. There are also some very large, high profile and successful tourist businesses in Skegness, such as Fantasy Island and Butlins, which are well-known and cater all year round for a vibrant and lively tourist trade.

Underlying this energetic and vigorous business atmosphere is a real sense of community. Nothing assists people more as they go through life's vicissitudes than a sense of community. The best example of this is the Skegness lifeboat, whose brave crew, when called to do so, risk their lives to save others.

During my campaign in Skegness, I encountered a little old lady in a little old bungalow who, when asked how she would vote, informed me that she had always voted Labour, but oh no, not this time. She was going to vote for that good-looking young man and vote Conservative. I straightened my tie, puffed out my chest slightly and with great pleasure informed her that I was that good-looking young man. She replied without hesitation, "No, no, not you, I mean William Hague". So, if my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) is ever looking for female company, I know a little old lady in a little old bungalow.

There are 70 to 75 villages and hamlets in my constituency. Some of the larger ones, such as Burgh Le Marsh, Friskney and Wrangle, may be familiar to those who know Lincolnshire, but one of them has a particular history—Wainfleet. William of Wainfleet was not only Bishop of Winchester, but Lord Chancellor to Henry IV. He also founded Magdalen college, Oxford. In the spirit of European co-operation, Wainfleet provided in 1359 two warships for the invasion of Brittany. Today Wainfleet contains one of the few highly successful family-run breweries that are remain. It is called Batemans and real ale aficionados will be familiar with the name. It is a local business that I am delighted to support.

In the constituency we have many dedicated and long-suffering education professionals who support an extremely successful grammar school system and also work energetically to drive up standards in primary and secondary modern schools. I will provide any support and encouragement to improve educational provision in Boston and Skegness, and there is much room for improvement.

My constituency has historically benefited greatly from European assistance. Indeed, much of it would still be under the sea if it was not for the land reclamation

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

expertise exported from Holland. However, some of the contents of the treaty are not in the interests of my constituents or the country. I shall, of course, endeavour to follow the traditions of the maiden speech and not traverse the avenue of controversy. There are, however, several key issues that I must highlight.

There is an ever-increasing democratic deficit. All of us in the House are democrats, of whatever political persuasion. However, the deficiency is exacerbated by the treaty and is increasingly prevalent in the European Union. Not only has Ireland recently voted no in its referendum, but it seems that the democratic desire of the Irish people will at best be circumvented and at worst ignored. Such an attitude seems to contradict entirely the charter of fundamental human rights, which was also discussed at Nice. It appears that the EU wishes to give powers with one hand, and with the other to ride roughshod over people when they exercise those powers in an allegedly disagreeable manner.

I do not see what the charter can do for the United Kingdom, as we have a constitution that has evolved through history and served us well for the last thousand years. The charter must not be annexed to future treaties or made legally enforceable. The treaty is supposed to be fundamentally about enlargement, but instead it is integrationist, making it more complicated and difficult for countries to accede. I do not see anywhere in the treaty the necessary reforms to enable that to happen efficiently and effectively.

There seems to be a general acceptance in the House that the CAP requires fundamental and far-reaching reform, but I find no mention of it. Are we going to subsidise east European agriculture in the same way we have our own over the past 30 or 40 years? Instead, the treaty contains 31 new areas that will be subject to qualified majority voting. What do pension rights for judges have to do with enlargement? The extension of QMV allows no opportunity to stop any policy in those areas, irrespective of whether it is in the national interest.

There is a direct causal link between the ratification of treaties such as Nice and the poor voter turnout. It is not until we address this fundamental issue that the electorate will believe that they have an impact through the democratic process. I am not advocating withdrawal, but arguing forcefully that if Europe is to survive and succeed in the forthcoming years, it must become more democratically accountable—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time allocation.

8.8 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) on a self-assured maiden speech full of passion and conviction, and all the maiden speakers so far on the high standard that they have set.

Today's debate is about the new Europe, but I hope that a view from one of its oldest industrial heartlands will bring a useful perspective to our proceedings. I grew up in the Leigh area and it is with great pride that I take my seat as its fifth Labour Member of Parliament. I aim to give the House an authentic voice from my home area in the years to come.

For someone making his maiden speech, I am in the unusual position of already having made history in the House. On 26 October 1996, *The Times* reported:

"The mobile phone has finally breached the last bastion of low-tech tranquillity: the House of Commons."

I have always kept quiet about that, but today I own up as the naive researcher who made that historic call. I am relieved to say that it has not harmed the career of the right hon. Member on the receiving end, and I can only hope that my future contributions to the House will be less irritating than that one.

Many people of my generation in the north-west feel proud of their regional roots, but also feel part of Europe. They want Britain to play a positive part in creating a strong and united Europe and to enjoy the benefits that that would bring. The Bill will help that process. But I make a strong and heartfelt plea today that, in the drive to assist the emerging economies of Europe, we do not overlook the real need in the communities that were the cradle of the industrial revolution in Europe.

The spinning jenny was invented in Leigh by a poor weaver called Thomas Highs, but we were denied our place in the history books by an entrepreneur from Blackburn who quickly patented it. I shall fight for what Leigh deserves—although on reflection it would perhaps not be a good idea to annoy the Foreign Secretary in my maiden speech.

Our area is renowned for its strong tradition in engineering and coal mining. The towns that make up my constituency—Leigh, Atherton, Hindley, Hindley Green, Lowton, Golborne and Bickershaw—grew up around the coal and textile industries, the decline of which has caused real need in those communities.

For 22 years, those communities have been loyally represented by my predecessor, Lawrence Cunliffe. Lawrence worked in the local mining industry and knew the area and its people well. He entered the House in 1979 and, while national developments made the following years bleak for Leigh, Lawrence always fought our case, and I know that I speak for many people in thanking him for his work on our behalf.

Only days into the job, I have been made painfully aware of the challenges that we face to stay competitive in the new Europe. Ingersoll-Rand has announced that it is considering relocating its manufacturing operation for portable compressors from Hindley Green to the Czech Republic, resulting in the loss of 250 jobs.

I am worried that an air of inevitability is growing around the loss of manufacturing jobs from Britain, with the use of vague terms such as market forces and globalisation. That is dangerous. As a country we need to work hard to keep jobs that are desperately needed.

Today, with other Labour Members, I met union representatives from Hindley Green. The work force is doing all it can to give the company positive reasons to stay, and I urge the Government to bring all relevant parties together to see if more can be done to keep those jobs in my constituency.

People in the Leigh area can be forgiven for having little confidence in this place. Until recently, it has delivered only bad news. Dr. Beeching put Leigh on the

map—sadly, for making it the largest town in England without a railway station. Next came the closure of the mills and mines in the 1980s and 1990s, tearing the heart out of the communities based around them, and Leigh infirmary's accident and emergency unit was closed in the 1990s. The challenge I face is to restore people's faith in politics and show that Parliament does listen and deliver good news as well as bad.

The Leigh area now has its best opportunity for many years to make real progress. On 7 June, the country re-elected a Government committed to investing in the country's infrastructure and revitalising its former coalfields. After years of closures, new facilities are opening in the Leigh area—an NHS walk-in centre and a sure start scheme at Hindley. Millions have been invested in the fabric of our local schools, including £2 million at Lowton high school.

The Leigh constituency has perhaps benefited more than most from the working families tax credit and the national minimum wage. Parts of my constituency have objective 2 status and I want to ensure that funds begin to flow to help our local economy to compete in a new age. We are not stuck in the past, but understand the need to look to the emerging sectors of the service economy to bring jobs and prosperity.

One of the proposals driven forward by Wigan borough council is the Xanadu project, a major leisure and retail development close to the site of a former colliery. At no cost to the public purse, it will create thousands of new jobs and bring a new railway station to the Leigh area. The proposal has been the subject of a planning inquiry and the inspector's report is with the Government. It is argued that such large developments should follow the country's population centres, its major towns and cities, but that logic precludes an area such as ours, made up of small townships and communities, from ever benefiting from a major regeneration project. But that is exactly what we need—a catalyst for change. Xanadu would give this deprived former coalfield hope of a better future, and I urge the Government to bear that in mind when reaching their decision.

Some things in Leigh will never change. Leigh Centurions rugby league club has a proud history and will continue to be a strong source of civic pride and identity. After troubled times, the club is thriving again and on Sunday completed the Northern Ford premiership season as league champions. I hope that the House will join me in congratulating it and allow me to thank one of Leigh's greatest ever players, the former Great Britain star Mick Martyn, who did so much to help me to serve Leigh in Parliament. Like our town, Leigh Centurions have come back the hard way and earned the right to be promoted to the Super League, but that decision is out of their hands. I make a direct plea to the Super League to accept Leigh. Such is the importance of the club to our area that it would give it a real boost and instil renewed optimism for the future.

I joined the Labour party at the age of 15 to fight for a better deal for the working people of Leigh among whom I grew up. It will be with a great sense of personal fulfilment that I will work with the Government during the next few years to continue the improvements that they have started and to right some of the wrongs that we have suffered.

8.16 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) for such an excellent maiden speech, and congratulate all those others who have made excellent speeches today. It was a particular privilege for me as a relatively new Member, not having heard a maiden speech before.

The Nice treaty brings together the wider nations of Europe on the basis of free trade, international agreement and co-operation, founded on democratic institutions, and it paves the way for European security. It is a recipe for a strong Britain in a greater Europe. Enlargement will mean a bigger Europe capable of looking after our interests in a global context. It means a bigger trading area to create even more prosperity and jobs. That is why the Government have negotiated the treaty on behalf of the British people.

In the last century, Europe was for the most part divided. There were two world wars, millions of people killed and nations living in fear of one another. What has been achieved in the past 50 years is astonishing and, in its significance, outweighs the achievements of the past 2,000 years. National barriers to the movement of goods, people and services have been swept away by the development of international road, air, rail, energy and information networks, and those networks are the arteries of the European economy, the health of which is dependent on the ability of goods, capital and services to flow freely around Europe.

Where problems exist within the European economy, European institutions support and restructure development so that ailing parts of the economy are remedied. In my region, more than 400,000 jobs are linked to membership of the EU and in the next five years the area will receive more than £1.5 billion in EU structural funds. It is essential that all the nations of Europe benefit in that way. The alternative of division and isolation will only lead to the conflicts that plagued the last century and continue to fester in this century.

Nationalism in Europe has been swept away by those economic forces because the nation states of Europe recognise that future economic prosperity and security require membership of the EU and commitment to its further development. However, with anything up to 28 nations as members, there is clearly a need for the reform of European institutions such as the Commission, Parliament and Council of Ministers. That is what happened at Nice. Anyone who says that reform is still needed obviously has not read the treaty.

The Government have achieved that while acquiring more power for Britain through the reweighting of votes in the Council of Ministers. They have agreed a limit to the size of the European Commission and more majority voting where that will promote Britain's interests in areas such as trade liberalisation and improved financial controls. On vote reweighting, Labour has secured a substantial increase in the strength of Britain's vote in the Council of Ministers—the first increase since Britain joined the European Union.

Many hon. Members will know that, as smaller states have joined the EU in each successive round of enlargement, the voting strength of the larger member states has declined disproportionately. In an EU of 28 countries, it would have been possible for member states representing a minority of the population to achieve

[Mr. Mark Hendrick]

a qualified majority. The treaty of Nice prevents that from happening by reweighting the votes of all member states to reflect more accurately the population size. The Government have also agreed with other member states that, from 2005, all member states should have only one Commissioner, which will limit increases in the size of the Commission after enlargement.

The historic treaty of Nice introduces improved procedures for enhanced co-operation. It is essential for an enlarged European Union to be flexible enough to enable groups of member states to co-operate more closely on specific projects. This is not a lumbering superstate, as the Opposition would suggest, but a flexible union which can act, for example, in the fight against crime and drugs, where closer co-operation is essential, but which would not prejudice the fight against these problems in non-participating countries. The interests of member states will be preserved and the use of enhanced co-operation can be referred to the European Council. Enhanced co-operation cannot be used to undermine the single market or other common European Union policies. It will be open to all member states, which will provide a guarantee against the creation of an inner core of member states that operate as a block vote.

The next intergovernmental conference, in 2004, will discuss a delimitation of competencies between the European Union and the member states to prevent unnecessary centralisation. There will be a debate about how to involve national Parliaments in European decision making, and the conference will also consider the means of putting the treaties into plain language so that they are easier to understand for the people of Europe.

Europe needs strong member states, and the development process will explode the Conservative myth that the European Union is becoming a superstate. The extension of qualified majority voting will contribute to the reform that Britain wants: further trade liberalisation, improved financial controls and European Commission appointments being made on the basis of merit. QMV is an opportunity, not a threat. It is the oil of the European Union, and the huge benefits that it has brought, such as the European single market, are a testament to that fact. Labour has ensured that the national veto is retained in key areas such as treaty change, taxation, border controls, social security, defence and the revenue-raising mechanisms.

Although one would not have thought it when listening to some Opposition Members, the Conservative party agreed to 42 extensions of QMV when it was in government. Twelve extensions were made in the Single European Act 1985 and 30 were made in the Maastricht treaty. Yet Opposition Members have the cheek to argue against the treaty in its current form. QMV has always worked in Britain's interests.

Let us consider what is good about the treaty in terms of QMV. Obviously, there are improvements in trade and services. Changes have been made in respect of structural and cohesion funds, to prevent net recipients from blocking efficiency and cost savings. There is also help on environmental issues, financial regulation, appointments and industrial policy. The treaty will enhance stability and security in Europe, as well as many other aspects.

We live in a world that is shrinking because of new means of travel and communications. The world of the 21st century should be about peace, freedom and security for all. If we can bring together the whole of Europe in this manner, who knows what we can achieve on a global scale? It is my firm belief that, later this century, we can bring together a global union with all the values and types of institution that we have created here in Europe. That needs reform of the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation, and a willingness in the world—and the G8 nations in particular—to recognise that peace and prosperity can be achieved only by co-operation and by sharing the world's resources. The enlargement of Europe is an important step towards that goal, and I only hope that I will live long enough to see it achieved.

8.24 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I want to confine my remarks to the European security and defence policy aspects of the treaty. Before I begin, I should like to add my congratulations to new hon. Members on their maiden speeches. I remember that there was an empty Chamber when I made my maiden speech on a Friday morning in 1992, while the Queen's Speech was being debated. It must be far more difficult to make such a speech to a House that is relatively full, at least on the Labour Benches. The Conservative Benches are rather empty at this moment.

I wish to concentrate on the defence aspects of the treaty because it is important for us to recognise that there has been a shift in recent weeks in the attitudes of the United States in respect of European security and defence policy. I was in Washington last week, meeting members of Congress and of the Administration, with a British-American parliamentary group delegation. Significantly, the previous rhetoric of the Republican party, which was whipped up by the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, has died down. We were told by officials in the new Administration that the US had been astonished by the developments at St. Malo and had been concerned about what had happened since, but was now far more relaxed. We were also told that the European developments that were foreshadowed in the Helsinki statement of 1999 and that are set out in the Nice proposals and the comprehensive presidency report appendix were seen as complementary to NATO. One person to whom I spoke said that it would be worse for European security and defence policy to fail because of lack of resources than for it to be autonomous. The key is how to work out the day-to-day relationships of NATO and the European Union.

That attitude is welcome, and follows a further shift in the position of the American Administration, who have been in office for only a few months and have not formed all their posts, in relation to policy on the Balkans. Secretary of State Colin Powell has now said that we went in together, so we should go out together. That position is diametrically different from the Republican party's election platform of cutting forces from the Balkans and withdrawing unilaterally. That is welcome as Europeans try to cope with the legacy of the conflict in the Balkans and in view of the dangerous situation in Macedonia.

I visited Kosovo a few months ago with the Select Committee on Defence. We stood on the so-called chicken leg, looking down on the Presevo valley in Serbia. On the other side, in Macedonia, we saw the area

of conflict, which has been shown so graphically on our television screens in recent weeks. British forces were there, working with a NATO ally, Norway, and two other European Union states, Sweden and Finland. We were also working in the zone that is allocated to the Americans. That is a sign of European partners in the EU working with their European and north American NATO partners for the common good.

Nonsensical rhetoric was used in the general election campaign about, for example, Euro armies.

Mr. Francois: Speak for yourself.

Mike Gapes: If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene and contribute to the debate, I shall give way.

Mr. Francois: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. However, I am now on my feet, so I shall say that he can speak for himself, but not all hon. Members agree that there is no such thing as a European army, especially in view of developments in the past six months. He can hold his opinion and we can hold ours, but he should not pretend that ours is nonsense. There are two views.

Mike Gapes: Those views were presented during the election campaign. My Conservative opponent fought the campaign with a megaphone in Ilford town centre. All he seemed able to say was, "Save the pound. Keep the pound." People in my constituency had a clear choice and the Conservative vote decreased from a little more than 30 per cent. to approximately 25 per cent.—a resounding vote of confidence in the Opposition's policies. It was a rejection of sectarianism, to which I referred in Westminster Hall this morning.

There is clearly a need to work out the detail of the arrangements for armed forces. The headline goal of 60,000 troops to be deployed for a year with rotation is, unfortunately, ambitious for some European countries. It must be achieved, and we should begin to argue more forcefully, especially with Germany, about the need for stronger, more effective contributions from their forces. It is no good the British, French and Dutch taking the lead because of the shape of our armed forces and the way in which we have worked in the past.

Other European partners must change the structure of their forces and the way in which they co-operate and are deployed. That will be difficult and painful for those who have concepts of territorial defence and have no expeditionary strategy or tradition of deployment in other countries. That also applies to those who, for long-understood historical reasons, have political aversion to that or face adverse public opinion. However, such change is essential if we are to achieve the headline goals that were set out in Helsinki and reaffirmed in Nice.

Enlargement of the EU is desirable and essential, and it will happen. However, there is a parallel debate about the enlargement of NATO. We need to start making some distinctions. From information that I picked up in the United States, I am worried by the strength of the well organised lobby, which is linked through the Administration to Democrats and Republicans in Congress and key staffers, in favour of early, rapid enlargement to include all three Baltic states. We need to think that through.

The argument for including the Baltic states in the European Union if they meet the economic criteria is unassailable. However, we should express our anxieties about the political consequences for the relationship with Russia and the stability of Europe of precipitate early NATO enlargement to include all applicant countries. In Warsaw, President Bush referred to those matters obliquely. He talked about the Baltic states joining European institutions. Some of us in Europe should express more strongly to the United States our anxiety to ensure that there is no automatic conveyor belt for all states to join the hard security organisation of NATO, which will remain pre-eminent in defence and security matters.

8.34 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): It is a pleasure to participate in a debate that has included so many eloquent and confident maiden speeches. They came from my hon. Friends the Members for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) and the hon. Members for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds), for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), for Guildford (Sue Doughty) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). I apologise if I have missed anyone off the list. They all painted such delightful visions of their constituencies that if it were not for the fact that I am lucky enough to have the one constituency that is even more delightful, I would be planning immediately after the debate to move my house and family to one of their constituencies. I congratulate them all.

I have been impressed by the maiden speeches, but with the greatest respect, I was less than impressed by the speech of the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). He, like most Opposition Members, did not paint a coherent vision of Europe. He claimed that the Opposition supported Europe, could see the benefits of Europe and wanted Europe enlarged. However, he painted no vision of how that could be achieved. Similarly, he painted no vision of what he wanted Europe to do if it were not doing what he wanted it to do.

I commend to the right hon. Gentleman a document entitled "One Europe". I do not know whether he has read it, but if he has, I suggest that he re-reads it. It was written by a former an aide to Margaret Thatcher, who subsequently became one of her most trusted Cabinet Ministers. It painted a clear vision of Europe that grew out of the vision that the Conservatives had of Europe throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It was a vision that clearly informed their actions over the 18 years that they were in government from 1979.

I commend the document to the right hon. Member for Horsham because, first, it said that we should not be scared about economic union and that we should face the desirable need for political union and not be afraid of monetary union and even military union. Secondly, he should read the document because one of its publishers was his father. He could well be enlightened by its contents. At least it painted a coherent vision of Europe.

After we give the Bill a Second Reading, as I hope that we will, let us start speaking up for Europe. Let those of us who believe in Europe start to proselytise for Europe. Let us start trying to explain to the people of the United Kingdom what it is that we believe that Europe offers.

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

A theme of the debate is the need to reconnect people with Europe. If we are to achieve that, we must explain to people what Europe has achieved for them. In my constituency, that is relatively easy. We receive European objective 2 funding. I can take people to the road to which Europe contributed, which is a vital part of the economic infrastructure. I can take them to the new university campus that has been built on a business park that was serviced as a result of funding from Europe. I can take them also to the promenade, which similarly was funded by Europe. Two weeks ago, we all enjoyed the United Kingdom power boat grand prix in Ramsgate, which was paid for by Europe. I can show people what Europe is doing for them.

It is not so easy to do so in some constituencies because the benefits of Europe are slightly less tangible. Nevertheless they are there. Factories have been built in the UK because people want to invest in Europe. There are jobs that exist only because we are in Europe. In the south-east of England, 495,000 jobs are linked directly to trade with Europe. Many tens of thousands of those jobs are in east Kent, the area that includes my constituency.

I can explain to people the security that has come from the peaceful co-existence of nations since the second world war as a result of Europe. Protection comes from human rights legislation, and there is freedom of movement. Those are all benefits that we get from Europe. We should start explaining to people that they are receiving them from Europe. When they understand that, they will understand the benefits of enlargement that are made possible by the treaty. They will understand why we say that enlargement could create 300,000 more jobs across Europe. They will also understand when we say that enlargement will increase the security of Europe.

We can also show people the benefits of common working in the treaty of Union. One of the few issues in the political process that really inspires people is that of the environment. The treaty of Union sets out the need to work together on environmental issues—which are of fundamental importance to us—on drugs, on combating organised crime and on organising asylum better than we do at the moment. All those things come with being members of the European Union and they can all be improved by enlargement. The EU works. We might want it to work better and to be more transparent, and we might want its decision-making process to be more efficient and rational sometimes, but it works.

The treaty makes enlargement possible. As other hon. Members have said, it does not, in itself, bring about enlargement. However, without modernisation we cannot have enlargement. Conservative Members who pointed out that we need modernisation of the Union and its institutions would deny it the means to carry out that modernisation if they denied it this treaty.

Qualified majority voting is an important concept. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) claimed that there would be a democratic deficit because we are to lose our veto on certain matters, that totalitarianism was about to rule, and that we were in danger of handing over power to minority parties and extremist Governments in other countries. In reality, there are, by my calculations, 237 qualified majority votes under the new structure. That means that a majority would be achieved by 119 votes. The minimum number of nations that would need to vote together to achieve that majority would be five, although only if they were the five biggest nations, which command the support of some 300 million people. That is not a recipe for allowing small nations to dominate the union, or for giving away our democracy. If we were not among those five nations, it would require six nations to outvote us in any such decision.

We must not overlook what happened in Ireland. Clearly, we must respect the view of the Irish people. We have to convince them that changes have been made to facilitate their views and concerns; we cannot ride roughshod over them. However, hon. Members who say that the Union lacks democratic legitimacy should remember that the opinions of only half a million people in that referendum will hold up a treaty that affects the lives of half a billion people. Surely that demonstrates that the Union is taking account of minority views and is focused on their needs and opinions.

The European Union costs only about 1 per cent. of the annual gross domestic product of the member states. For that, we get more jobs, more trade, more security, more protection for our rights, and better controls on the environment, on monopolies, on drug traffickers and on asylum. That is a good bargain. The treaty, if we ratify it, will give us the power to make further improvements to the Union and to carry out the enlargements that we all know are necessary, and will be of benefit to every one of our constituents in the long run.

8.44 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Many thanks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me. I am particularly grateful as I lost my maidenhood only some 10 days ago. I apologise in case I miss anyone out, but it has been wonderful to hear excellent maiden speeches from Members representing Boston and Skegness, Guildford, Rayleigh, Greenock and Inverclyde, Argyll and Bute and Fareham. That sounds like the shipping forecast.

I am particularly delighted to have heard the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), who has been a personal friend for many years. I hope that further legislation will make it possible for all anti-Catholic parts of the constitution that still remain to be removed. I also welcome the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), as I have been told by my Whip that he and I will be in adjacent offices from next Monday.

I should tell my hon. Friend that I stole a Tory fan earlier today. There are not many Tory fans these days, but I know that it is a Tory fan because it was in the room that says "Tories" on the door. There were no Tories inside, however, and the fan will be in the office on Monday. I note that we are to share the rooms that were occupied until recently by the former Member for Billericay, Mrs. Teresa Gorman. I doubt whether we can fill the space that she occupied.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Have you had the tuck?

Mr. Bryant: I have not had the tuck and I am not fibbing about my age either.

I am delighted to speak in the debate on the treaty of Nice for the simple reason that it relates to substantial issues that are significant to my constituents in the

Rhondda. The first is enlargement, which matters, and we sometimes have to remind ourselves why: every time the European Union has gained new members, Britain has gained trade. Look at what happened after Spain and Portugal joined—Britain significantly increased its trade with those countries. When Greece joined, again we significantly increased our trade.

I know that such an increase will be good for businesses in the Rhondda, whether they be newer industries or more traditional firms such as Burberrys, and I am pleased that we are extending the market in which the businesses of the Rhondda can trade. I am also pleased because enlargement will provide us with the opportunity to achieve greater political stability not just in the countries that we hope will join the EU, but across the world. We have a chance to establish long-term peace.

Enlargement will also give many of our constituents the opportunity to share and extend benefits that we have known in our own country when they go abroad for trade or leisure purposes. For example, following Spain's accession to the EU, water quality off beaches around Spain improved significantly. That is of great importance to many of my constituents. For my own part, I suffered from meningitis in Spain several years ago and, unfortunately, had to go to hospital. However, thanks to Spain having acceded to the treaty, I received prompt help from the Spanish health services.

It is good that we are discussing enlargement, but it is also good that we are talking about reform, and the Government are absolutely right to say that the treaty of Nice must involve the two coming together. Again, there are proposals that are of great value to our constituents, above all those on the battle against crime. The treaty gives us a chance to make a better fist of it by providing more opportunities to work together with other member states.

I am pleased that there will be a new system for appointing the President of the Commission, which is far better than either the previous version or the version before that. However, I am slightly nervous about the role that will be played by the European Parliament. It is important that the directly elected Members of the European Parliament have the chance to quiz everybody who is appointed to the Commission.

I am glad that the reforms in the treaty of Nice make it clear that it will be easier for the United Kingdom to get its way. We shall gain not only an increased share of the vote in the Council for the first time ever, but the ability to combine with others to create blocking minorities. We may get together with France and Germany or other members to achieve that and it represents a significant move forward, even for those who say that they are patriots who argue only for the benefit of the United Kingdom.

I am anxious about a few issues that will have to be considered in the future. My first concern is about the workings of the Commission after more members have joined but before we get to EU 27. EU 27 is fine and clear: it is all arranged. We know how many members of the Commission there will be. There may be a lengthy period, however, when there are 25 or 26 members of the EU, and a Commission of 26, 25 or even 24 members will be completely unworkable, and will lead to more problems than we have already.

My second concern is about the retention of the veto in areas of trade. It has been removed from intellectual property, which is right, but it still applies to audio-visual services and cultural services. This issue was pushed by the French, and we need to be careful about how they use the veto in the future, because we should not harm our audio-visual trade opportunities around the world.

I am also concerned about the culture of the Commission. Too many people working in the Commission believe that their role is to meddle in the affairs of others. I am prepared to accept that the European Union will be better if countries work together more, but the Commission should think very hard before it intervenes. In the past, the Commission's Competition Directorate has tried to define the parameters of public service broadcasting, which is the subject about which I know the most. I firmly believe that it is for the member states to decide what is public service broadcasting, and no one else. It may be acceptable in Spain to have bullfighting on Spanish television on a Sunday afternoon paid for out of state funds, but that would not be acceptable in this country, and that is right and proper.

My final concern is about the rotating presidency. It is crazy that offices in both Strasbourg and Brussels are used at an inordinate cost to the European Union. It would be good to look into that in the future, and we should also consider that mechanism to find an efficient way of doing business.

There is a vacuum at the centre of the two Conservative amendments. The Conservatives' argument has always been that we must not surrender sovereignty to anyone else. The two amendments make the point that the Irish have already said that they do not want to go forward, so we cannot go forward. I am sorry, but to my mind that means that we should surrender our sovereignty to Dublin, never mind Brussels or Strasbourg—the Irish have decided, so that is the end of the story. I do not agree. I do not believe that the Irish should decide for us.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said that if the treaty is not ratified by the United Kingdom, it will not slow up enlargement. By golly, it would. If the United Kingdom did not ratify the treaty, the European Union would be in terrible difficulty and the enlargement process would be delayed by many years. That would be terrible for the United Kingdom, and especially for my constituents in the Rhondda.

8.54 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am delighted to contribute briefly to the debate, although I am sorry that I am unable to be in my constituency of Wimbledon with the hundreds of thousands of British tennis fans who are celebrating the outstanding victory of Mr. Tim Henman. We all send our congratulations to him, and wish him well in the semi-final. However, my absence from Wimbledon is more than made up for by my being here as the Labour Member of Parliament for Wimbledon working with the Government and winning so convincingly the argument on Europe—so convincingly in fact that many Conservative Members are no longer present.

In the last Parliament I was a member of the Select Committee on European Scrutiny, whose 17th report, published during the 1999-2000 Session, is one of the relevant documents listed on the Order Paper. During that Session, the Committee conducted, on behalf of the

[Roger Casale]

House, an extensive investigation of the intergovernmental conference that led to the Nice treaty, and of the way in which the British Government had conducted themselves during the negotiations. Our conclusions appear in the report.

I want to challenge—I think the report will back up my challenge—the view expressed by many Opposition Members, notably the shadow Foreign Secretary, that the institutional reforms decided at Nice were not a necessary precursor of EU enlargement. Those who study the report—I urge Members to do so, although it seems that the shadow Foreign Secretary has not—will note our recommendation that the scope of the IGC that led to the treaty should be restricted to the practical reforms that we considered necessary to pave the way for enlargement. We did so exactly because we saw those changes as a precondition of enlargement, and we wanted enlargement to take place. We argued, successfully, that the Government should resist pressure from the European Commission and the European Parliament to widen the IGC's scope, in order not to jeopardise the chance of achieving the real, practical reforms that would allow enlargement.

The shadow Foreign Secretary suggested that the EU was pursuing some starry-eyed federalist agenda through the IGC, but if he reads our report he will see that the Government's focus was firmly on the ground beneath our feet, and on the practical steps that were necessary for the widening of EU membership.

Let us remember what constituted those limited but significant changes to the mechanics of the EU decision-making processes. There were changes to the size of the Commission: it was right for us to drop one of our two Commissioners if other countries that would join the EU in future were not to have a Commissioner at all. There were also changes to the weighting of votes. Now that those changes have been accepted, the three largest states, if opposed, can constitute a blocking majority. A further safeguard—an important democratic safeguard—was established, in the form of a supplementary condition that the member states constituting a majority should represent 62 per cent. of the population of the EU.

Those changes may be technical, and they may not be easily understood by those who are not aficionados of the EU and its evolving institutional architecture; but, notwithstanding what we have heard from those on the Opposition Front Bench, they were essential if we were to prepare for a potential membership of 27 rather than the present 15 EU states.

Behind the rather bald statement of the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), which flies in the face of the facts—behind the stubborn refusal to acknowledge the reality of what was achieved and decided at Nice—lies a vision of Europe, and Britain's relationship with Europe, that would take the country back half a century or more. I must tell Opposition Members who will oppose ratification tonight that European integration has always been about much more than the creation of a free-trade area or a common market for goods and services, and it is about much more than that today.

The Union of which we are a member has never been devoid of political content; nor does the European marketplace lack a social foundation. Not a single existing member of the European Union would want that to be the case, and certainly no applicant would wish to join the kind of Union that the right hon. Member for Horsham and his hon. Friends wish to create. Nor do I believe that any European member state or applicant state would believe that the EU described by Opposition Members could deliver the sort of practical improvements on which continued public confidence in the EU depends. However, the Conservative party has moved so far to the right on Europe that it has put itself well outside the mainstream of European Christian democracy. It would be difficult to name another party, let alone another Government, in the EU that would agree with the vision of Europe, and of its future, that the Conservative party is trying to put forward.

We know that the vision put forward by the Tories was flatly rejected by the British people on 7 June. We also know that it has not gone down well with public opinion in other member states. When I researched this speech in the Library this afternoon, it was interesting to read the press comments that appeared in Germany, France and Italy at the time of the election about the Conservative party and the virulent form of Euro-scepticism that it was putting forward. One piece, by Stepfan Berger of Germany's *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, caught my eye. Published on 6 June, it stated:

"At present, the Tories are a truly sad old bunch: a kind of cabinet of horrors, made up of religious fundamentalists, Euro-sceptics, nationalists and people hostile to foreigners . . . Germanophobes are particularly widespread".

The Conservative party must understand that its ideas about Europe and about Britain's relationship with Europe have been rejected not just by the British people. Labour Members and others must take on those ideas and propose a more confident and positive vision of Europe; otherwise, we risk appearing ridiculous in the eyes of European public opinion and of those European partner nations that we want to influence and with which we want to co-operate.

However, the Tory election manifesto boasted:

"The next Conservative Government will secure our independence and use Britain's great strength to help create a flexible European Union"—

as if a Conservative Government were going to twist the arms of 14 other European nations and take them in a direction that none of them wanted to go.

How were the Tories going to do that? They would do it be refusing to ratify the treaty of Nice. The manifesto stated:

"We will not ratify the treaty of Nice, but will renegotiate it so that Britain does not lose its veto"—

a veto that Britain had already lost as a result of the Maastricht treaty and other treaties to which the previous Conservative Government had signed up.

The right hon. Member for Horsham is not in his seat. However, although it is all very well for him to say that globalisation requires co-operation but not integration, it is not acceptable then to argue that Britain should fail to co-operate when the means for such co-operation exist. The right hon. Gentleman said that he wanted an EU that is stable, prosperous, outward-looking and democratic. He should therefore support the ratification of the treaty of Nice.

The right hon. Member for Horsham said that the French referendum on Maastricht nearly plunged Europe into chaos, but he wants to plunge the EU into chaos by

refusing to ratify the treaty of Nice tonight. He should remember that the near-failure of the French to ratify the treaty of Maastricht also catapulted Britain out of the European monetary system.

The Tory party must learn the lessons of the election on Europe. It is fantasy to believe that we can reverse 50 years of European development. It is not credible to claim that we can influence the future of Europe by carping from the sidelines. Before they vote to oppose ratification of the treaty of Nice tonight, Tory Members must take a moment to reflect on the fact that the Nice treaty is a limited treaty that makes the practical reforms necessary for enlargement. To oppose the treaty of Nice would give the impression that the Opposition want little more than to see the EU paralysed by lack of reform, or to block this historic opportunity to unite the two halves of Europe—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

9.4 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I, too, am delighted to have this opportunity to speak in the debate. In 1979, I was a student in Strasbourg for a year. My newly directly-elected MEP came to the city for the first time while I was there. It was summer, and my grant being somewhat non-existent, I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet him. That MEP is now my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) and the Minister for Sport, and he made sure that I had two good meals that day. That evening, we went to a restaurant and met some Danish MEPs. I am sure that my hon. Friend will not mind my telling this story now—I have never told it before—but some anti-European British MEPs were meeting their Danish counterparts to discuss how they might pull out of Europe.

The views of many Labours Members have changed—not all of them, as we have heard today—and one reason for that is that Europe has gone further in what it does. At that time, Labour party members thought that the Common Market was purely for trading purposes. It was viewed as another way for capitalism to grow bigger and bigger, without doing much good for the workers. More than 20 years on, I am pleased to say that the situation is completely different. We now see a recognition by Labour party members of the significance of globalisation and the importance of European and worldwide markets. We also have a Europe with a social conscience, which is concerned about the environment and which can be of benefit to ordinary people.

The approach taken by the Conservatives is disappointing but predictable. Last weekend, as one of my first duties as a new Member of Parliament, I was invited to a conference on town twinning in Sheffield. It was organised to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the first visit of some young people from Sheffield's twin town, Bochum in the Ruhr valley. The origin of that link is similar to the origin of the development of what is now the European Union and has its roots in the fundamental desire for peace that followed the second world war. Town twinning was seen as a way for ordinary people to get to know each other, so that we would never again experience the horrors of that war.

Three politicians attended the conference—I, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) for the Liberal Democrats, and a local Conservative who had been a lord mayor. The Conservative spoke of how important the link between the towns had been and how it had brought alive for members of his group the things we have in common as Europeans. He talked of taking a busload of members from Sheffield council over to Bochum. Unfortunately for the Conservatives, the trip would now need only a moped, because there is only one Conservative councillor left on Sheffield city council.

Sheffield has also developed other links, especially with Donetsk in the Ukraine, which has also developed a link with Bochum. It is interesting to note that Bochum and Donetsk have developed trading links. It perhaps says something about Britain that we have not used those strong links to develop ways to trade better together. Time and again, our reluctance fully to participate and engage in Europe holds us back. When I talk to friends from Germany and France, they are often puzzled by our seeming half-heartedness. If we want to be a strong voice in Europe, we must stop that nonsense. We will only be seen as a nation that can influence what goes on if we are properly committed to the process.

The benefits of the European Union appear to me to be threefold—stability, security and economic prosperity. Importantly, the economic prosperity is achieved in a socially responsible way. The Nice treaty offers us a process for enlargement, and I welcome that.

Economic prosperity is important. I am staying with my sister while I am in London, and this morning we were discussing what I would be doing today, and I said that I was hoping to speak in this debate. We were looking at the list of applicant countries, and she made an important point. She works for a small specialist software company which exports its product throughout the world. She said that, because the product is so specialised—not unusual in computer technology these days—we need those markets. If companies are to survive and be at the cutting edge in Britain, they need to know that they can export to those markets. She looked down the list of applicants and it was surprising how many countries she had already visited on business. Other companies in the same position will also see this as a positive step.

For me, developing the European Union further promotes the security and stability that the people of my parents' generation saw as so important to the future of the whole of Europe. Enlargement is in our interests; the principles that brought together a smaller number of countries must hold true now.

The prospect of enlargement has already made a difference to political stability and international security in central and eastern Europe. We do not have to look very far to see some of the horrors that have taken place. People of my generation believed that we would never see such horrors again, but unfortunately we have. The European Union is fundamental to ensuring stability and is an important way forward for us and for those countries. If countries that border the EU suffer from poverty or division, we cannot all enjoy the security and stability that we want for ourselves and our families. We know that, without that prospect, neighbouring countries have suffered from instability and war, at great human and financial cost.

I want the treaty to be ratified. Yes, there are many small things to discuss, but overall, this must be the way forward. My hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) and for Wimbledon (Mr. Casale) made it

[Ms Meg Munn]

clear how difficult things would be in the European Union if we did not ratify the treaty. I see it as very important; I want us to sign up to it wholeheartedly. It is time we stopped dithering, because that is how it appears to our European neighbours. Let us get on with it and be the strong voice in Europe that we are in a position to offer.

9.13 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): In his absentia, may I warmly congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his appointment and welcome the new Ministers to the Front Bench, most particularly the Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain)? Double congratulations are due.

This has been a tremendous parliamentary debate. We have heard some outstanding speeches on both sides of the House from all the various viewpoints. What has come through above all is an underlying concern and anxiety, genuinely expressed, about the future of the European Union and the disconnection that is taking place between the peoples of Europe and the structures and institutions of the European Union. Those points were powerfully made by my hon. Friends the Members for Stone (Mr. Cash) and for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Among the excellent speeches were some memorable maiden speeches. I congratulate in particular the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), who spoke warmly of her constituency and its many activities, including ice hockey, new businesses and cultural activities. I also wish to express my appreciation of the very kind comments she made about my friend Nick St. Aubyn. I hope that she will make many more such competent contributions to debates in the House in her parliamentary career.

I should also like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) who, in a parliamentary sense, is truly to the manner born. As a parliamentary speaker, he already shows remarkable force and ability. He said that his constituency is not particularly beautiful, but he said so with great good humour and affection. We will all agree that his tributes to Dr. Michael Clark, who was a senior and respected parliamentarian, were extremely appropriate. I know that my hon. Friend will make excellent speeches in the House in the future.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) paid warm tribute to his predecessors. He talked about the history of his constituency and its fine maritime traditions, and said that it is moving towards modern industries such as updated electronics industries. He was very witty, and he has staked his claim to a position in history. He is a former cleric who has taken his place in the House, but he has yet to see as much as some of us of the vicar of St. Albion—a well known figure who is far less likely than the hon. Gentleman to appear frequently in the House. I congratulate him on his excellent speech and look forward to hearing frequent contributions from him in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) made generous remarks about a highly intelligent and independent former parliamentary colleague, Sir Peter Lloyd. He talked with warmth and affection about his constituency, mentioned its naval history and said that new business is being attracted to the area. I took particular note of his reference to the pressure on housing in the south of England, which is a tremendous problem that we must deal with as the population tilts ever southward. I know from listening to him today that he will make an outstanding contribution to Parliament through his speeches in this Chamber.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) spoke with warmth about Ray Michie, who was an impressive constituency representative. He made his constituency sound extremely attractive, and all who have visited it will know that that is the case. It is certainly one of the most beautiful parts of the British Isles, and he made it seem so tempting that he might just get a rash of visits from parliamentarians in the next few years. Apart from the stunningly beautiful aspects of his constituency, he also talked about worries that many of us share about rural Britain. I feel sure that he will be an eloquent spokesman for his constituency in his time in Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) paid tribute to Sir Richard Body, who was a great parliamentary individualist and a very assiduous constituency MP. My hon. Friend was right to bring powerfully to our attention the terrible problems currently experienced by British agriculture. Of course, Lincolnshire is a great farming county—one of the greatest in England. He talked about the welcome diversification in his constituency by small businesses and the tourist industry. Boston and Skegness has a fine representative in the House, and certainly a powerful orator.

Finally, I should like to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). Unfortunately, I was not present to hear him, but my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) tells me that it was a fine speech. He talked about his predecessor, Lawrence Cunliffe, a long-standing parliamentarian. He discussed his worries about the manufacturing industry, which I think we all share. Of course, many parts of manufacturing are in recession. He spoke of the need to revitalise his constituency, of the Beeching cuts and of the coal mine closures of the past. His was a fine maiden speech and I wish him well in his career.

The salutary effect of the Irish referendum was to make all of us stop and think about the future of the European Union, its democratic underpinnings and enlargement. Nice simply failed to address some of the most vital questions that the European Union faces, thereby making enlargement more difficult and adding to the increasing disconnection between the European Union's institutions and the citizens of its member states. Many hon. Members have made that point today, and we have repeatedly warned that that is precisely what would happen.

The previous Foreign Secretary frequently told the House that Nice was essential for enlargement to proceed. He tried to tell us that, in not supporting Nice, we could not support enlargement. That was simply incorrect. My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) accurately warned that, in practice, Nice would actually slow down enlargement.

I shall deal with the matter straight away. Conservative Members believe that enlargement is right both economically and politically, but it is a moral issue too. In government, we Conservatives played our part in fighting the totalitarianism that blighted the lives of millions of our fellow Europeans. We must now embrace

them to help to secure their democratic status and prosperity—it is as simple as that. We will take no lessons on that score from any Labour politician.

Both the Foreign Secretary and the Commission President have indicated that enlargement could go ahead without the Nice treaty, so let us consider all the extraneous baggage surrounding Nice which we believe to be so unnecessary. My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham and other hon. Members spoke about the implications of the move to increase qualified majority voting. That point was ably and directly taken up by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard).

None of that baggage is essential for enlargement, and we see, throughout Europe, people's growing alienation from EU institutions and structures; but has there been even one example of powers being returned to national Governments to deal with that problem? Did our Government argue for the return of such powers? By contrast, we would have drawn a clear line to begin the process of reversing the remorseless centralisation and harmonisation, which is crucial if the EU is to connect with its people again. That is why we want to give the British people a voice in this matter.

Outside the treaty, but endorsed at Nice, is the charter of fundamental rights, described idiotically by the former Minister for Europe as being on a par with the *Beano*. That is not the view of learned counsel. The charter is being held up as the basis for a future written EU constitution, and even if that does not come about, the Commission has stated:

"It can reasonably be expected that the Charter will become mandatory through the Court's interpretation of it as belonging to the general principles of Community law".

Our long traditions of evolving case law and of the clear divide between the judiciary and the legislature will be undermined by the charter and the inevitable growth of judge-led law in this country.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept that the charter gives rise to a substantial problem? It is effectively a blank cheque for enormously increased taxation on the people of Europe, because the provisions of the social agenda, which are entrenched by the charter, will be enforced by the judicial activism of the court.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the various dangers of the charter. If it is to serve as the basis of a written European constitution, the implications are very serious for a country such as ours, which has no written constitution.

The foundation of the European rapid reaction force had little to do with the ability of Europeans to carry out important defence-related roles, and everything to do with the process of political integration in the EU. We want, and have always argued for, enhanced pan-European defence co-operation; the Americans want greater burden sharing. The EU plays this game with the future of NATO at our peril. It will test the one organisation that has secured peace and stability in Europe for over 50 years. At Nice, we saw measures to allow European-level political parties to be funded, and for the EU to involve itself in individual countries' affairs merely on the basis of speculation about what may happen in future.

Setting aside enlargement, however important, what are the great issues facing the EU, and are the Government dealing with them? Did they highlight them at Nice? There can be little controversy about the projected demographic trends of the EU over the next 40 years, with declining birth rates. Can our welfare structures survive in the face of that? How do we generate the wealth to sustain an ever-growing ageing population?

The Prime Minister sought to address that at Lisbon; it was heady stuff. We heard much about benchmarking, the knowledge-based economy and the information society. Harold Wilson would have loved it; white heat had nothing on that Lisbon speech. Afterwards, the Prime Minister said:

"The Council marks a sea change in European economic thinking. It points Europe in a new direction—away from heavy-handed intervention and regulation, towards a new approach based on enterprise, innovation and competition."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2000; Vol. 347, c. 21.]

A week later, Lionel Jospin rejected that change outright, reaffirming the European social model. We were told that change was a prerequisite for Europe's economic success, but the Prime Minister's speech was viewed by many as vacuous techno-babble, and was cast into the out-tray at Stockholm a year later. So much for the Prime Minister's influence in Europe.

At Nice, the outline for the 2004 IGC was set, mainly in response to European peoples' increasing disillusion with the EU. What have the Government done to address that democratic deficit? Last October, the Prime Minister made a speech in Warsaw about trying to achieve democratic accountability; at the heart of it was a proposal for a second chamber. It almost defies belief that that is the UK's main and substantial contribution to the comprehensive and lively debate about the future of the EU. Perhaps the Prime Minister was inspired by the fabled and huge success of his reform of the House of Lords. That is almost incredible, as he himself told us last week in the Chamber that he wanted no rival second Chamber to the Commons. He wants, however, to foist such a body on Europe; that is monumental irrelevance, and must be set against the genuine need for enhanced powers for national parliaments themselves.

Again at Nice, it was agreed that there should be work towards involving Europe's citizens in the European project. What have the Government done about that in Britain? We have had the taxpayer-funded "Your Britain, Your Europe" campaign, the most visible manifestation of which was the former Minister for Europe travelling around the country in a bus, visiting our towns and cities. One simply could not have written the script; the enterprise was farcical and embarrassing. On those bus trips, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) distributed items of literature paid for by the taxpayer. They included "Your Britain, Your Europe: Want to Know More?" which, under the heading, "The Treaty of Nice Explained", poses the question:

"But I thought it was about creating a superstate?"

It answers:

"Not at all. That was just another EU myth."

Then we get two wonderful new Labour Aunt Sallies. The document states:

"There is nothing in the Treaty about a European police force or an elected European President. And there was never going to be. Nice was about preparing for enlargement, pure and simple."

What a load of inaccurate and patronising drivel! Will the Foreign Secretary reconsider the campaign and its challenge to the intelligence of the British people? I urge him to end it forthwith.

[Mr. Spring]

Nice was a failed opportunity. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham indicated, there can be no enlargement without reform of the common agricultural policy. This afternoon, there was an astonishing intervention by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Dr. Starkey), who signed the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Nice but was not familiar with its contents. No applicant country has closed the agriculture chapter.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why, in the Opposition amendment, there is criticism of the Government for failing to address reform of the CAP? Last night, however, in our debate on the Berlin summit, which dealt with matters relating to the CAP, they did not even bother to table an amendment.

Mr. Spring: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Berlin summit did anything radical about the funding of the common agricultural policy, he is completely ignorant of the actual situation.

The Prime Minister ducks and weaves whenever the matter of agriculture is raised. I truly hope that the Foreign Secretary will grasp the nettle and try to find a way forward with our European partners, which will both save the EU from bankruptcy and protect the larger-scale farms in this country.

Leading to the IGC from Nice, there is a lively and serious debate about the future of an enlarged EU. Every major European leader has presented a vision of what it should be. Only one sits on the sidelines, parroting "constructive engagement", but failing to come up with clear parameters and policies for the future. Sadly, that is the United Kingdom under Labour.

There is a terrible danger that the EU will become ossified in a time warp of thinking that was appropriate to the 1950s and 1960s. The idea that a "one size fits all" policy, based on a social agenda that is totally out of place in the globalised network that we inhabit, can possibly succeed defies all common sense.

We on the Conservative Benches want an enlarged EU that will meet the problem of alienation and disconnection and the demographic challenges of enlargement and of a globally competitive marketplace. Just as we were right about Nice, by contrast with a Government whose thinking is now frozen in time, we are now looking to the future. Our view is of a modern, outward-looking and democratically supported EU which Britain can help to shape.

By contrast, at Nice, yet another opportunity—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like to hear this because they know that they have lost the argument. They know that their attitudes towards the EU are totally inappropriate in a modern world and an enlarged Community. At Nice, that was manifest.

The Government failed at Nice to raise all the crucial and important issues relevant to the survival and prosperity of the EU. We want a European Community that will be prosperous and outward-going. All that was passed up at Nice by this Government, whose thinking is outmoded and irrelevant to the real needs of the people of Europe, and of the people of Britain in particular.

9.32 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I begin by thanking the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for graciously welcoming me to my post. He gave a very accomplished response to the debate. I am glad that he is improving his education by reading excellent Foreign Office leaflets. I hope that he continues to do so.

This has been an extremely thoughtful debate on Europe. Indeed, it has probably been the highest quality debate that I have heard since becoming a Member 10 years ago. It has been unrecognisable compared with the general tone of such debates in this House over that period. What has distinguished it for me has been the fact that there have been five times as many Labour speakers as Conservative contributors—and the debate has been five times the better for it.

It is invidious to select a number of the best speeches, but perhaps I could refer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who both spoke very interestingly. Their speeches will repay reading in the context of the future reform programme of the EU leading up to the intergovernmental conference in 2004. My hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) made extremely interesting speeches, too.

We heard excellent maiden speeches to which I want to pay fulsome tribute. The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) made her constituency sound almost as attractive as Neath. I very much welcomed her victory when I saw it come up on the television screen on the night, although Nick St. Aubyn was a very valued Member of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Wait for it—he might come back to the House to replace some of the less valued hon. Members whom I see staring at me.

We heard a very good speech from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), another Liberal replacement in the House. Listening to the tour of his constituency, I was reminded of all the malt whiskies from that part of Scotland which are so excellent to taste. He replaced a Liberal stalwart, Ray Michie, who was held in great affection in the House.

The hon. Members for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) and for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) paid fine tributes to their predecessors. Along with the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), they showed remarkable confidence in their maiden speeches and will no doubt prove formidable adversaries for the Government in years to come.

Another who showed remarkable confidence was my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), who brought an excellent touch of pulpit oratory to the House, and in doing so paid a well-received tribute to his predecessor, Norman Godman, who was an excellent and diligent member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. My hon. Friend spoke about the importance of companies in a constituency such as his being able to export to Europe. He argued convincingly that there were enormous benefits from enlargement for constituencies such as his and the companies in them, deriving from the extra trade and opportunity that would come from up to 200 million more people coming into the European Union. That is one of the aspects of the Nice treaty that we commend to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) made an eloquent maiden speech, especially about the industrial tradition which is at the root of his constituency and from which his predecessor, Lawrence Cunliffe, sprang. He was a valued Member and is much missed on the Labour Benches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh has a dispute with my boss, the Foreign Secretary, about where the spinning ferry was invented—[HON. MEMBERS: "Spinning jenny."] I am sorry; I was thinking of Argyll and Bute for a moment. I am sure that the dispute will be resolved peacefully outside the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) has made a valuable contribution during his time in the House, especially on renewable energy matters, for which we had a common enthusiasm when I was in my previous Government post. However, he is hopelessly confused in his desire for nationalism—independence for Wales and Scotland—in a united Europe. He does not want a united Europe where nations of Britain such as Scotland and Wales can become prominent regions with a serious voice in Europe, for which the existing arrangements provide. He wants to fragment Europe into little nationalistic enclaves, which would defeat the purpose of enlargement and be parochial and dangerous.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) spoke with his usual authority, derived from years of experience and expertise in foreign affairs. We enjoyed his speech.

I always enjoy the speeches of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) even though I never agree with him. It is interesting that he omitted to repeat the words that he used in 1998, which go to the heart of Conservative opposition to the treaty and their flawed position on Europe. The hon. Gentleman stated in 1998:

"We should seek a renegotiation of our relationship with the EU. That renegotiation should start from the premise that we will stay in the EU if we can strike a deal that is in our interests and pull out if we cannot."

That is the hidden agenda of the Conservative position—at least, the Conservative position that the hon. Gentleman advocates and which was put forward in the last general election and roundly defeated

Mr. Bercow: The Minister should know that the run-up to every treaty represents a renegotiation. But let the Minister now answer the question that was ducked by the Foreign Secretary. Following the passage of the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality in the Amsterdam treaty, can the Minister identify one directive or regulation that was repealed in consequence?

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend answered that question very directly. The difference between this Government negotiating a new treaty or an amendment to an existing one is that we go in to try to obtain the best deal for Britain, not with an excuse to try to pull out, which is what the Conservative position amounts to.

When I considered the absence from the debate and from the Chamber for most of the past few days of those rather embittered serried ranks of Conservative Eurosceptics, I wondered what they had been up to. What they had been up to was canvassing for the different candidates for the coming leadership of the Tory party.

I have a revealing quote from the distinguished political commentator, Peter Oborne. He referred to his conversations with Conservative Members when they come back from consulting their constituents on the leadership election. He said:

"I have been party to these conversations and they have something of the flavour of the exchanges that must have gone on at the Royal Society between Victorian explorers just back from the African interior. They tell each other of horrible customs, quaint beliefs and a strange, primitive mindset entirely alien to modern, sophisticated, metropolitan man."

We have also had a revealing set of confusions in the different statements on Europe and on the Nice treaty from the leadership candidates. I have been indulging in an exercise in political masochism in reading their statements.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), a well-known advocate of entry to the single currency and a supporter of the Nice treaty, said:

"Our official policy at the general election was . . . difficult to reconcile with Britain's continued membership of the European Union. When I am leader, these will not be the official policies of the party."

The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) said that he would be "friendly" to pro-Euro Tories on the Conservative Benches. That is a welcome change.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) said that he was "not obsessed with them"—the pro-Euro Tories—and that he welcomed "intelligent opposition".

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) did not say much about Europe in his statement, but he did say that he had

"much to learn from Tory MEPs",

which is comforting.

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), another Conservative leadership candidate, interestingly said that, during the debate on the euro, and indeed during any possible referendum campaign, he would "temporarily stand down" all those pro-Euro Tories in leading positions.

There we have it. Iain would put Ken in the sin bin, David would not be obsessed with him being there, Spanish Michael would be friendly, and noble Michael had much to learn from him—and Ken actually wants to lead that lot. Instead of 14 pints a day, he would need 20 pints a day to keep sane.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Hain: In a minute.

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green made an extraordinary statement yesterday, and it was backed by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who spoke with his usual force tonight. I recognise his principled commitment on the European question. We have often debated it together and sometimes we have been on the same side of the argument in the past, but on different sides of the Chamber.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green want a referendum now, but even the most fervently pro-euro person knows that it is not in Britain's interests to rush into the euro now.

[Peter Hain]

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, a potential leader of the Conservative party, wants a referendum when nobody wants to go in. What if he lost such a referendum? He would be catapulted into the single currency, whether or not he liked it and whether or not it was in Britain's interests—and it would not be. It may be in the Conservative party's interests to call for a referendum now, but it is not in the country's interests. The Tories want to use the electorate to solve a problem for them, which is a cynical and fraudulent use of the referendum issue.

Mr. Cash: I have discussed European matters with the Minister many times, including in Papua New Guinea, where we agreed on a considerable number of issues. There is one thing on which I think all the Conservative leadership candidates, with perhaps one exception, would agree. As Disraeli said, the Tory party is a national party or it is nothing. That is not to say that it is nationalistic, but it is patriotic, unlike the Government.

Peter Hain: I spent a happy couple of days head hunting in Papua New Guinea with the hon. Gentleman, who looked very striking in his swimming suit.

The Conservative position on the Nice treaty, as annunciated by both Front-Bench speakers, is essentially politically dishonest. They say they want enlargement, but they deny us the vehicle for achieving it and making it possible. If they got their way on Nice, Britain would lose the increased share of votes in European decision making that we secured—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick). We would also block the much-needed European modernisation that is necessary to speed up decisions and to increase efficiency, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) pointed out. Furthermore, we would lose the enormous opportunities for increased prosperity and jobs that will be provided when 200 million extra people join the single trading market, free of border tariffs and controls.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) said in an excellent contribution, the British share of trade has increased and British companies have done more business as every new country has joined the European Union. That will continue to happen through enlargement. If the Tories got their way on blocking the Nice treaty, we would insult our friends and allies, including the Cypriots, Maltese, Czechs, Lithuanians, Poles and others, many of whom my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have been meeting in recent weeks and days. They desperately hope to join and want us to sign up to Neath—[HON. MEMBERS: "Neath?"] I would like us to sign up to Neath as well.

If the Tories got their way, they would deny Britain the increased stability and security that will be created when more countries are absorbed under the banner of European democracy and peace—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn). They made the last election a referendum on Europe, to use their leader's words, and they lost it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) said, they are stuck in the past. Labour is part of the future, driving forward economic and political reform in Europe to make Britain more prosperous and secure and to make Europe more economically competitive, just, democratically accountable and peaceful.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: As the Minister knows, the Opposition amendment seeks a referendum on the Nice treaty. Has he been able to identify an essential constitutional component in the treaty that would justify a referendum, but which was absent from the Maastricht treaty? The previous Conservative Government did not think that that treaty required a referendum of the people of the United Kingdom.

Peter Hain: I was coming to that point, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman made very well in his speech. For all the treaty's importance in respect of enlargement, it is far less important and momentous—to use his words—than the Maastricht treaty. The Conservatives denied people the opportunity for a referendum on the Maastricht treaty, yet they want one on a treaty that is far less complicated and momentous. They employ double standards, but we have got used to that. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), whom I greatly respect, joined the Conservatives in requesting a referendum on Nice.

It is important to take heed of the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife and my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda that if we delay ratification, we delay the whole programme of enlargement. In that case, the goals of 2004 could not be achieved and many countries would be denied the opportunities and security which they crave and which we are trying to provide.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who always makes eloquent and expert speeches on Europe, made several points about qualified majority voting. It is important to answer them in detail. We shall agree to QMV when it is in Britain's interests; when it is not, we shall not agree to it. It is as simple as that. The Opposition agreed to move from unanimity to QMV, and they gave away the veto, as they call it, in the Single European Act 1985, to which Margaret Thatcher signed up, and in the Maastricht treaty, which John Major signed, on some fundamental articles. They include all general single market legislation and almost all the environment provisions. Good. I supported that. It has clearly been in Britain's interest to facilitate cleaning up the environment and implementing the single market.

We do not therefore oppose QMV in principle. Now that we have established that, Conservative Members should explain why they oppose QMV on such measures in the Nice treaty as appointments of common foreign and security policy special representatives. Unanimity could clearly delay important work, such as that done by envoys, or allow one member state to hold out against the best candidate for the job. Why do the Conservatives oppose QMV for the salary and pension of the registrar of the Court of First Instance? What is so earth-shattering for our national interest that a British veto is required for that?

Why do Conservative Members oppose QMV for the rules of procedure of the European Court of Justice? In that case, QMV would facilitate introducing changes to improve efficiency so that justice will no longer be delayed or denied to British companies that seek redress. Those questions are important and Conservative Members need to answer them.

At Nice, we agreed to extend QMV when it would have genuine benefits for Britain's interests and increase the efficiency of European Union institutions. We said that we would not agree to QMV on tax, social security and the European Union's budget. As before, we would insist on Britain's agreement before any EU action was taken on those issues. Qualified majority voting has delivered for Britain. When more QMV would deliver for Britain, we backed it at Nice; when it would not deliver, we opposed it.

Angus Robertson: I support the Minister's position on QMV. However, I want to ask about giving constitutional regions and nations the right to direct access to the European Court of Justice. The UK delegation blocked that in December, yet, only a month ago, the Scottish Executive, led by the Labour party, signed a declaration describing such access as vital. The Belgian Government have tabled the measure again. Will the Government support the Scottish Executive?

Peter Hain: We shall consider any representations from the Scottish Executive. However, we are currently considering the union of nation states. For those purposes, Scotland and Wales are part of the United Kingdom and are represented in that context.

Let me answer the question of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) about the common agricultural policy. He said that the treaty ignored it, but he and the Conservative party did not pursue an energetic programme of CAP reform in their 18 years in office. They got nowhere. We are reforming the CAP; the Prime Minister secured an important package of reforms at the Berlin Council in 1999, when it was decided to cut CAP spending in real terms by next year. That will deliver a net economic benefit to European Union consumers and taxpayers of 7.5 billion euro by 2006. However, we need go further towards comprehensive reform of the CAP. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), one of my predecessors and a good Minister for Europe, made a good speech in which he said that Nice was not about CAP reform but about treaty change: it was about making the necessary institutional changes for the EU to welcome new members. We do not need treaty change to reform the CAP. We are already doing that.

Mr. Howard: Will the Minister answer the point that I raised on the extension of QMV to article 100? Will he explain how that serves Britain's national interests, unless he envisages that the UK is about to encounter severe financial difficulties and may find itself in need of assistance?

Peter Hain: The use of QMV in article 100 does not undermine the no-bail-out rule set out in article 103. Article 103 makes it clear that there will be no bailing out of member states, whether of Britain or of any other state. That applies as much to pension liabilities as it does to Government liabilities. That is the answer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question. If he wants me to write to him in more detail, I shall be happy to do so.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) is one of my distinguished predecessors. I take much to heart the importance that she attaches to taking the message to the regions of Britain. With 3.5 million jobs being retained and advanced through EU membership, the benefits of EU membership are felt in the regions and nations of Britain.

An historic move is contained in the Nice treaty—to enlarge Europe, to reunite Europe and to bring together all the nations that were divided from western Europe by either the second world war or the cold war.

Enlargement represents an historic opportunity to end the cold war division of Europe and to reunite our continent. Bringing in the countries of central and eastern Europe will consolidate democracy and consolidate good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights and minority rights. It will contribute to peace in Europe, because EU member states settle their differences through discussion, not confrontation. A larger European Union will be a stronger and safer Europe. Crime, terrorism, drugs and pollution can be addressed only through joint action across the continent.

Without enlargement, western Europe would always face the threat of instability, conflicts and mass migration on its borders. Enlargement will make new and existing member states richer, bringing long-term prosperity and employment. Accession of the central Europeans will create the largest single market in the world, with nearly 500 million people, opening new opportunities for British companies. Independent research suggests that the accession of the seven largest central European candidates could increase British gross domestic product by £1.75 billion.

Nice is necessary for enlargement, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon said. The enlarged EU that we want cannot work effectively without the changes that the Nice treaty makes to the EU's institutions and procedures. That is why all the member states, including Ireland, have agreed that the ratification of the Nice treaty should proceed to the agreed timetable, so that the EU can be ready by the end of 2002 to begin to welcome new members.

It would theoretically be possible to admit new member states on the basis of the existing EU treaties, a point made in argument against the Government during the debate. However, that is not practical or politically possible. The present treaties do not include the institutional changes that are required for an enlarged EU to work. Member states are clear that the changes that Nice makes are necessary for the accession of new member states.

As we said all along, Nice is necessary for enlargement. Nice in that context is indeed nice. Nice is not only necessary for enlargement, but it is desirable. With Nice, we won a good deal for Britain. The treaty increases the relative weight of Britain's vote in the Council of Ministers for the first time. That is why I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 151, Noes 388.

Division No. 8] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Greg
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waller, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Callon, Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Cassle, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian

Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 385, Noes 148.

Division No. 9] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman

Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malliaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn

Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Wooles, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Greg
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mallins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

European Communities (Amendment) Bill (Programme)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill:

Committal of the Bill

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Programming of proceedings

2. Proceedings in Committee of the whole House and all remaining proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Committee, on consideration and on Third Reading

3.—(1) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed in four allotted days.

(2) An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day.—[*Mr. Heppell*].

The House divided: Ayes 372, Noes 148.

Division No. 10] **[10.31 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Callon, Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara

Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Greg
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question—[28 June].

Question again proposed,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE

Motion made,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. David Chaytor, Brian Cotter, John Cryer, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Paul Goodman, Andy King, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Mr. Andrew Love, John McDonnell, Mr. Denis Murphy, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Andrew Rosindell,

Mr. Anthony Steen, Ian Stewart and Brian White be members of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Hartlebury 449 Safety Action Group

10.45 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): It is a great but sad privilege to present the petition of 572 signatories, organised by the Hartlebury 449 safety action group. It is sad because the group came into existence in response to the recent death of a teenage girl on the very dangerous A449 between Kidderminster and Worcester at Hartlebury. The petitioners have seen the middle section of the road become immeasurably safer since the introduction of a radical traffic-calming scheme by the Highways Agency, and now feel that it is time to apply similar measures to the rest of the road, especially in the Hartlebury area. They hope that the petition will encourage the Highways Agency to move speedily. It states:

"the A449 trunk road between Kidderminster and Crossway Green is so dangerous to the lives and property of residents, pedestrians and drivers that traffic calming measures are vital for the community.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to take the necessary steps to introduce traffic calming measures, notwithstanding any requirement for de-trunking this road."

To lie upon the Table.

Environmentally Friendly Fuels

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

10.46 pm

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): This is a large topic and I obviously cannot cover all aspects of it tonight. I have therefore chosen to concentrate on the areas in which I have been personally involved.

I realise that some of the issues that I am going to raise may not be entirely the responsibility of the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). Many of us are finding that the new departmental boundaries take a bit of getting used to; let us hope that the change will be positive. As the issues that I shall raise concern more than one Department, there is a mechanism for passing them for reply to the Minister with relevant responsibilities.

We should abjure parochialism in relation to national and European Community boundaries. I should like to give personal thanks and pay tribute to the delegation of French MPs whom I met today and with whom I discussed many of these topics.

During my lifetime and that of the majority of hon. Members, growth in road traffic has been so fast that it has been impossible to cope with its consequences for congestion, pollution, health and climate change. It is unsustainable, however many new roads we build. Undoubtedly, in the longer term, we shall adopt new patterns of road use and may travel shorter distances to work, own fewer private cars and rent more. I find that solution very convenient, as I am a non-driver.

Public transport certainly needs to be improved, and new forms will be developed, including road transport. At present, however, few people are willing to give up their cars or the freedom and flexibility that that mode of transport provides. Or, if they are willing in theory, they cannot see how their life style can be maintained without cars. People cannot, overnight or alone, decide to relocate their homes, work, children, shopping, school and leisure facilities, however concerned they are about pollution and its effect on health, climate and the future of the planet.

People in more remote areas have even less choice and have to travel, both to obtain the majority of their goods and services and to work. That is where the Government must intervene. We elect Governments partly to provide the solutions to problems that we cannot solve by acting alone; they should provide solutions in the short term and address and influence longer-term trends. Part of the short-term solution to the problems caused by increasing road traffic is the development and supply of alternative fuels. Hon. Members may know that, during my period of service in the previous Parliament on the Select Committee on Environmental Audit, I consistently championed the use of road fuel gases in vehicles. Such gases are consistently more environmentally friendly in terms of air quality strategy pollutants than petrol or diesel are. If we consider just one pollutant, particulates, the health gains from reducing particle levels are greater than for those of any other pollutant. About 20,000 people a year suffer medical problems owing to particulates. Most—75 per cent. of them—particulate emissions from road transport are from diesel engines.

In recent tests, liquefied petroleum gas engines have produced no measurable particulate matter at any speed. Recent tests also show that, at 30 miles per hour, although diesel engines fitted with traps are better than non-fitted engines, even they produce significant quantities of particulate matter. Clean diesel is an advance, but it is not the answer.

A major advantage of LPG is that the technology is available now and offers significant benefits to human health and the environment. Clearly, what is—and was—needed to encourage its development is the right fiscal policy, as other countries such as Holland and Italy already have large road fuel gas vehicle populations. During the previous Parliament, I welcomed successive Budgets that gave incentives to road fuel gases, but even now, only some 39,000 vehicles in the UK use LPG, compared with 1 million in Italy, a country of similar size, and 400,000 in the much smaller country of Holland.

In our country, road fuel gases are on the brink of full market viability, and significant numbers of drivers and fleet owners are realising the benefits to themselves and the environment of switching to cleaner fuel. One LPG pump is installed every day on a forecourt somewhere. There is now the prospect of a nationwide network of pumps so that drivers need not fear running out of fuel. There are still problems in rural areas. As I said in the debate on the Queen's Speech, there is a need for targeted help—again, as in other countries—to enable rural garages in places such as Scotland to install LPG infrastructure. That should be seen as part of a wider package to sustain the countryside.

On road fuel gases, we are nearly there; let us not throw it all away. Fleet owners need long-term confidence to invest, and many of them remember when a previous Government summarily removed incentives for LPG use and killed off a nascent market.

Powershift, the Government programme that encourages people to shift to cleaner fuels, did its own research this year and reported on its website:

"The research also considered the importance of a number of market factors in influencing the decision to switch to clean fuels . . . The strongest concern was a lack of confidence in the Government maintaining the fuel duty differential".

This Government have promised to retain the fiscal incentive until at least 2004, but I ask: what next?

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The hon. Lady's work on this matter is well known to the House. Will she join me in congratulating Powershift on its work so far and urge the Minister and the Government not only to retain but expand the scheme as much as possible, not only to include older vehicles, which would contribute greatly to tackling climate change, but to consider other fuel alternatives, such as fuel cells and biodiesel, as they come on the market?

Mrs. Brinton: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I agree with everything that he has said, and hope that he will join me in approaching the Minister at a later and more convenient date. I suggest that the measures be extended.

Just when the market is about to deliver, let us not offer the prospect of the advantage disappearing in three years' time. People are rational consumers; they will not invest in something that may become inviable in the foreseeable future. As the hon. Gentleman helpfully reminded us, recent consultation on Powershift has suggested that its help for conversion may be phased out at the end of next year. There are certainly other technologies that may require support in the longer term, but as I said, LPG is here, now. In government, we should deal in the here and now and in achievable solutions. LPG is already delivering. We cannot afford to throw away its environmental benefits in favour of a future of uncertain alternatives.

There is an article on the Powershift website by Professor Garel Rhys, the director of the Centre of Automotive Industry Research at Cardiff university business school, with which the hon. Gentleman may be familiar. He writes:

"It is important that the incentives are not withdrawn prematurely . . . whatever the state of public finances."

I agree. Powershift can and should be reviewed, but let us not throw the baby out with the bath water.

I turn to the challenge posed by the rubbish mountain. We have a problem of too much waste going to landfill. Only about 9 per cent. of household waste was recycled last year—a shocking figure. About 85 per cent. of domestic waste goes to landfill. The European landfill directive will force us to reduce biodegradable domestic waste sent to landfill by 2016 to no more than 35 per cent. of the 1995 level. That will not be easy.

We also have a problem of slow progress towards developing sufficient sources of renewable energy. The Government are committed to a target of 10 per cent. of electricity generation by 2010, but the present level achieved is only 2.8 per cent. There is a long way to go. Some people have suggested that large-scale incineration of waste with an energy by-product is the answer to both problems. I am not so sure that incineration deserves the support that it would gain from being included in the renewables order.

Incineration is unpopular with the public. It has a poor history of producing unacceptable emissions. Low environmental standards were applied to municipal incinerators as recently as the early 1990s. Incinerator technology does not need subsidy. However, we must be careful not to get caught by the shackles of vocabulary.

There is a danger that generating energy from waste by pyrolysis may be excluded from the renewables order. Pyrolysis is not the same as incineration. It has the advantage of recycling energy from waste effectively, without the emission problem. Modern pyrolysis technology is much more able than incineration to meet or improve upon the requirements of the new directive on emissions. It is an exciting technology, but is not yet at the stage of market viability.

A new generation of pyrolysis plants would need to produce much more electricity from the same amount of waste as handled by current pyrolysis plants. To do that, new cutting-edge designs must be introduced. It is unlikely that anyone would be prepared to take the risks of trying to establish pyrolysis plants on a commercial scale without the support of the renewables obligation. Can my hon. Friend assure me that pyrolysis, as distinct from incineration, will be given favourable consideration for inclusion in the renewables order?

I am concerned also about the deteriorating situation in relation to CHP—combined heat and power. The Government strategy for stimulating CHP is, I believe,

[Mrs. Brinton]

out for consultation. CHP was set to double by 2010, saving more than 25 per cent. of the current shortfall in the UK target of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. However, I understand from a major company in the Peterborough area, British Sugar, which has used CHP since the 1920s—yes, I had to look that up—that Government targets are under serious threat, owing to a combination of factors, including the electricity trading arrangements and the need to exempt CHP fully from the climate change levy.

There is an urgent need to stimulate CHP as part of the Government's sustainable energy policy. I urge the Minister responsible—in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, perhaps—to ensure that a comprehensive strategy is published soon.

My final topic this evening is biofuels, which offer great reductions in emissions. The production of biofuels could be of great benefit in rural regeneration as another source of employment, particularly in my region, the eastern region. The matter was raised in another place last Thursday by my noble Friend Lord Palmer, and I was pleased to see the Minister's reply. He agreed that it was important to investigate the use of biofuels, and that fiscal and other measures might encourage their development. He specifically mentioned rapeseed-based biodiesel.

I am particularly interested in how far the use of such fuels in aviation has progressed. I asked a question about that in the House in January and I was informed that the Department of Trade and Industry was then reviewing what it termed a "modest proposal" to use a fuel derived from biomass instead of aviation kerosene.

The growth in aviation is even more dramatic than that in road transport. The number of planes using UK airports has doubled since 1985. Air travel worldwide is expected to reach double 1995 levels by 2015. In 1992, air transport accounted for 3.5 per cent. of greenhouse gas emissions, but by 2050 it could be as high as 15 per cent. Those are worrying figures. A White Paper is expected which will attempt to address the many issues involved. I ask the Minister to ensure that, at the very least, as for road transport, the use of cleaner, more environmentally friendly fuels is a priority.

I did not notice anything on the subject in the Green Paper published last December, but there is considerable interest in it, including in the aviation industry. I happened to be at an event hosted by British Airways this week, and I shall certainly be following up some contacts that I made there.

In all the areas upon which I have touched there is a balance to be struck between incentivising technology with real promise and technology which has enthusiastic backers but little prospect of viability. Making the wrong choice results not only in wasteful expenditure, but deprives us of attainable environmental gain. As I said in the debate last week, transport being now part of another Department, I am concerned that transport policy making could be less informed by environmental considerations, and I am far from alone in that. There is a danger that economic drivers will be given precedence without check by environmental and social considerations, the two of which are far from independent, or, indeed, always in conflict.

During the past few years, we have learned a lot about the processes and benefits of sustainable development, about how we can achieve economic benefits without social or environmental costs, and, indeed, in the best so-called win-win-win scenarios, about achieving gains on all fronts. We must not discard all that experience now. We must be very careful where we build new roads. We must properly assess and understand the projected impacts, both short and long term, and investigate creative alternatives.

We must be equally and similarly vigilant concerning measures to address the increase in aviation and the environmental and other problems that it will cause. We must continue to encourage investment in other forms of transport, both public and private, and not forget the aims of the integrated transport strategy developed by the Deputy Prime Minister in the previous Parliament. We must encourage existing and new forms of cleaner transport and other fuels.

11.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on securing the debate. She has taken much interest in environmental matters and has always brought her considerable experience to debates such as this, as she has done tonight.

In answer to one of my hon. Friend's latter questions, I can assure her that, while I am in this job and my hon. Friends are in their jobs, transport policy will be informed by environmental concerns.

My hon. Friend raised a number of matters that fall within the responsibility of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I shall draw those to the attention of my colleagues.

My hon. Friend made important comments on transport and traffic, underlining the issues addressed in the 10-year plan. I am pleased to be responsible for cleaner fuels and vehicles in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and, like my hon. Friend, I have a personal conviction about the potential to raise transport quality as well as improve the environment. We can do that by reducing air pollution and the resulting health problems, making vehicles quieter, enhancing local liveability, helping to bring about an urban renaissance, cutting greenhouse gases and opening the way for haulage to operate more flexibly.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of liquid petroleum gas, which is better known as LPG, but that is only part of the Government's agenda. I welcome the opportunity briefly to outline that agenda and its underpinning strategy. The components are to secure the maximum take-up of today's environmentally friendly fuels, bring forward the next generation of green fuels and lay the foundations for the United Kingdom to benefit from the longer-term prospects for fuel-cell propulsion and the low-carbon economy.

That means using the right mix of measures, including, as my hon. Friend mentioned, appropriate taxation of the different fuels and types of vehicle, in line with the Government's statement of intent on environmental taxation. The strategy includes grants to provide incentives and support for motorists and businesses in buying green vehicles, action to promote information and

awareness of new fuels, and partnership with other players such as the vehicle and fuel industries, local government and others to break the logjams and make things happen.

I have briefly described the structure and sinews of the strategy, but I want now to fill out the picture. As my hon. Friend said, LPG is here now and is already delivering. That success follows the action taken by the Government, who have put in place the low duty for LPG and compressed natural gas, or CNG. The rate is 6p per litre, compared with 45p for petrol and diesel, which means a pump price of about 40p. We have established the Powershift grant and promotion programme, and increased the scheme's funding substantially in the 2000 comprehensive spending review, giving it a firm three-year forward budget of £30 million.

The oil companies have responded with impressive forecourt investment. As my hon. Friend said, there are now more than 750 LPG outlets and the number is growing daily. We have a strong and high-quality conversion industry. The car companies are now starting to offer LPG models as standard, off-the-assembly line options, so that buyers do not have to arrange separate conversion. That further establishes LPG as a mainstream vehicle option. However, technology does not stand still. Conventional fuels and vehicles have become much cleaner in the past few years, which challenges the gas technologies to raise their environmental performance in the same way.

My hon. Friend noted that the Government are currently consulting on the future direction of the Powershift programme. We are maintaining the funding for LPG grants—there is no question about that—but we have suggested that grants should now focus on the conversion of light-duty goods vehicles, as the biggest air quality benefit now comes from displacement of diesel. Hence the proposals to switch resources progressively towards such vehicles. Some responses argue that refocusing of the grants should be taken more slowly. That view and all comments will be carefully considered.

The Government also want to push hard on CNG, which is the other main gas fuel that is now available. It has huge potential to make heavy goods vehicles significantly cleaner and, importantly, quieter. We have put the economic parameters in place—guaranteed low duty for CNG, plus the grants available through the Powershift and CleanUp programmes—to assist HGV operators in investing in new CNG-fuelled vehicles and in converting existing vehicles. There is still a chicken-and-egg problem with the fuel network: there are not many CNG vehicles, so there are not many outlets, and vice versa. We have begun two pilot initiatives—one with the London Mayor and Transport for London and another with Manchester city council—to demonstrate how a local agency can break into the circle by bringing together prospective CNG users and suppliers.

The second strand of the strategy is introducing the next generation of fuels. As my hon. Friend said, we are considering hydrogen and biofuels, which can start to decouple mobility from climate change. That is crucial. My hon. Friend mentioned biofuels, which are practical and can replace and be blended with fossil petrol or diesel in existing engines. When compared with fossil fuel, the carbon saving is highest when the biofuel is made with waste or recycled material. It is less when the feed stock is specially grown using fertilisers and energy.

We intend this country to be a leader in biofuel technologies. The Chancellor launched the greener fuels challenge in last year's pre-Budget report to identify the most promising fuels for tax treatment. That led to the 20p per litre reduction in duty for biodiesel in the Budget. That will encourage biodiesel, which is produced in the UK with used vegetable oil.

In the Finance Act 2001, we took powers to set low duties for pilot projects aimed at bringing forward other new fuels. Companies will shortly be invited to introduce their proposals, and we aim to announce the successful pilots later this year.

Bio-ethanol made from agricultural waste material or from municipal refuse is especially interesting. It delivers double benefits: a new source of farm income, and a better option for waste disposal. It is a productive alternative to incineration or landfill. The potential is obvious.

I am aware of the arguments that there should be an even larger duty cut for biodiesel to open the way for biodiesel made from virgin rapeseed, and that biodiesel duty should be on a par with LPG or CNG.

As my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State said in the other place, the Government will continue to keep all biofuels under review, including biodiesel production from rapeseed. Doubtless, continuing developments will occur in technology and rapeseed cultivation. The case for even lower duty on biodiesel, on a par with LPG and CNG, was addressed in the debate on the Finance Bill. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary explained that the prime purpose of the low duty on LPG and CNG was to help combat air quality problems. Experts generally agree that biodiesel is no better than fossil diesel on the most important emissions. Rapeseed biodiesel offers some carbon savings compared with fossil diesel, but the benefits are fairly limited because of the amount of fertilisers and energy used in growing rapeseed.

If we look even further ahead, there is the firm prospect of electric drive vehicles running on fuel-cell technology. That opens the way for a clutch of benefits. They include higher vehicle efficiency, better in-car amenities, zero tailpipe emissions and lower carbon emissions. Carbon emissions will be almost zero when the hydrogen is renewably generated.

We want this country to be out in front. In the autumn, my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry will produce a discussion document, entitled "Powering Future Vehicles." It will set out our strategy for promoting the development, introduction and take-up of fuel cell and other new technologies, and for ensuring that the United Kingdom automotive industry is fully engaged in that process. That will open an extremely important discussion, with great significance for the whole automotive industry and the environmental footprint of transport.

In the time available, I have ranged widely on the subject, and I hope that that has been useful. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for initiating this evening's debate and for her presentation of the case. If she believes that any issues have not been covered in adequate detail, I will ensure that my officials provide a response shortly. I am glad that the matter has been aired and I look forward to discussing it in future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 5 July 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

STANDING ORDERS (PRIVATE BUSINESS)

Ordered,

That the Amendments to Standing Orders set out in the Schedule be made:

SCHEDULE

Standing Order 27,

Line 66, leave out from "Office" to "and" in line 68 and insert—

"and one copy at the Health and Safety Executive, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 27A,

Line 24, leave out from "be" to first "and" in line 26 and insert—

"two in the case of a deposit at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 29,

Line 8, leave out "of the Environment, Transport" and insert "for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 30A,

Line 4, leave out "of the Environment, Transport and the Regions" and insert "for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs".

Standing Order 31,

Line 6, leave out "of the Environment, Transport and the Regions" and insert "for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs".

Standing Order 32,

Line 8, leave out "Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food" and insert "Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs".

Standing Order 34,

Line 10, leave out "of the Environment, Transport" and insert—

"for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and at the Department for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 37,

Line 9, leave out from "Office" to "and" in line 10 and insert—

"the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport, Local Government".

Line 14, leave out "a copy" and insert "two copies".

Line 17, leave out from "the" to "and" in line 19 and insert—

"Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and one at the Department for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 39,

Line 3, leave out from "bill," to "three" in line 4.

Line 4, after "at" insert "the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs".

Line 5, after "Office" insert—

"and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions".

Line 6, leave out "the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food".

Line 9, leave out "Employment" and insert "Skills".

Line 10, leave out "of Social Security" and insert "for Work and Pensions".

Line 20, leave out "Employment" and insert "Skills".

Line 23, leave out "Employment" and insert "Skills".

Line 29, leave out "Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food" and insert "Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs".

Standing Order 45,

Line 20, leave out from "Department" to "and" and insert—

"for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and at the Department for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 47,

Line 10, leave out "of the Environment, Transport" and insert "for Transport, Local Government".

Standing Order 101,

Line 4, leave out "Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food" and insert—

"Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs".

Standing Order 147,

Line 7, leave out "the Environment, Transport" and insert "Transport, Local Government".*

Line 10, leave out "of the Environment, Transport" and insert "for Transport, Local Government".*

Standing Order 154,

Line 12, leave out "the Environment, Transport" and insert "Transport, Local Government".

Line 28, leave out "the Environment, Transport" and insert "Transport, Local Government".—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

**refers to the Standing Order text as amended by the House on 28th February 2001.*

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Further Education Lecturers

1. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What recent discussions she has held with representatives of further education lecturers. [869]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): My right hon. Friend has not recently met representatives of further education lecturers. However, I met the general secretary of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education on Tuesday this week, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and I are due to meet representatives of NATFHE again on 18 July.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister share my deep concern that moderate and responsible further education lecturers are being driven to strike over pay? Does he agree that the underlying cause is a chaotic, inconsistent and unfair

system for financing further education, in which, for example, lecturers on £25,000 a year are being paid £5,000 a year less than A-level lecturers in schools doing an identical job a few hundred yards away? Does he further agree that there needs to be a radical overhaul of the whole system of funding for further education, without which the Government's programme for post-16 education will not be able to deliver?

John Healey: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's comparison between further education establishments and schools. In many ways, schools are different institutions with different problems, including many unqualified or part-time staff. Direct comparisons are, therefore, not appropriate. I share his concern over industrial relations in the field, but NATFHE's claim for an across-the-board £3,000 increase is simply not on the cards.

What is in place this year, for the first time, is the teaching pay initiative, which provides money on top of the general funding for colleges. For the first time, this will give us the ability substantially to increase supplementary pay arrangements to reward better teachers, deal with recruitment and retention problems and recreate a proper career structure in further education. It will also allow us to create more funding for courses and colleges that are delivering the best training in the sector, and there will be extra funding this year, for the first time, for capital modernisation and information technology. In many ways, therefore, this year is the first year of a new era for further education, by contrast with the rather dispiriting and demoralising picture painted by the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I welcome my hon. Friend to his new position on the Front Bench—a post that is fully deserved. I also welcome the last answer that he gave. I have two excellent sixth-form colleges in Cambridge, serving my constituency. However, representatives of the colleges tell me that they are under severe pressure owing to a 4 per cent. increase in staff salaries, inflation that has risen by 2.5 per cent. and only a 1 per cent. increase in their funding. Will my hon. Friend investigate the circumstances in Cambridge?

John Healey: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words of congratulation. I will certainly look into the position of the colleges in Cambridge that she has mentioned. I know that the colleges in her area are among the best and deserve support. She points out the need, and our plans, for rebuilding professionalism in further education and for rebuilding the resources available to the sector. There are still too many unqualified teachers, too many substandard courses and too many weak managers.

This year, we have put in place—through the teaching pay initiative, the standards fund and the other money going into FE for specific purposes—rewards to encourage better teachers, backing for better training and professional qualifications, recognition for departments and colleges providing first-rate FE training and substantial support for colleges with special weaknesses that need special help.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the new Minister, whom I sincerely welcome to the Dispatch Box, appreciate that if—after what I understand was a somewhat extended departmental away-day which took him out of town later on the day—he had been able to attend the meeting in the Palace of Westminster with NATFHE lecturers, he would have seen a very lively meeting, at which the concern expressed was entirely genuine and moderate, and in no sense politically motivated?

In particular, does the Minister realise that the problems might possibly be due to bureaucratic problems in getting the money through the local learning and skills councils, rather than the colleges themselves, which have their own problems, particularly with core funding? Money earmarked under the teaching pay initiative for current-year pay improvements has not always got through. There are real worries about the recruitment and retention of lecturers, and there is a question mark over the possibility of fulfilling the Government's ambitious targets for enrolment and the development of the further education sector. This is not, essentially, a party political issue, but it is one that is giving rise to widespread concern.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am required to get through the Order Paper; therefore, questions and replies must be brief.

John Healey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance on my first outing at the Dispatch Box.

I thank the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for his genuine congratulations. I respect his experience and knowledge of the field, but in this case he has got the wrong end of the stick. The learning and skills councils are ready, willing and able to provide money for the teaching pay initiative. Indeed, the provisional allocation has already been made to colleges. However, it is for colleges to conclude agreements with staff for the extra money, and they must provide the Learning and Skills Council with the simple assurance that it will be spent in line with the design of the scheme. It will be backdated to 1 April, so that no one loses out. My message to college managers and staff representatives is this: we have ensured that the money is available—get on with it.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I remind my hon. Friend of the circumstances at Barnsley college, where, at the end of last month, 120 lecturers were released because of its particular problems. As he is aware, the difficulties resulted from the loss of courses through franchising, which has left it with a £2 million budget shortfall. Will he reconsider Barnsley's circumstances to establish whether any Government help could be given to those whose jobs are under threat?

John Healey: I am well aware of the problems at Barnsley college, as some of my constituents are students there. One of my first actions in my first week in the job was to ask for an update on the situation. As my hon. Friend said, there have been serious problems and serious financial irregularities there. A full report is with the Learning and Skills Council and the local learning and skills council is developing, and will support, an action plan for the recovery of Barnsley college's position. In the meantime, we shall do all we can to ensure that courses, the position of lecturers and, above all, the provision of training for students at the college are not further damaged.

Learning and Skills Councils

2. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent representations she has received on the responsibilities of the learning and skills councils; and if she will make a statement. [870]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): We have received few representations on the responsibilities of the Learning and Skills Council. I have had several meetings with its chairman and chief executive in the past three weeks, and I am confident that the council will make a genuine difference over the coming years to widening participation in learning, driving up standards and improving achievement.

Miss McIntosh: I congratulate the Minister on retaining her post in the Government. I shall share with her some representations that I have received from local firms, which are confused about who is responsible under the new arrangements for the Investors in People initiative and want to know whether it is the Learning and Skills Council or the Small Business Service. Guidance would be most welcome. Can she assure me that businesses will continue to be involved in the delivery of training to young people, as they were so successfully under the training and enterprise councils?

Margaret Hodge: On the hon. Lady's second point, I can assure her that businesses will continue to be involved. On the first, the Learning and Skills Council is responsible for ensuring that we meet our Investors in People target, extend the system and ensure that more people participate in it. However, there is nothing to prevent the Learning and Skills Council from negotiating and contracting with local business links or the Small Business Service to ensure that it delivers. I am pleased to tell the House that in North Yorkshire, which includes the hon. Lady's constituency, 43 per cent. of medium and large companies have attained the IiP standard, as have 132 small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): How will the Learning and Skills Council increase participation in post-16 education? *[Interruption.]*

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just said that I could write an essay on that. However, bearing in mind what you, Mr. Speaker, said about answers, I shall try to keep my response brief.

The Learning and Skills Council will set a strategy and business plan that will be implemented by the 47 learning and skills councils, which will work through existing institutions such as the further education sector and private providers, among others, as well as sixth-form schools and colleges to ensure that we extend participation. Extending participation is an essential part of the Government's manifesto commitment and is not only good for individuals, but key to ensuring that we build economic prosperity.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): One of the responsibilities of the Learning and Skills Council is the funding of school sixth forms. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey), said earlier that there was no equivalence between schools and further education colleges, but the Government's funding arrangements are based on exactly that proposition. Many school sixth forms are under threat from the new funding arrangements under the Learning and Skills Council, which allow fees to be charged. Will the Minister give a pledge today that no school will face a reduction in its funding for pre-16 education as a result of the new arrangements, and that the funding allocated by the Learning and Skills Council to local education authorities for school sixth forms will all be passported to the schools?

Margaret Hodge: In fact, there have been no closures of school sixth forms since the Labour Government were elected in 1997. Any such closures took place under the Conservative Government, pre-1997. We gave a real-terms guarantee of funding at 2000–01 levels to all sixth forms when the funding was transferred to the Learning and Skills Council, provided that they maintained their pupil numbers. That is an unprecedented guarantee. We have instructed the Learning and Skills Council to passport through the entire funding to the sixth forms that will receive funding from it.

Specialist Schools

5. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): What plans she has to increase the number of specialist schools. [873]

12. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): How many and what percentage of secondary schools in England are expected to have specialist school status by June 2005. [881]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I would not like Question Time to pass without extending the sympathy and thoughts of the House and the Department to those in Lambeth at the school with the child missing in the north of France. It is a difficult time for all concerned and it must be unutterably difficult for the parents and other members of the family who have to travelled to France this morning. I know that the whole House would wish to join me in sending them our best wishes and our thoughts. The Department will give whatever help might be appropriate in due course.

From September 2001 there will be 684 specialist schools and we are working towards a target of 1,000 by September 2003. The Government's target of 1,500 specialist schools by September 2006 represents 46 per cent. of secondary schools in England.

Mr. Rammell: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Does she agree that eventually every school should have its own distinctive mission and ethos? In taking forward that agenda, should not the Government welcome associated bids from two or more schools, where such a bid can be shown to be in the interests of developing such an ethos within each of those schools? Were such a bid to be forthcoming from schools in my constituency of Harlow, would she consider it very seriously?

Estelle Morris: I agree with my hon. Friend. Schools do try to attain their own distinct ethos and we are working with the grain of schools in that respect. It is certainly our aim that all secondary schools develop their

own ethos and mission. Some will find their voice in the specialist school movement and others will do so through training schools, beacon schools or church schools. That is the nature of diversity. However, I strongly feel that schools improve their standards most when they have a feeling of being different, of being special, and when they are proud of their children and their communities are proud of them. We want to help them work towards that. Although I welcome joint applications, I have a cautious word of advice for my hon. Friend. To be honest with him, I do not think that the existing rules encourage joint applications and my best advice to schools in his constituency would be to wait a while and see whether that guidance changes.

Mr. Prentice: If we are to have specialist schools, I am rather attracted by the Liberal Democrat policy, which is to make all schools special schools. We could then call them comprehensives. My attention was drawn to an article in the *Financial Times* yesterday stating that my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards plans to put private companies in charge of state school departments—presumably that includes specialist schools. As a member of the Labour party's national policy forum, let me ask the Minister where that idea came from. It was never discussed in any of the Labour party's policy forums and, as the Minister will know, it was never discussed at the Labour party's annual conference last September. If we are going to have bizarre suggestions on a regular basis, the Government should at least honour us by telling us who was responsible for the idea in the first place.

Estelle Morris: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I want all schools to have in place the key measures of improvement that will enable them to take up specialist status. This is about extra resources and the capacity to spend them effectively to bring about improvements.

On my hon. Friend's second comment, there are no circumstances in which I or my Department would force a school to outsource one of its departments. However, some head teachers may choose to do that. I want to make it clear that it would be their choice, with no instructions from me about the break-up of the school.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I welcome the Secretary of State and her ministerial team to the Front Bench, and we wish them well in their short careers. We also welcome the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), who will be the first Member to cross the Floor in this Parliament. Liberal Democrats will welcome his wise views.

Does the Secretary of State agree that her policy on specialist schools is akin to creating a giant McDonald's-like franchise within our school system? The difference is that anyone can go into a McDonald's, but specialist schools will decide which students to take. Does she accept that by the end of the Government's second term in office, 60 per cent. of Britain's schools will remain bog standard—to use the phrase of the Prime Minister's press secretary? Given the failure of private sector investment in education action zones, will she today rule out the involvement of private sector companies in future specialist schools?

Estelle Morris: McDonald's restaurants are all the same, whereas our aspiration for the school system is that schools should have a common base but should be different, not the same. What upsets me most about the hon. Gentleman, who I know has education close to his heart, is that he has incredibly low aspirations for our school system. I believe that every school in the country can, with help and support, and with the will, passion and hard work of teachers, develop its own ethos. Schools try to do that, but in the past they have tried to do it by themselves. With our diversity agenda, we are bringing that approach into the national school system, so that we celebrate diversity. When schools are ready, we give them resources to help them to achieve that diversity. That is absolutely key.

On private sector involvement, the hon. Gentleman may, on reflection, regret his slur on many education action zones. Children and teachers in some of the most disadvantaged areas have worked their socks off to raise standards, and in doing so have worked with the private sector. The improvement in attainment rates in those areas is a cause for celebration, and should not be knocked down. I welcome the private sector's involvement in those achievements. It has provided cash, but as the hon. Gentleman knows there have also been hours spent in schools reading with young children, mentoring head teachers, allowing access to places of work and raising children's vision so that they can aspire to work in business. I have no intention of turning my back on the contribution that the private sector can make to raising aspirations and delivering the world-class education system that we want.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the right hon. Lady, whom I congratulate and welcome to her post, realise that in her pursuit of true excellence she is more likely to engage the hearts and minds of Conservative Members than of Labour Members? In that context, what plans does she have to encourage young people who want to follow a career in the crafts? Does she agree with me that craftsmanship is of supreme importance, and that not enough encouragement is given to such young people?

Estelle Morris: I shall ignore the fact that, in 1997, six out of 10 children could not read properly at the age of 11. I do not know how that reflects on the Conservative Government's commitment to excellence in schools. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the importance of the range of subjects that are termed as crafts. Crafts have long been neglected and have been squeezed out of the education system. We want both to acknowledge and to promote them and give children who achieve in that regard the applause and credit they deserve.

The Government desperately want to give vocational education the status that it needs and deserves. We believe that our plans relating to vocational GCSEs and A-levels,

and the policies that we are developing for 14 to 19-year-olds, will turn the tide that has been going in the wrong direction for the past 15 to 20 years.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new position.

Will the Department be publishing clear criteria for schools applying for special school status? Some schools experiencing serious weaknesses or special measures apply for such status, only for the applications to be turned down because the schools have not been given a clean bill of health by Her Majesty's inspectorate or Ofsted.

Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Holmesdale community school, which was recently awarded special school status, and congratulating Ian Hobson—the head teacher—the governors and the entire Holmesdale team on their hard work?

Estelle Morris: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the school. I believe that this is the eighth time he has mentioned it at Question Time; on seven of those occasions it had not yet achieved a special school status, so I am very pleased to be able to congratulate it today and to put on record my hon. Friend's contribution in supporting its application.

If the guidance is not clear I shall, of course, want to clarify it. I take my hon. Friend's point about schools experiencing special measures and serious weaknesses. Sometimes a school starts to experience special measures and serious weaknesses while it is putting together and submitting its application. When a school is in that position, it is pretty tough to get out of it; all efforts must be focused on the basics—on good teaching and leadership. I genuinely wonder whether, at that point in a school's development, it is able to take on special school status. It can, however, aspire to such status, and the prospect of no longer being subject to special measures and being able to apply for it may spur schools on.

I should be delighted to look at the guidance again. As I have said, if it is not as clear as it should be I will endeavour to remedy the problem.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I welcome the new Secretary of State to her job. I know that she will bring her characteristic commitment and diligence to the task.

Perhaps it was those qualities that encouraged the right hon. Lady to reverse the policy of exclusion targets that has been such a cause of dismay in schools throughout the country—special schools, schools experiencing special measures and other schools. She will know that heads, governors, teachers and, of course, the Opposition have mounted a vigorous campaign against the exclusion targets on which she has now performed a U-turn. However, uncertainty remains about the financial sanctions. The right hon. Lady will remember the punitive sanctions that the Government imposed on schools that did not meet those centrally defined targets. Will she confirm that, in that respect, DFEE circular 16/99 has been either rescinded or superseded by further guidance?

Estelle Morris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments.

The targets were reached, and we are not setting new ones. We have made that clear. I consider it cause for celebration that, under the present Government, schools have learning support units and learning mentors, and if they do exclude pupils they can be guaranteed a full-time education for those pupils to a greater extent than they ever were under the last Government. Schools have, however, reduced the number of exclusions from some 12,000 or 13,000, and rising, to about 8,600. I congratulate and thank them for that—and, as I have said, we are not setting new targets.

As for the money that the hon. Gentleman describes as a fine, there are some tough decisions to be made. We did something that I would have expected him to welcome: we made local authorities delegate money to schools, so that the schools could use it to try to retain children. That, I think, is the place for the money. It is better for it to be used to help schools develop preventative treatment to stop exclusions than to sit with local education authorities.

If a child is excluded after the money has been devolved to a school, I am adamant that that child will be given a full-time education and not left to roam the streets. Full-time education costs money, but the money has been delegated to schools, and must follow the child back to the local authority and then to the pupil referral unit. I think that that is right. It is delegated money to prevent exclusions, but if a child is excluded, the money guarantees full-time education. Again, I would have thought that the whole House welcomed that.

Student Hardship

7. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What assessment he has made of reports from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in respect of alleviating student hardship. [875]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Our objective is to break down the barriers to wider participation in higher education, so that 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds will enjoy the opportunity of higher education by 2010. Our system of student support provides targeted support for students most in need while balancing, overall, the costs between student, family and taxpayer, but we shall continue to keep that under review, bearing in mind our participation objective and different approaches elsewhere.

Mr. Rendel: Is the Minister aware that, according to a recent Barclays report, the average level of student debt is £6,500 and that that is expected to rise to up to £12,000 within a few years? Given that both the Cubie and Rees reports recommended radical reform of student financing in order to relieve student hardship in Scotland and Wales, do the Government accept that similar radical reform is necessary for English students, so that student hardship can be relieved throughout the United Kingdom?

Margaret Hodge: Many of the surveys that I have looked at since I have been a Minister make for a rather blurred understanding. The issue of student hardship is not as clear as the hon. Gentleman makes it out to be. For example, although students may incur a debt while at university, their earnings after university are 20 per cent. higher than those of people who did not go to university. That means that, over their lifetime, they are likely to earn

£400,000 more. If that is set against the potential debt, it is not a disincentive to participation. Most students recognise the benefit of higher education.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I welcome the suggestion that my hon. Friend intends to keep the situation under review, but does she accept that there is growing evidence in constituencies such as mine that tuition fees are a disincentive to young people to go into higher education in the first place? In keeping the situation under review, will she at least keep her mind open to the possibility that there may be a case for reform in the near future?

Margaret Hodge: I can assure my hon. Friend that I will keep the situation under review. I draw to his attention the fact that, at the start of this autumn term, we expect over 50 per cent. of students not to have to pay tuition fees. We have targeted support, particularly for poor students, by quadrupling the hardship and access fund and by introducing the excellence challenge: a total of £190 million will be available over three years.

I wish that we could to reach our target of increased participation in higher education, which we know is of benefit to individuals, society and the economy, just by dealing with student hardship. The reality is that nine out of 10 young people who achieve two A-levels do participate in higher education. The real challenge is to increase the number of young people achieving two A-levels. That comes under our schools agenda—our 14 to 19 agenda. A particular problem is the haemorrhaging of young people, who achieve five A to Cs at GCSE level and then do not stay on to do further education full time.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must appeal again. I wish no offence to Ministers, but the replies are far too long. I must get through the Order Paper.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the new Department for Education and Skills team and in particular the hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), who had an important part to play in my political career because I was a resident in Islington in the late 1980s when she was presiding over that shambles of a council. Indeed, it led to a legacy in education that resulted in none other than the Prime Minister ensuring that his own children no longer went to Islington schools—but I shall move to a serious point. We shall discuss in the House this afternoon the whole issue in relation to our allowances. *[Interruption.]*

There is an implicit understanding that there are great costs involving staff in central London. May I ask the Minister—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid I shall have to stop the hon. Gentleman.

Adult Basic Skills

8. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): If she will make a statement on her plans to improve adult basic skills. [876]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): The Government are fully committed to helping the estimated one in five adults who do not have adequate literacy, language or numeracy skills. The Prime Minister launched our strategy for improving adult basic skills on 1 March, and our manifesto reaffirmed our intention to help 750,000 adults to achieve basic skills by 2004. We are now working to deliver on that commitment.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, and add my congratulations on her well deserved appointment.

May I remind her of the very interesting proposal in the national strategy for basic skills, which argues the case for a form of paid educational leave for low-paid workers with poor basic skills? Has there been any progress in implementing that proposal? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the principle of paid educational leave could be considered more generally for groups of low-paid workers with poor basic skills?

Estelle Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I share his concern and determination to ensure that low-paid workers can access training in basic skills. Indeed, it is a truism that such workers are probably low paid because they do not have the basic skills; that just makes sense. I should remind my hon. Friend and the House that, under our strategy, basic skills education is free to everybody, whether they are in work, in part-time work or seeking work. One of our biggest challenges is to identify who those people are.

Such people are often not very confident about coming forward to say that they lack basic skills. As my hon. Friend knows, we shall be doing all that we can over the coming months both through pathfinder and through pilot projects to attack the problem at every level—when people turn up for interviews at jobcentres or apply for jobs in workplaces, and when they are not in work. I shall certainly reflect on what my hon. Friend says. As the strategy progresses, we shall no doubt want to return to the matter.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I welcome the new Department for Education and Skills team and the announcements on improving adult basic skills. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Government's major investment in nursery education will also help to prevent children leaving school and becoming young adults without basic skills, and that decisions that she has had to take in that area are a recognition of past failure to identify and address the specific needs of individuals?

Estelle Morris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments. I disagree with him absolutely. Really tackling literacy and numeracy problems is about working with children before they start school, when their language is developing. If they are behind at the age of four or five, they often find it very difficult to catch up. Given our work in early-years education—not just on nursery places but on training staff so that they can teach what is appropriate at that age—together with our literacy and numeracy strategies, I would be immensely disappointed if the same number of adults had problems with basic skills in decades to come. It is a failure of the education

system if people leave school and are still not functionally literate. In that sense, I agree with the hon. Gentleman—the question is very much one of remedial work.

Educational Maintenance Allowances

9. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What plans she has to extend the geographical coverage of educational maintenance allowances. [877]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): Education maintenance allowances are now available in about 30 per cent. of the country as a pilot scheme. Our manifesto said that we would build on that, drawing on the evidence of the pilots. Early results are very encouraging, and we will be considering the case for expansion in the next spending review.

Mr. Grogan: I welcome my hon. Friend to his new post, and urge him to consider extending the education maintenance allowance scheme to every local education authority in time. All evidence suggests that the scheme has been extremely effective in encouraging staying-on rates, particularly for young people from low-income families. If he is minded to have more pilot schemes, will a greater proportion be introduced in rural counties, where participation rates can be as much of a problem as in urban areas? For example, staying-on rates in North Yorkshire declined by six percentage points in the five years to 1999.

Mr. Lewis: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and others who have done so much to draw attention to the plight of coalfield communities, attracting the resources needed to rebuild them after the wanton destruction and neglect under the Conservatives.

We made a conscious decision to pilot educational maintenance allowances, which now cover about 30 per cent. of the country. Early evidence suggests that they are making a significant contribution to supporting young people so that they can stay in education. That is what they are for. We are anxious that, before we make a final decision on whether to extend the allowances throughout the country, we have qualitative evidence to show that they are the most effective way of delivering that objective. We believe that more and more such evidence will emerge. Early indications are indeed very positive, and when we make decisions about the future we will certainly consider the points that my hon. Friend has made.

AS-Levels

10. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If she will make a statement about the AS-level courses. [878]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced a review of the advanced level reforms. An interim report is due by the middle of July. My right hon. Friend will then consider carefully the next steps.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Is it not now evident that the hasty reform of the A-level system was ill conceived and not properly thought through? It has led to chaos in the curriculum in many schools. I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's first decision, I think, on taking office—in which I wish her well—which was to order the urgent review on 13 June. When will the review be completed?

Mr. Lewis: My right hon. Friend did indeed act quickly to respond to the concerns that have been expressed both by young people and by teachers about some teething problems in the implementation of the new reforms. The report is being prepared by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and an interim report will be available by the middle of July. My right hon. Friend intends to act on that report, so that we can put in place the necessary changes, where possible in time for September.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Many parents hope that their children will have passed their GCSEs and will go on to A-levels in the autumn. I welcome the review, but I hope that it will consider extracurricular activities for such young people, as that is an important part of their development, and examine the difficulties of trying to create a hybrid of a baccalauréat and a gold-standard A-level system.

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the concerns that have been expressed. That is why my right hon. Friend commissioned the review, part of which will be about extra-curricular activities. We intend to make clear to schools in time for September what needs to be done to ensure that the implementation of the reforms runs far more smoothly in future.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box, but I have to tell him that parents, pupils and teachers will have been outraged by his complacent response in describing the difficulties that they have been suffering over AS-levels as "some teething problems". I can assure him that they feel that, over the past year, far from some teething problems, they have had every single tooth drawn slowly without anaesthetic. I hope that he will apologise to pupils, parents and teachers throughout the country for that remark, and join me in congratulating students and teachers on their hard work and perseverance. They now need the confidence and comfort of knowing that there will be no problems with their AS-level results. Will he guarantee that there are sufficient markers in place for the examinations and that all the results will be published on 16 August?

Mr. Lewis: How can it be complacent to commission an urgent review of AS-levels, which was my right hon. Friend's first act immediately after the general election? Many people have said in recent weeks that the principles of the A-level reforms are absolutely right. In fact, they build on proposals that first emerged in 1996, when the hon. Lady's party was in government. With regard to A-level reforms and their effect, let me quote from a couple of school principals and head teachers. Peter Newcombe, principal of Franklin college, Grimsby, said:

"Students at my college have responded magnificently to the challenge and range of opportunities. Most have successfully sustained four AS levels and they have chosen subjects that broaden and deepen their experience."

Chris Henstock, the head teacher at Lutterworth upper school in Leicestershire, said:

"Fundamentally, I think the curriculum changes are a good thing. I have seen a lot more of my pupils doing a variety of subjects."

There is no doubt that the vast majority of people believe that the principles behind the A-level reforms are absolutely right and that they are in the best interests of young people in this country. We are determined that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister has made his point.

Schools (Devon)

13. **Mr. Anthony Steen** (Totnes): What assessment she has made of the need to build new schools in Devon in the next five years. [882]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): It is not for the Government to dictate how schools are organised locally. It is the duty of local education authorities to ensure that there are sufficient school places. We believe that decisions on the organisation of school places are best taken at that local level, with the knowledge of local needs.

Mr. Steen: First, may I congratulate the Minister on getting where he is? However, he can do better than that answer. Is he aware that secondary school children in my constituency are being bussed 40 miles a day? They are spending three to four hours a day in a bus because there are not sufficient school places near their homes. That is not acceptable to anyone. With 90,000 new homes being built in Devon, there will be even more bussing, which is expensive. We cannot have a bussing society such as exists in the United States. What is the Minister going to do to ensure that new schools are built before the new homes? There is no shortage of money, according to the Government. We need a system that ensures that new schools and infrastructure are in place before the new houses are built and people are allowed to live in them.

John Healey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments, but I urge him to take this matter up with the Devon local education authority, whose school plan predicts a shortfall of secondary school places of about 2,000 by 2003-04. However, I repeat that it is not for Whitehall to work out where those school places should be provided, and I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman would want that. We can—and will—contribute to the funding for those new school places, as we have done since the last election. In that time, Devon LEA has received more than £96 million in capital funding.

City Secondary Schools (Standards)

14. **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): What further measures the Government plans to take to raise standards in city secondary schools. [883]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): We are committed to transforming secondary education in this country. Through the forthcoming education Bill, we will be putting in place legislation to create a more diverse system that can provide high standards of education for all our children, and meet their individual needs in cities and in every part of the country.

Valerie Davey: I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his post, and thank him for his reply. In Bristol, the city council has depended on, and built on, the collaborative work of the excellence in schools initiative. However, Bristol's diverse nature has led the council to undertake a citywide review of secondary provision. Will my hon. Friend and his Department give the support and encouragement that this creative but demanding initiative requires?

Mr. Timms: We are well aware of the developments in Bristol, and are very encouraged by the steps that have been taken to achieve improvements in the way that the LEA supports its schools. We are also very heartened by the progress of Excellence in Cities in Bristol, which has been involved in that initiative since September 2000. I know that 20 secondary schools are involved. In Bristol and elsewhere, we are detecting real progress being made in dealing with some of the long-standing problems that have faced secondary schooling our cities.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new Government position. He is one of the most courteous and caring of Ministers and I wish him well. Does he accept that one of the ways to raise standards in city secondary schools in particular would be to encourage firm discipline, because in a disciplined environment young people are much more inclined to learn and to gain the benefit of good teaching? Does he believe that discipline in city secondary schools is of the utmost importance in raising standards?

Mr. Timms: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and agree that pupil behaviour is an important topic. We will address that in the White Paper, and we have taken some important steps to improve the position. This year, for example, we are providing £174 million to address poor behaviour in schools: 10 times the level of 1997. It is a matter that we will need to keep under close review.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Domestic Violence

37. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): If she will make a statement on the policy of the Crown Prosecution Service on prosecuting crimes of domestic violence. [909]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Crown Prosecution Service will publish new policy guidance for prosecutors on domestic violence this autumn. Further to the initial consultation, there will be extensive consultation on this guidance with the police, local government, voluntary organisations and the courts, and the Attorney-General and I will be consulting on domestic violence with our ministerial colleagues—

in particular with the Ministers with responsibility for women, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office.

Judy Mallaber: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on her well deserved appointment and thank her for the urgency with which she is tackling a most traumatic and difficult issue in respect of which there are still low levels of successful prosecutions. On Friday, I attended a good multi-agency conference on domestic abuse at Derbyshire police headquarters. Will my right hon. and learned Friend take account of the point made to me there, which was that although dedicated domestic abuse police officers have been created over the past six years—encouraging the CPS to take a more proactive line—those involved are still frustrated at the cases that are dropped? In drawing up the guidance, will she urge the CPS to be prepared to use section 23 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which allows the admission of written statements when witnesses feel that they cannot attend court because of a well founded terror of further reprisals by the perpetrators of their abuse?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend raises a number of important issues, and I thank her for her kind comments. I wish to take this opportunity to pay the warmest of tributes to my predecessor. I hope and expect that he will continue to play an important role in this House generally, and in relation to the legal issues on which he is most expert.

My hon. Friend raises a number of issues, including the low level of prosecutions arising from domestic violence. We are not clear as to what the conviction rate is on domestic violence, the number of prosecutions that take place or the number that are discontinued half way through. The CPS is undergoing a review of the statistics, so that these issues, which are very important, can be monitored. My hon. Friend talked about the police in her county having a dedicated domestic violence officer who is responsible. That will happen also in the CPS, and will be in the guidance. The issue will be taken very seriously indeed.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I congratulate the Solicitor-General on her return to the Government and on this particular and important appointment. In welcoming the multi-agency approach that she has just described, will she confirm that she intends to liaise closely with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and to ensure thereby that the CPS is well aware of the significance of the contents of the Homelessness Bill in terms of improving the treatment of and opportunities for women who have suffered domestic violence and are at risk of losing their homes?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. There are the obvious Departments that are involved in this issue, but many others are involved, including the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills, which is concerned with protecting children in households where there is domestic violence. The Attorney-General and I will take up the hon. Gentleman's important point.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend to her new post. Is she aware of a successful initiative employed in Sweden in which the police, when called to a domestic violence incident, immediately video the victim and any injuries that she has sustained, and the surroundings in which the incident has taken place, and then use that in court? This has increased the number of perpetrators pleading guilty and the number of convictions. Are there any plans or pilots to employ such methods here, and would that evidence be admissible in court?

The Solicitor-General: That is something that is being considered by the Crown Prosecution Service, which is working closely with the police on this issue. It is possible to use in court photographs, including videos, of any injuries that have taken place, but it is also necessary to prove how those injuries were occasioned. Those issues will be addressed in the guidance.

As hon. Members know, we must take domestic violence seriously. Yesterday, I visited the CPS in Hampshire and was told that a quarter of all the assaults in that area are domestic violence. It is an important issue and will be a priority for the CPS, working with the police.

Crown Prosecution Service

38. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What plans she has to reform the structure of the Crown Prosecution Service. [910]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS is currently undertaking the restructuring proposed in the Glidewell report. As well as structural improvements, the CPS is recruiting more lawyers and administrative staff with the extra resources that have been allocated. The CPS is an important public service and a key part of the criminal justice system. It needs to be properly funded, properly structured and able to get on with its work.

Mr. Swayne: Absolutely. Will the right hon. and learned Lady assure the House that the reforms that she will put in place will address the criticisms of many victims, and an increasing number of police officers, that the CPS has been fumbling its case load?

The Solicitor-General: There have been several problems with organisation, and those are being addressed through closer work with the police; with understaffing, which has been a long-term problem both among lawyers and among administrative staff; and with low morale as a result of those problems. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise that we need an effective, efficient and fair prosecution system as part of building confidence in the criminal justice process. The restructuring is under way and the resources are being put in, and we all want to be sure that we have the best possible outcome.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I shall not express my congratulations again to my right hon. and learned

Friend, because I did so in my maiden speech last week. What measures does she intend to take to tackle racism in the CPS? I hope that she, too, feels concern about what has been going on in the CPS, as reported in the media recently.

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and I have a clear view on that matter: we must be certain that equality of opportunity operates in the CPS and that there is no tolerance of racial discrimination. That is important as a matter of principle in a public service employer, but it is also essential, for the CPS to be able to do its job, that people in local communities and from different ethnic minorities know that they can turn to the service if they are a victim and, if defendants, know that they will receive fair treatment. The Denman report on those issues is with the CPS now, and will be published shortly.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I join others in congratulating the Solicitor-General on her recent appointment? It marks her return to the Front Bench after four years and to the practice of law after 20. Her appointment to silk is probably unprecedented. Does she see her role as more than simply being politically accountable for the CPS and its budget, and if so, when does she expect to be in a position to appear in the higher courts here, and in the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of the CPS or the Government?

The Solicitor-General: As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, there are different aspects to the jobs of the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General. In one dimension, the hon. and learned Gentleman is correct: the supervision of the CPS is like the supervision of the police by a Home Office Minister. The Attorney-General and I are also responsible for consents to prosecution and moving contempt, and in that respect we operate in the public interest. We also act as lawyer advisers to Government. None of those roles necessitates appearing in the higher courts or, indeed, any courts at all. If the hon. and learned Gentleman was shocked to discover that I was a Queen's counsel, he should imagine the surprise I felt on discovering myself in Lord Bingham's full-bottomed wig, dressed up as if I were appearing in a restoration comedy.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I congratulate the new Solicitor-General on her appointment; I also pay tribute to her predecessor, the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), and put on record my thanks to him for his unfailing courtesy and conscientiousness. We now have a new Attorney-General. He is, I understand, an able lawyer, but he has, of course, failed the acid test: he has not been validated by a constituency of the British people, and is not accountable to this House.

The Prime Minister has now appointed three Law Officers from the other House—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must put a question to the Solicitor-General. I am not looking for a speech now.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. I have made my point about the appointment of the Attorney-General, and I shall now revert to the point made by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda). There was a report in *The Independent* two weeks ago about racism in the Crown Prosecution Service. Those are important allegations, and I would like to know where the report is, when it will be put into the public domain and what the Solicitor-General's views on it are.

The Solicitor-General: The Denman report is completed; it is with the Crown Prosecution Service and will shortly be published. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is also a Commission for Racial Equality investigation into the Crown Prosecution Service in Croydon, and that, as a public service, we have the responsibility to implement the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Many issues need to be brought together into focus to ensure that, for the reasons that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda), we go forward positively, with no discrimination, and with equality of opportunity.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) also raised the issue of the accountability of the Law Officers. The Attorney-General is accountable to the House of Lords and I am accountable to the House of Commons. If the hon. Gentleman has any points of substance to make about that, no doubt he will raise them. I think that it is important to have a Law Officer in each House, so that the Law Officers are accountable to both Houses.

Business of the House

12.32 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House give the business for the coming week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 9 JULY—Second Reading of the Export Control Bill.

TUESDAY 10 JULY—Second Reading of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Motion to approve the draft special education needs code of practice.

WEDNESDAY 11 JULY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill (1st Day).

At 10 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

THURSDAY 12 JULY—Opposition Day [1st Allotted Day]. Until about four o'clock, there will be a debate on post-16 education followed by a debate entitled "The Countryside in Crisis". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

FRIDAY 13 JULY—Debate on small firms on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week is:

MONDAY 16 JULY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

Motions to approve the membership of Select Committees.

Motion to approve the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 2001.

TUESDAY 17 JULY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill (2nd Day).

WEDNESDAY 18 JULY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill (3rd Day).

THURSDAY 19 JULY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

FRIDAY 20 JULY—Motion on the summer recess Adjournment.

Mrs. Browning: I thank the Leader of the House. Can he tell us when the Home Secretary is likely to come to the Chamber, especially as Members will have questions for him about the announcement of the Government's response to the Halliday review on sentencing policy, which he will make today at a conference? In a written answer yesterday, he said that that was how he intended to put that information in the public domain. However, there is very limited time before the House rises for the summer recess, and this is an important subject. The House deserves an opportunity to hear at first hand from the Home Secretary and to put questions to him.

Equally, we heard this week of the Government's intention to change the legislation in respect of entitlement to incapacity benefit. Before that is debated in the Chamber, will the Leader of the House arrange for consultation with Members of Parliament on both sides of the House, as many of us are already receiving correspondence from concerned constituents about how this will affect them?

Is there any intention to ensure that the House receives a statement on the future of the tube and, if not, will the right hon. Gentleman make it his personal business to ensure that that happens? Given that negotiations have broken down on how the reform of the tube is to be taken forward, which has caused great confusion, and given the high priority that the Government have placed on improving the tube, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us when the House can expect a statement on how this is to go forward?

Last Tuesday, the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) asked the Minister for Local Government about the timetable for bringing forward legislation to introduce regional government. We understand that the Government are to produce a White Paper, and the Minister indicated in his response to the right hon. Member for Hartlepool that consultation is currently taking place. Will the Leader of the House ensure that all Members of Parliament are privy to the consultation that is taking place prior to the White Paper, as many of us wish to make our views known in advance of its publication?

Finally, the Leader of the House announced that next Thursday the Conservative party has, yet again, chosen to allocate Opposition time to debating foot and mouth. The Government have yet to provide Government time for a full debate on foot and mouth. When the crisis started, the then Agriculture Minister stated that he could not participate in such a long debate because he was too busy dealing with the crisis. Now that we are told by the Government that we are on the home straight, perhaps the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs could honour the House with some time, in Government time, so that right hon. and hon. Members can ask their questions.

Mr. Cook: I thank the hon. Lady, and shall respond to her questions in the order in which she put them.

On the Home Secretary's statement in response to the Halliday report, the hon. Lady will be aware that there is a debate on youth justice in Westminster Hall on 19 July. That will be a perfectly appropriate opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to raise questions on the Halliday report and sentencing. Plainly, it must be right for the Government to act as quickly as they can on a report that spells out that prison sentences should be used and targeted on those who are severe repeat offenders and that shorter prison sentences should be combined with rehabilitation and community provision. There will, of course, be a consultation process on the Halliday report, and I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will wish to take part in it.

There will have to be legislation before any of the proposed changes on entitlement to incapacity benefit take place. I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will have an extended period of consultation with right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House about those proposals.

It may help the hon. Lady and others in responding to the approaches to which she referred if I make it clear that any proposals that are made to change the rules on

[Mr. Cook]

incapacity benefit by legislation would apply only to new claimants subsequent to that legislation. Therefore, any change in legislation will not have an impact on current claimants. I am pleased to say that my right hon. Friend confirmed that to me this morning.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will be making a written statement to the House very shortly. We are looking for a way forward. There is an enormous sum of investment available for London Underground. The funds available from Treasury and private sources amount in total to some £13,000 million—that is £4,000 per household within the London region. It is deeply frustrating that we cannot secure the agreement that we need with London Transport and London Underground so that we can proceed with that massive investment, which many other parts of Britain would be very glad to receive.

The hon. Lady also asked about the timetable for publication of the forthcoming White Paper. I can assure her that all right hon. and hon. Members will know about the White Paper's publication and will be able to take part in consultation.

In conclusion, I thought that the hon. Lady was uncharacteristically ungenerous to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In the short space of time since the Queen's Speech, there may not have been an opportunity for a debate on foot and mouth in Government time, but the first statement to the House this Session was on foot and mouth and my right hon. Friend made it at the first available opportunity. I do not think that anybody can fairly accuse her of having failed to take every opportunity to keep the House informed of progress.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we have a debate on early-day motion 60?

[That this House deplores the misleading television advertisements of loan consolidation companies who promise debt relief by combining debts into a single manageable payment; notes that they increase, usually by more than 15 per cent., the total debts of their clients and lengthen the period of indebtedness; and urges restrictions on their misleading claims and a wider understanding of the similar services provided at no charge by the Citizens Advice Bureau.]

The early-day motion refers to the activities of so-called loan consolidation companies that purport to solve debt problems by rolling up debts into a single manageable payment. The result of their activities is usually to drive their client into deeper debt and to give the impression to many others who might risk debt that there is an easy way out. Can we have a debate so that we can advertise the danger of the activities of these companies and the fact that citizens advice bureaux and the Consumer Credit Counselling Service offer the services entirely free?

Mr. Cook: I fully share my hon. Friend's concern about this issue. I have had distressing constituency cases of people being tempted into further debt and then discovering that the debt repayments greatly exceed anything that hon. Members would ever contemplate entering into. Those who have become caught in that way feel unfairly trapped. I am pleased to say that the Director General of Fair Trading is consulting on the prospect of issuing guidelines to debt management companies. Those guidelines must highlight the importance of giving comprehensible and high-profile warning of what the debt repayment would be.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I warmly welcome the clarification that the Leader of the House has just given us on incapacity benefit. Hon. Members on both sides of the House would have benefited if the Prime Minister had made such a clear statement yesterday in answer to a question on the issue. It by no means seemed to be in his mind yesterday that the proposal would not apply to existing claimants. I hope that the Leader of the House will note how important it is for statements to be made to the House in full detail on issues of this sort. This is yet another illustration of that.

On sentencing policy, the Leader of the House should note that the Home Secretary's answer to a planted question last night was wholly inadequate—there was no detail whatsoever—yet the detail that the Home Secretary gave to the "Today" programme this morning was very full indeed.

Will the Leader of the House look again at the issue of making statements to this House? He will recall that you, Mr. Speaker, and your predecessor on many occasions deprecated the practice of Ministers appearing on the "Today" programme and making detailed statements there, where they were subjected to the questioning of journalists only, while this House did not have an opportunity to put those questions. As Leader of the House, the right hon. Gentleman has a right and a duty to defend the rights of this House. I ask him, as I did a fortnight ago, please to look particularly at this issue. If Ministers go on saying that Parliament has lost the respect of the public, they are simply contributing to it if they think that Mr. John Humphrys, Mr. Jim Naughtie or even Miss Sue MacGregor are more important than we are in this House.

Mr. Cook: I would disagree with the idea that I hold that view. If my right hon. Friend was able to give a full answer on the "Today" programme this morning, I congratulate him, because I could never get through a full answer on that programme.

The hon. Gentleman raises an important consideration. I draw attention to the fact that the Halliday report is now out for consultation. The Government are not taking a decision on it—it would be wrong to do so until consultation finishes. That consultation will continue until 31 October, by which time the House will have recommenced and there will be a fresh opportunity for Members to table questions and pursue the issue.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): May I pursue the point that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has just raised? Does the Leader of the House accept that there is an issue of principle here, in that we have been elected to the House to scrutinise Government actions, so Government initiatives and statements should come first to this House? Even though the paper is out for consultation, the House should have the opportunity to raise the first questions with the Government. That is what we have been elected to do. Does the Leader of the House accept that overall position? Will he do all he can to

persuade the Government in this Parliament to make a principled stand as a matter of course always to bring initiatives and statements to this Chamber first?

Mr. Cook: I am all in favour of principled stands and will certainly seek to ensure that, where appropriate, statements are made to the House. A balance has to be struck, however. The House has much business to commence with, and if my hon. Friend goes through the business that I have just announced he will see that on many of those occasions it would be inappropriate to make a statement before the House, because it would interfere either with a programme motion or with Opposition business. However, bearing in mind those constraints, I am of course always in favour of the House being fully informed and having as many statements as possible.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Can we test the good will of the Leader of the House on the statement that he has just made? Will he give us an assurance that next week the Government will not make important announcements about their policy without first making a statement to the House of Commons?

Mr. Cook: If there are strategic statements that represent new policy, the House is the place that would hear of that first. In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, he did that by way of a written statement—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Oh, come on!

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman groans, but to make a written statement is an entirely well trodden, well known and well accepted method of informing the House. If we allow Ministers to make only oral statements, with no written statements, there will be little time for other debate in the House.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 23 on missile defence?

[*That this House expresses concern at President Bush's intention to move beyond the constraints of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in developing missile defence; and endorses the unanimous conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, which recommended that the Government voice the grave doubts about NMD in the UK, questioned whether US plans to deploy NMD represent an appropriate response to the proliferation problems faced by the international community and recommended that the Government encourage the USA to explore all ways of reducing the threat it perceives.*]

I urge the Leader of the House to make time for a debate on disarmament so that the House may examine President Bush's proposals for national missile defence. Among other things, the House should explore the fact that the technology is wholly unproven and that it is almost certainly in breach of existing disarmament treaties; that the threat posed to America by a nuclear strike from North Korea is risible; and that the proposals have been opposed by Russia, China and most EU states. It is surely appropriate that the House has a chance to debate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I say to the hon. Lady and to the House that business questions should be short and not statements of policy?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that there will be opportunities for hon. Members to raise the concerns articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). Indeed, she and others have expressed those concerns on a number of occasions. However, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that although she refers to President Bush's proposals, we currently have no specific proposal—partly owing to the fact that, as she points out, the technology is still under examination and assessment. For instance, we do not know at present whether the system will be sea or land-based. Whether it is based on sea or on land will have a big impact on the extent—if any—to which facilities in the United Kingdom are required. It would be premature of the Government to make a hard and fast rule.

I advise my hon. Friend not to diminish the very real threat of nuclear missile proliferation—she understates the technological capacity of North Korea. However, the House would be right to be worried about the proliferation of ballistic missile technology.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to come to the House as a matter of urgency to make a statement on what is going on with regard to the redundancies at the Marconi companies that affect so many of our constituents? Is the Leader of the House aware that the company is releasing information in dribs and drabs? It is desperately unfair for constituents, such as mine in Chelmsford and in the constituencies of other hon. Members, that they have to go to work today not knowing whether they will be out of work by the end of the day or at some time early next week because the company will not make a full announcement.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the unease, concern and worry of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. Having been through a similar experience with Motorola in my own area, I know how desperately unsettling it is for members of staff not to have full information on what may happen to their plant. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are in contact with the company and are pressing for full details of its plans. We are also seeking contact with local partners, both from the Employment Service and local authorities, so that we are ready to respond once we are clearer about what precisely the company may propose for its British work force.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Is my right hon. Friend aware that an inquiry is under way into very serious allegations about poor conditions and intimidation experienced by asylum seekers at the Landmark and the Inn on the Park tower blocks in Liverpool? Does he have any information on the progress of those inquiries and on when they are likely to be

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

concluded? Will he consider holding a debate on the treatment of vulnerable asylum seekers—a very important subject?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the complaints that a number of the asylum seekers at the Landmark facilities have made about their treatment. I am also aware of their threat to go on hunger strike if those issues are not addressed. As my hon. Friend is aware, the Home Office is conducting a thorough investigation. I assure her that it will be thorough and that we want to make clear what has happened in this case and to learn the lessons from it. My noble Friend Lord Rooker would be very willing to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the case if she wished to pursue it with him.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the proposed business for next Tuesday—namely, the Second Reading of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill? In view of the talks on the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly, decommissioning and the peace process, which will presumably involve the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland political parties on Monday, Tuesday and perhaps even Wednesday of next week, would it not be inappropriate to hold that important debate on that occasion, as, no doubt, Northern Ireland elected representatives would like to express their views on the issue? Will the Leader of the House consider deferring the debate for a week?

Mr. Cook: I have announced the business for next week, and I have announced that debate on Tuesday at the request of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is plainly confident that he can attend the debate and play his full part in it. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we ensure that the election system in Northern Ireland, and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, is above reproach, fairly administered and cannot be abused. Whatever view people take on the peace process, it is important that such a Bill should be put in place, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is confident that he can accommodate it next week.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to come to the House next week to explain how increasing the anxiety and insecurity of those people who have had to pass a stringent personal capability test to receive a meagre £69-a-week incapacity benefit helps them to take advantage of the opportunities available through the new deal to help them to overcome the discrimination that they suffer in the labour market? Before he does so, will he reacquaint himself with what he and my right hon. Friend now the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said in opening and closing speeches in debates on social security legislation introduced when Baroness Thatcher was Prime Minister?

Mr. Cook: I remember that period well, and I am glad that it is behind us. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend fully took in the point that I made earlier in my comment to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning).

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Repeat it.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend clamours for a repeat, and I am always happy to repeat it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions assured me this morning that the new legislation would, of course, apply only to new claimants, as is common with social security legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) can therefore provide reassurance to those who may be expressing unease to her.

On the issue of principle, I must say that my hon. Friend and I fought the election on a manifesto in which it was made quite explicit that we would help back into employment those who could work and who would prefer to work. We should not lose sight of the fact that 1 million people currently on disability benefits say, when asked, that they would prefer to be at work, and it should be the function of government to help them and support them in finding work.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that what he has just said and what he said earlier are suspiciously like a definitive response to the pressure placed on the Prime Minister by the hon. Members for Walsall, North (David Winnick) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) yesterday? Can we have absolute clarification by having the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions come to the Dispatch Box next week to explain in detail to the House precisely what he has in mind?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that a debate will start in Westminster Hall in an hour and a half on the role of the Department for Work and Pensions, to which a Minister from the Department will respond. If hon. Members wish to pursue clarification, they have plenty of opportunity to do so this afternoon, although I anticipate that many hon. Members will wish to be in their place for the full debate that we shall have in the Chamber.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Despite his previous answers, could not the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on incapacity benefit to be made at the earliest opportunity by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, so that the fears of some of my most vulnerable constituents—entirely justified fears, given the somewhat insensitive manner in which the issue has been introduced to the public arena—can be set to rest?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has expressed concerns that I hope the statement that I have just made will go some way to addressing. Hon. Members are now perfectly able to say to their constituents that any change in legislation will not alter the basis on which incapacity benefit is received by current claimants.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Leader of the House assist me? I was lucky enough to secure an Adjournment debate yesterday in which the question was raised as to who has the power to close footpaths outside infected areas in counties such as North Yorkshire.

The point was made to the Minister for Rural Affairs that the Government should take such decisions. The Minister said that it was the responsibility of local authorities, but North Yorkshire county council is under the firm impression that this is the Government's responsibility. Will the Minister for Rural Affairs come to the Dispatch Box at the earliest opportunity to clarify the matter?

Mr. Cook: I am no legal expert, but my understanding has always been that it was the primary responsibility of the local authority. Indeed, local authorities across England have been acting on that assumption over the past three or four months. However, if there is any doubt about the matter, I shall arrange for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs to write to the hon. Lady to clarify it.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the shameless way in which the Conservative leadership and some Conservative candidates exploited the sensitive issues of immigration and asylum in the run-up to the general election?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. I must remind him that these are business questions, and that he should be asking questions about the business for next week. If he has not a question on that, I shall move on.

Mr. Prosser: Will my right hon. Friend make a statement on those issues, so that we can discuss the behaviour at the general election? Will he also take the opportunity to celebrate the fact that, last weekend, we celebrated our first-ever multicultural festival in the town square in Dover, and that a good time was had by one and all?

Mr. Cook: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I suspect that I should be in some trouble if I attempted to make the statement that my hon. Friend tempts me to make. I said what I wished to say on the matter at the time, and it was well reported. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the action being taken in Dover to promote and celebrate the strength of Britain as a multicultural society.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Can we have a debate next week on the constitutional position of the Prime Minister? The Leader of the House will have noticed that, over the past few days, when the Prime Minister has talked about the privatisation of public services, about the star wars project, about taking money away from disabled people or about giving money to Railtrack executives, he has received no support whatsoever from the those on the Government Benches, but an enormous amount of support from the Tory Benches. Would it be constitutionally possible for the Prime Minister to cross the Floor? Could we have a debate about it?

Mr. Cook: More frequently, we are accused of using our record majority in a way that is inconsistent with parliamentary democracy. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman will notice that, even as I speak, Conservative Members are agreeing with that. They cannot have it both ways: they cannot simultaneously complain about a record majority and a lack of support for the Prime Minister.

Throughout this Parliament, we will carry through the programme on which we were elected. We will ensure that we improve public services in schools, hospitals and transport, and that we carry through a programme of welfare reform that helps those who want to work and can work, and protects those who are unable to work. On that, the Prime Minister has the full support of this side of the House.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the Government's youth policy in general? Too often, we debate youth justice and other matters that paint a negative image of our young people. However, I know from campaigning recently that we need to look at the services that are available to those young people, including recreation and sports provision. I believe that we could devote more time in here to discussing matters that affect young people in general.

Mr. Cook: I very much share my hon. Friend's emphasis on ensuring that we provide properly targeted, sensitive policies for young people, and he will welcome the fact that that is reflected in the changes made to the machinery of government after the election. We now have a new Cabinet Committee on children and young people's services and, for the first time, a Minister with responsibility for young people—my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs—has been appointed. That will enable us to focus and target our services and policies on young people. Just before the election, we set out a strategy for children and young people on which consultation is taking place, so my hon. Friend and others will have an opportunity to feed in their views.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The Leader of the House has had a long and distinguished career representing a Scottish constituency in this place. Will he arrange an urgent debate to give us the benefit of that experience and his wisdom, with particular regard to the West Lothian question? In the light of his new responsibilities and in respect of both his long experience and distinguished service here as a great parliamentarian and of any previous pronouncements he may have made on the subject, we would all find it very interesting to hear what he thinks about and what answer he or the Government have to the West Lothian question.

Mr. Cook: I very much appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's observations on my experience, although when he makes such comments I wish that he would make them sound a little less like an obituary. On the question of the participation of Scottish Members in the House, as I said last week and the week before, this is a unitary Chamber. All Members have equal rights. I do not remember respect being paid to the sensitivity of Scottish political preferences when he was in government.

David Wright (Telford): May I ask my right hon. Friend for an early debate on housing and regeneration policy? The quality of some local housing estates was a key issue in the election campaign in my constituency. Many are still in local authority ownership, but some have transferred to other landlords. There is a clear difficulty in co-ordinating services on many such estates and the funding regimes that can regenerate them are often

[David Wright]

difficult to assemble and labyrinthine in nature. May we have an early debate on simplifying funding regimes for housing estates to draw together a range of partners and make genuine improvements for local people?

On the Woodside estate in my constituency, local people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will improve his chances of being called more frequently if he keeps his questions brief and concise. He has said enough to enable the Leader of the House to respond.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises serious issues and raises them—

Mr. Forth: At length.

Mr. Cook: No, in penetrating detail. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's comments are conveyed to the appropriate Secretary of State. We began this Session with the Homelessness Bill and there will be further opportunities to legislate on housing. He and others will be welcome to express their views in those debates.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Why does the Leader of the House think it appropriate to announce in a written answer the fact that the Transport Commissioner for London finds unacceptable the future of the tube as set out in the policy of Her Majesty's Government? Does not that announcement represent a gross insult to the people of London, who have suffered for four long years and more from the unworkable proposals for London's transport system made by Her Majesty's Government?

Mr. Cook: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the commissioner made his views clear earlier this week. There were exchanges about that at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, and a full statement has been made today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I am bound to say that I think it appropriate that such a response has been made and I am not necessarily persuaded that I should accept the precedent that when the Transport Commissioner for London makes a statement, an oral statement should also be made to the House.

We are the ones who are looking for the way forward; the commissioner has said that he cannot see a way forward. I repeat that £13 billion of investment is available to Londoners to improve the underground, and it is regrettable that the commissioner cannot find a way to access and use the moneys available to him. Most other local authorities in Britain would find a way round the problem.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Further to the comments of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), my right hon. Friend will be aware that this week there have been a number of disturbing press reports on the recession in manufacturing industry and a downturn in the electronics industry. Given the importance of those industries to the UK economy, while I welcome the debate on small businesses, when will the House have an opportunity to discuss the future of manufacturing per se in the UK?

Mr. Cook: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's concern about the present difficulties in the electronics industry. As I said earlier, I have personal experience of that with the Motorola closure in West Lothian. Manufacturing industry is continuing to perform well in terms of both output and productivity, but there are particular problems in the electronics sector. It is open to right hon. and hon. Members to raise these issues whenever we debate economics and industry, which we did only last week. However, I can assure my hon. Friend that I will draw her comments to the attention of my appropriate colleagues and we will consider having such a debate in future.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): When the Leader of the House makes his business statement next week, will he be in a position to indicate which, if any, Government Bills this year will be draft Bills published and subjected thereafter to pre-legislative scrutiny under the Select Committee system? May I suggest as an appropriate candidate the clauses on incapacity benefit in the welfare reform Bill?

Mr. Cook: On the general principle, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that in the Queen's Speech we announced four Bills for draft legislation, which will be brought before the House. I have said before that I would like the House to move towards a two-year rolling programme on legislation, with the opportunity for Members and outside bodies to comment on draft legislation in advance of it being included in the subsequent Queen's Speech. That would make for better legislation, and it would have a better passage through the House. We are already in the second year of what might some day be a two-year rolling programme. Therefore, unless we bring forward for Second Reading debate and legislation the current Bills in the Queen's Speech, we shall have a long delay in introducing some measures that are very important to Members and their constituents.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on domestic energy prices? Many pensioners in my constituency are facing a 25 per cent. increase in their gas bills because they are supplied by a dedicated subsidiary of Eastern. Eastern is itself owned by Texas, so decisions that are made thousands of miles away affect people living in Havering. This is all entirely due to privatisation and deregulation, which was brought about by the previous lot, but now we have to deal with it. May we have a debate or a statement?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the problems of pensioners, and he will be aware that we have set out a strategy for tackling fuel poverty among pensioners and others. The primary impetus behind the current round of gas price increases from last April was the increase in the wholesale price of gas, which distributors can no longer avoid passing on to consumers. The average increase has been not 25 per cent., but 5 per cent. and my hon. Friend may wish to draw that to the attention of his local distributor; and gas prices overall in the United Kingdom are still 10 per cent.

down on what they were in May 1997. However, I fully appreciate that certain consumers such as pensioners are facing difficulties, which is why we are trying to target on them our strategy to try to end fuel poverty.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Would the Leader of the House consider an early debate on the state of industrial relations at the Post Office, because the other problems faced by that organisation affect us all and very few of them will be resolved until the underlying problems are tackled?

Mr. Cook: These are problems that must be addressed by the Post Office and its unions: it is for them to try to seek to find a way forward. I am not persuaded that a debate in the House would necessarily help either side find a solution.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the activities of cable companies and other utilities? They are causing huge unnecessary disruption to road users, and I recently learned of the disruption that they are causing to our environment. They are digging up grass verges and not putting them back properly, which means that they cannot be cut, and sometimes they leave equipment around, causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. They are preventing grass verges from being cut right across Swindon, so may we please find time for a debate on the wider issues arising from the activities of cable companies and other utilities?

Mr. Cook: I have sympathy with my hon. Friend's point, as I almost missed the Cabinet meeting because of street works on my way there. Such works not only cause individuals enormous inconvenience, but are a big economic cost to the nation, estimated at £2.5 billion a year. We have just taken legal powers for local authorities to enter into contracts and deadlines with utilities carrying out street works, which provide for fines if the deadlines are not met. I am pleased to say that in the short time since those legal powers have been available, 100 local authorities have said that they intend to use them. I hope that that will result in an improvement, and will reduce disruption to the lives of constituents.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): In view of the big climbdown on disability benefits that the Leader of the House has announced, cannot he see that there must be a ministerial statement to tell us why the Government trust existing but not future disability claimants? Will he give us an assurance that the Prime Minister will from now on visit the Terrace more often, in the hope that the Government's unpopular policies will be modified by such action?

Mr. Cook: I would encourage all Members to visit the Terrace, and I hope to do so when we manage to conclude the pressing business of the Leader of the House over the past two weeks. I stress that the proposal on incapacity benefit is intended not, as the right hon. Gentleman suggested, to distress new claimants by putting them in a state of uncertainty, but to ensure that, if they wish and are able to do so, they can open the door to employment. Those who cannot work and are incapacitated will continue to get benefit and have nothing to fear.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 42, on television coverage of the British Lions tour?

[*That this House notes that television viewers without access to subscription TV in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be unable to view even highlights of the Rugby Union test series between the British Lions and Australia; regrets the fact that BSkyB was prepared to do a deal involving highlights only with S4C and not the BBC; and urges the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to consider adding future test matches involving the British Lions to category B of the listed events which would mean highlights would be available to a wide audience.*]

I am concerned that, although Australian terrestrial television viewers have been able to see live coverage of the opening overs of the Ashes test series in the past couple of hours, terrestrial viewers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland cannot see even the highlights of the British Lions' games. If there is not time for a debate on this important issue, will my right hon. Friend at least draw the early-day motion to the attention of the Secretary of State?

Mr. Cook: I very much doubt whether a debate in the House would alter the grave situation to which my hon. Friend draws the House's attention. He has made his point, and I hope that it will be registered with the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Will the Leader of the House find an early opportunity for a debate on policing in Northern Ireland? He will be aware of the demoralisation of the police force in Northern Ireland, which has been accentuated by the recent discussions between the Government and republicans with a view to making further concessions to them. Such a debate would provide an early opportunity for the Government to set the Royal Ulster Constabulary's mind at rest and to make a statement on the long-term future of the RUC reserve.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that that matter has been much debated in the House. We set up an independent commission to review the RUC. It made its report, and we have acted to implement its recommendations. Those actions were taken to encourage consensus and support for the RUC. I fear that we will have a number of opportunities in the immediate future to return to Northern Irish politics and issues, during which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends can make their comments on the police. As he will understand, the current priority of the Northern Ireland Office is to ensure that we cope with the difficult situation regarding the Good Friday agreement.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the report published by Barnardo's yesterday called, "No son of mine! Children abused through prostitution"? It deals with the hidden problem of boys abused through prostitution. Many of those young people

[Julie Morgan]

have run away from difficult situations at home or in care. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on that important subject?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend draws attention to an important and sensitive report on the problem of child prostitution. She will be aware that last year we issued guidelines on the handling of sex prostitution of young people. We stressed that in child prostitution the child should be regarded as the victim and those who exploit child prostitutes as the criminals. It is important that we target those who abuse vulnerable young people, and that we provide every possible opportunity to protect young people from such exploitation, and to be rehabilitated and returned from it when we find them.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the Leader of the House persuade the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to make a statement on the alleged dumping of poisonous combination ash at the Pitsea tip? This serious issue came to light in last night's edition of "Newsnight". May we be told whether the ash contains dioxins and other poisonous substances, as has been claimed? May we be told when the ash was first deposited, what controls have been applied since, when concerns were first raised, what investigations have been carried out, when the dumping was stopped, what assessment has been made of the impact on public safety and the environment in the communities of Benfleet and Canvey Island, what is the radius within which the risk might arise, and what action will be taken to remove these dangerous materials?

Mr. Cook: I hope the hon. Gentleman will not be disappointed when I say that I cannot answer each of his questions in full. I will, however, draw them to the attention of the Minister for the Environment, and encourage him to write fully to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Will the Leader of the House consult the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the refranchising of the railways, to establish what progress is being made? There is a particular problem with the Wessex franchise, which needs to be resolved quickly. I gather that the Secretary of State will make an announcement on 16 July; it would be very helpful if he also made a statement in the House.

Mr. Cook: I have noted my hon. Friend's comments carefully, and I will draw what he said about the Wessex franchise to my right hon. Friend's attention. I am aware—partly from my constituency work—of the difficulties regarding investment in and development of the service that can arise from uncertainty about the future of franchises, and I assure my hon. Friend that the Government understand the importance of making as reasonable progress as possible in providing certainty.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Next week, the House will deal with the Committee stage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. Does the Leader of the House think—particularly in the light of his previous experience—that there is a case for changing the way in which the House considers the ratification of treaties? At present, we can consider only their legislative consequences. Should the House not have an opportunity to debate ratification on a substantive motion, which might give us more democratic legitimacy in the context of matters that are important to the country?

Mr. Cook: That point has been at the heart of the debate about the powers of the House ever since I became a Member of Parliament. We have made some improvements, in that Select Committees can now take more of an interest and more of a scrutinising role in regard to treaties that the Government have undertaken to ratify. I think it important that when legislative change is involved it should be fully debated, as the Nice treaty is being debated on the Floor of the House.

The hon. Gentleman invites me to reflect on the experience that I gained in my last post. I personally would regret it very much if the United Kingdom drifted into the situation in which the United States now finds itself. Treaties negotiated at length by the US Administration, and signed by them, are subsequently repudiated by Congress and Senate. I do not think that that has assisted the standing of the United States in international treaty negotiations, and I would not wish to put a British Prime Minister or Foreign Minister in the same position.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Too many people are losing their homes, having made their mortgage repayments, because of our scandalously unfair and out-of-date leasehold laws. When will the leasehold reform Bill be put before us, so that we can protect and enhance the rights of home owners?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend knows that we committed ourselves to such legislation in the Queen's Speech. With respect, we have worked hard to ensure that we can deal with as many Bills as possible before the recess, but my hon. Friend will have to wait for this one until after it. I note what she has said about its being a priority, as, I am sure, has my noble Friend Lady Scotland, the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Could the Leader of the House persuade the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement about the provision of beta interferon? As he will know, the issue affects many of my constituents and those of other Members. I believe that when the drug would have an efficacious effect for multiple sclerosis it should be prescribed, and I know that many others agree. The Prime Minister was asked about the matter on three occasions. Each time, his answer was characterised by spin and prevarication. Is it not now time for action? Should not a statement be made in the House as soon as possible?

Mr. Cook: I recall answering this question last week, or the week before.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Mine.

Mr. Cook: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman confirms my memory, although it unaccountably slipped my mind that he had asked the question.

I do not think that even the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) would say that my reply was characterised by spin. The fact is that the

National Institute for Clinical Excellence rejected the view that the drug could be provided on the basis of clinical excellence and value for money. Essentially, NICE judges whether the health service should provide the drug, but I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

In the past 50 minutes, there have been seven different requests for oral statements, which underlines the point that I made earlier: at some point, we have to strike a balance between oral statements and the business of the House.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Two weeks ago, the Government announced a comprehensive review of energy policy. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is crucial to the future competitiveness of the economy and to the quality of the environment? Given that in the previous Parliament not a single debate, as I recall, was dedicated to energy policy, and given that there is a growing and urgent public debate about the future of nuclear energy, the need for investment in renewables and the Department of Trade and Industry's attitude to both forms of energy, does he agree that there should be a debate in Government time before the performance and innovation unit completes its report on energy policy?

Mr. Cook: I agree with my hon. Friend on the importance of the energy review and its fundamental significance to both our industrial strength and our environmental health. I would be surprised if the review could be concluded and announced without giving the House a full opportunity to consider it, but I would take a bit of persuading that the right time to debate it was before the review, rather than after.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Leader of the House has already been questioned on the subject of Marconi and spoken about his experiences with Motorola, but is not a pattern developing: international companies are making more job cuts in the United Kingdom than in continental Europe and elsewhere? Is that not a reflection of our fall in the world competitiveness league from ninth to 19th? May we have an urgent statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how she intends to redress that balance and to return us to the position that we enjoyed in 1997, when we were in ninth, not 19th, place?

Mr. Cook: Those factors played no part in the decision of Motorola to locate in Germany. It did so because it had suffered large tax losses in Germany, which it wished to write off against future profits. That was its sole reason for going to Germany. Personally, I have always deprecated the fact that it took a decision affecting my constituents for reasons of tax management.

On Marconi, as far as I am aware, we do not yet know how the job cuts will be distributed, but the company has committed itself to shedding 4,000 jobs throughout the world, not within the UK.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Sadly, the Prime Minister's home straight appears to be stretching out without apparent end. Some estimates suggest that foot and mouth has cost the country £20 billion. As problems rise in the rural economy, the pressure for a full public inquiry mounts inexorably. Why are the Government so pig-headed about that? Why is the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs not coming here next week to announce a full impartial inquiry, under the chairmanship of an independent judge?

Mr. Cook: The Secretary of State did come here only the other week and she made a full statement on foot and mouth. In the course of that, she made it clear that there would have to be an inquiry and that its terms would be announced at the end of the outbreak. That position is fully shared by many people in the industry, including the vets. When the foot and mouth outbreak is over, that will be the time to ensure that we carry out a full inquiry.

Mr. Bercow: Given the welcome advances in medical science and the fact that, whenever a new cure is devised, a new queue is necessarily created, may we please have an urgent debate on the lessons that we can learn from our continental neighbours about the use of private resources to complement those of the public sector, in ensuring that we turn care from a word into a deed?

Mr. Cook: I very much welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman is willing to learn lessons from our European partners—a breakthrough on which we must try to build. I should remind him and other Members that our continental partners also make a heavy investment in public health provision. We must match that, as well as anything that we do in the private sector.

Speaker's Statement.

Mr. Speaker: We have a complicated day's business before us, so before calling the Minister to move the motion on the business of the House it may be helpful if I indicate how I propose to proceed—assuming, of course, that the motion is agreed to. I propose that motions Nos. 2 to 6, on the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body and related issues, should be debated together.

At 4 o'clock, the question will be put on each motion in turn. Where I have selected an amendment to a motion, and the hon. Member proposing it wishes to press it to a vote, the House will vote first on the amendment and then on the motion, amended or not. A list of the selected amendments is available in the No Lobby and the Vote Office, in the normal way.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): On a point order, Mr. Speaker, about today's Order Paper. On looking at it this morning, I expected to see my name on page 147 next to amendment (e) to the motion on the additional costs allowance, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), as I had agreed that it be added to the list of Members. It was not there. Instead, my name has been attributed to amendment (a) to the motion on pensions, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). Under no circumstances did I ask for my name to be added to that list. I want to make it clear that there is a mistake on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that, because of a printing error, a number of Members' names were wrongly printed in support of Mr. Butterfill's amendment to motion No. 4, on parliamentary pensions. Those names should have been printed in support of Mr. Betts' amendment (e) to motion No. 2 on Members' allowances, insurance, and so on. The Table Office has copies of the corrected list.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would not of course in any way consider questioning your selection of amendments, but in noting that two substantive amendments that I tabled were not selected, would it be sensible of me to assume that that might be because the issues with which they deal are expected to be covered by the Leader of the House in his opening remarks on the motion?

Mr. Speaker: That remains to be seen. The hon. Gentleman had best not assume anything—the amendments have not been selected.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should be grateful for your guidance. My name appears next to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), in support of amendment (a) to motion No. 2. Even though the amendment has not been selected, will there be any opportunity to press the matter to which it relates to a Division this afternoon?

Mr. Speaker: No.

Business of the House

1.28 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I beg to move,

That, at this day's sitting—

(1) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on any Motions in the name of Mr. Robin Cook relating to—

(a) recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body and related issues not later than Four o'clock; and

(b) Select Committees and European Standing Committees not later than Seven o'clock; and

proceedings on the Motions referred to in sub-paragraph (b) above may be concluded, though opposed, after Seven o'clock.

(2) the Questions referred to in paragraph (1) shall include the questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved.

I shall be very brief as I do not wish to reduce the time available for debate on the important substantive business before the House.

The motion on the Order Paper divides the day between two important matters. The time allocated should enable the House to give proper consideration to the motions. Both debates affect the working of the House and its Members. These are important debates, and they are being held in Government time. The business motion ensures that the House will resolve the issues today, so that any changes accepted by the House can be implemented quickly.

This is the earliest opportunity since the election for the debate on the Senior Salaries Review Body recommendations. Members have had the opportunity to study the SSRB report and the motions have been carefully prepared. Members have had the opportunity to study them and—as some have—to table amendments to them. This is a cross-party issue which affects not just Members but our staff, and therefore the efficient working of the House.

The further proposals regarding Select Committees reflect recent machinery of government changes, as well as extending new powers to the Committees. They pave the way for the Select Committees to be set up and to be up and running before the House rises for the summer recess. That will be the shortest period after an election in which the Committees have been established since the Select Committee system began.

I hope that hon. Members will now allow both debates to commence. I commend the motion to the House.

1.30 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): For future reference, given the number of amendments that have been tabled by Back Benchers, and selected by you, Mr. Speaker, it might be helpful if such important matters were given more than just two and a half hours' debate on the Floor of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Members' Allowances, Insurance &c.

[Relevant documents: Review Body on Senior Salaries, Report No. 47, Review of Parliamentary Pension Scheme, Cm 4996; Review Body on Senior Salaries, Report No. 48, Review of Parliamentary Pay and Allowances, Cm 4997–I; Review Body on Senior Salaries, Report No. 48, Review of Parliamentary Pay and Allowances—Volume 2: Independent study on pay and allowances, Cm 4997–II; The Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) (Pension Sharing) Regulations 2001; The Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2001; The Draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 2001; Second Report from the Information Committee, Session 1999–2000, on Information Technology Provision for Members, HC 758.]

1.31 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That, in the opinion of this House—

(1) Provision should be made, with effect from 5th July 2001, to implement Chapter 3 of the report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries on parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 4997–1) a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th March, to establish a General Services Budget under the Members' Vote, and with regard to related matters;

(2) These provisions should be applied as follows (subject to transitional arrangements under (5) and (6) below, and any directions which may from time to time be given by Mr. Speaker with regard to their application):

(a) the salaries of staff employed by Members to help them in their duties as Members of Parliament, and pensions contributions equivalent to ten per cent. of each employee's salary, should be paid centrally by the Department of Finance and Administration;

(b) all such staff who become employed by a Member should be employed on pay rates to be linked to job descriptions and standard contracts prepared by the Department of Finance and Administration;

(c) the total costs of employing such staff, attributable to a particular Member, excluding the pension contribution outlined in (a) above should be limited to £60,000 a year (£70,000 a year where a Member represents a London constituency) these figures to be uprated annually to reflect changes in pay levels for equivalent jobs outside the House.

(d) a new provision called an Incidental Expenses Provision should be established (at a rate of £14,000 per year for each Member, and uprated annually in line with the Retail Prices Index), to meet any other expenditure which Members may incur wholly necessarily and exclusively in discharging their duties as Members.

(e) specific financial provisions should be made for the supply and maintenance of a standard package of information technology equipment and services for each Member to be used exclusively in discharging their duties as Members; and

(f) the Office Costs Allowance should be abolished after a transitional period ending on 31st March 2003.

General Services Budget

(3) Central funding by way of a General Services Budget should provide for:

(a) relevant training of Members and Members' staff in connection with their parliamentary duties;

(b) any appropriate insurance provision;

(c) any additional reimbursement of exceptional expenses incurred by Members who have constituencies with particular problems;

(d) reasonable adjustments to the working conditions and equipment of Members with particular needs because of disability, and for necessary additional continuing costs;

(e) any additional payments to Members in respect of safety precautions to safeguard their staff, their office equipment and themselves, where such safety precautions have been recommended by the police; and

(f) other appropriate expenditure within the ambit of the Vote, under the authority of the Speaker.

Advisory Panel

(4)—(1) It should be the responsibility of a Panel appointed by Mr. Speaker to advise him on:

(i) directions he may give as to the application of the provisions of this Resolution under paragraphs (2) and (3) above;

(ii) his authorisation of expenditure not otherwise specified in this Resolution but within the ambit of the Vote, pursuant to paragraph (3)(f) thereof; and

(iii) the application of the provisions of this Resolution to individual cases of difficulty.

(2) The Panel should advise Mr. Speaker and the Leader of the House on the potential development of the arrangements made by or under the Resolutions in force from time to time regarding Members' allowances &c.

Transitional Provisions

(5) The following provisions should be made regarding the allowances of Members who, having sat in the previous Parliament, are returned to the present Parliament (subject to directions which may be given from time to time by Mr. Speaker with regard to application):

(a) Members may, whether or not they take advantage of central Information Technology provision, opt to retain their entitlement to the Office Costs Allowance, payable at the level and subject to provisions for uprating in force at 1st April 2001;

(b) Any reasonable contractual commitments entered into by Members who transfer to the new provisions in respect of staff and IT should be honoured through central funding until they can reasonably be terminated;

But these provisions should cease to have effect from 1st April 2003.

(6) Transitional provisions for all Members transferring to the new arrangements in 2001–02 should be determined by Mr. Speaker, having taken advice where appropriate from the Panel set up under paragraph (4) of this Resolution.

Winding Up Allowance

(7) In relation to the Winding Up Allowance, Subsection (3) of Part E of the Resolution of 13th July 1994 shall apply to Members who benefit from the provisions of paragraphs 2(a) to 2(d) of this Resolution as if for the words 'office costs allowance' there were substituted the words 'sum of the incidental Expenses Provision and the relevant staff employment cost limit in force at the time they ceased to be a Member'.

Members with Disabilities

(8) When provision is made in respect of any Members in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (3)(d) of this Resolution, any Resolution of this House entitling that Member to claim a multiple of the Office Costs Allowance shall cease to have effect.

As Amendments to Mr. Robin Cook's Motion (Members' Allowances, Insurance &c.):

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

Member's Pay (Expression of Opinion)

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 20th June 2001 and ending with 31st March 2002 the salary of a Member shall be increased by £2,000 per annum.

(2) That salary shall be increased by a further £2,000 per annum from 1st April 2002.

(3) The increases referred to above shall be additional to any increase resulting from the operation of paragraph (2) of the Resolution of this House of 10th July 1996.

Parliamentary Pensions

That this House endorses the proposals for changes to the Parliamentary Pensions Scheme to give effect to recommendations 1, 3, 5, and 7 contained in the SSRB Report on the Scheme laid on 16th March 2001 and calls on the Trustees of the Scheme to consider how best to implement recommendation 2 but at no additional cost to the Exchequer and to consider recommendations 4, 6 and 8.

And that this House further endorses the proposals for changes in this scheme and the avc scheme pursuant to the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 in relation to pension sharing on divorce.

Members' Insurance: Reimbursement of Costs Incurred by the Right Honourable Member for Blackburn

That, in the opinion of this House, provision should be made to reimburse the Right honourable Member for Blackburn for reasonable legal expenditure including damages arising in consequence of an action brought against him alleging vicarious liability for an act of negligence committed in the course of his duties as a Member of this House.

Members' Pay (Money Resolution)

That the following provision shall be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 20th June 2001 and ending with 31st March 2002 the salary of a Member shall be increased by £2,000 per annum.

(2) That salary shall be increased by a further £2,000 per annum from 1st April 2002.

(3) The increases referred to above shall be additional to any increase resulting from the operation of paragraph (2) of the Resolution of this House of 10th July 1996.

Mr. Cook: The motions are to give effect to the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body on Members' pay, pensions and office costs allowance. They neither add to nor subtract in any substantial way from the totality of the SSRB recommendations. I have followed the principle that the Government should put before the House all the recommendations as proposed by the SSRB in order that the House itself can make a judgment on them. The large number of amendments tabled clearly demonstrates that the House is keenly interested in the matter and wants to come to a judgment on the recommendations.

It is right that our salaries should be assessed independently. It must also be right that the independent assessment should generally be accepted by the House. The proposed increase is necessary to restore parity with the other posts in the public sector adopted in 1996 as the comparators to ours: a director of a district general hospital, a head teacher of a secondary school or a chief superintendent of police.

The proposed increase is wholly in line with the general principle set out by the previous Government, and entirely shared by this Government, that the pay of Members of Parliament should not be so high as to become the primary attraction of the job, nor so low as to deter suitable candidates from standing for election. I do not think that we impress the public if we set too low a value on our own worth. I would not go quite so far as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)'s famous observation that the

"post of MP attracts the average pay of a saxophonist with the job security of a football manager",

but I do believe that we should not sell ourselves too short. If we believe that our work here is important, we should not shrink from putting a proper value on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has tabled an amendment proposing that our annual uprating be tied to the increases recommended for nurses, teachers and doctors. Since 1996, our salaries have been uprated in parallel with pay in the senior civil service. Had his formula applied since 1996, our current pay would be almost £2,000 a year higher. I am not sure whether it was his intention to secure an even higher rate of pay for Members of Parliament, and if it was not, he may wish to reconsider the terms of his amendment.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): My aim was to relate our pay to professions that are meaningful to our constituents. Had my formula applied before July 1996, when we awarded ourselves an outrageous 26 per cent. increase, our pay would now be significantly lower.

Mr. Cook: The 1996 increase was the result of an independent assessment and reflected the fact that there had been no annual uprating by formula in the years preceding it. If my hon. Friend's intention is that we should be paid at the same rate as those in professions with which the public can identify, I am pleased to assure him that the logical step is to support the motion, which will give us precisely the 19 per cent. increase that nurses, teachers and doctors have enjoyed since 1996.

I turn now to parliamentary pensions, on which the SSRB made eight recommendations. The motion before the House would implement all the recommendations on which a decision of the House is now possible, and it invites the trustees of the pension fund to consider the remaining matters on which further work is required. That further work will include consideration of recommendation 8, which covers the question of pensions for unmarried partners surviving Members of Parliament and to which the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) has tabled an amendment.

I should say a word about the second recommendation of the SSRB, which proposed that we drop the provision in the pension scheme that the pension of widows or widowers is withdrawn in the event of their remarriage. The House will be aware that the Government announced in March that they could not accept that recommendation. In the light of representations that I have received, we have looked at the matter again.

Personally, I find the provision to withdraw pension from widows and widowers who remarry old fashioned, to put it mildly. The motion before the House therefore invites the trustees to consider making changes in line with the recommendation, but at no cost to the Treasury.

As I am about to turn to one of the more controversial issues, may I, lest I lose my audience, first invite consensus from across the House in paying tribute to the trustees of our pension fund? All hon. Members owe a debt of gratitude to those of our number who are willing to serve as trustees. Under the leadership of John MacGregor, they have taken major steps to modernise the scheme in line with good practice, and have put it under proper professional management. I am pleased to report that the fund has been managed with a satisfactory surplus.

In their submission to the SSRB, the trustees proposed that the accrual rate should be cut from one fiftieth to one fortieth of the annual salary. I understand the reasoning that led them to propose a faster rate of accrual in the light of the unpredictability of a parliamentary career. At the present rate of accrual, fewer than 10 per cent. of hon. Members make it to the maximum pension before they retire from the House.

Nevertheless, having considered the proposal, the SSRB explicitly rejected the submission by the trustees. In its report, it submits that the current accrual rate of one fiftieth of annual salary is already better than comparable private sector schemes, and significantly better than the overwhelming majority of public sector schemes, in which an accrual rate of better than one sixtieth is an exception.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My right hon. Friend has already noted that the average career expectancy of Members of Parliament is about nine and a half years, so does he agree that the comparison with groups in the private or public sectors is therefore invalid?

Mr. Cook: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which is very close to the one that I made earlier to the House. At this point, I should declare an interest as, in the course of this Parliament, I will achieve qualification for the maximum pension.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): No.

Mr. Cook: Indeed I will, and the fact unfortunately confirms the suggestion that I am nearing my obituary. However, I shall be one of only 8 per cent. of hon. Members who make it to that qualification. I have achieved it only because I have been blessed with constituents of judicious judgment. That is not the experience of every Member of the House.

The SSRB points out, however, that other profession also suffer from unpredictability and uncertainty. In the modern age, it felt unable to take that fact into account.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cook: I will give way on this occasion, but I have a number of matters to deal with.

Mr. Etherington: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the accrual rate for serving Members of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland is one fortieth of annual salary?

Mr. Cook: I take note of what my hon. Friend has said, but I am not sure that I necessarily wish to accept the principle that we should read across to our own package any particular element of the package in other Parliaments. If we did, we might well find ourselves to be disadvantaged in other respects.

As I said, it is for the House to decide whether to accept the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill).

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point? I am one of the pension fund trustees.

Mr. Cook: I shall certainly give way to one of the trustees, but then I must conclude on pensions.

Mr. Martlew: The House passed a similar amendment in 1980 but, on that occasion, the Government came back and blocked it. What are the Government's intentions if the House passes the amendment today?

Mr. Cook: This is a matter for the House to decide, and the House's decision will be one that I personally would take as binding on me as Leader of the House. I would not argue with that judgment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] But—*[Laughter]*—since I have been generous in giving that assurance to the House as Leader, I would ask the House to consider the advice that I am about to offer it.

We would ask hon. Members, before taking their decision, to reflect on whether Members of Parliament can accept an even wider gap than already exists in the rate of accrual between our pension scheme and the schemes of those who work in our hospitals, schools and local authorities. My colleagues at the Treasury attach particular weight to the public spending consequences if the accrual rate in the amendment were to become general across the public sector.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Could I say first that although the amendment stands in my name, it does so on behalf of all the trustees? Our soon to be ennobled Friend, Mr. MacGregor, is not able to attach his name, although he remains chairman of the trustees. All the other trustees of the fund support the amendment. As I wish to show later in the debate, ours is actually the meanest accrual rate of any assembly anywhere in the western world.

Mr. Cook: I have noted that the trustees have all signed the amendment and that they made a submission to the SSRB precisely in the terms of the amendment. I spoke yesterday with John MacGregor and it is only fair to report to the House that he fully shares the views expressed in the amendment.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that when that submission was put to the SSRB, it was not persuaded by the proposal and did not accept the basis of the argument put forward. The SSRB drew particular attention, as my right hon. Friends at the Treasury have done vigorously, to the fact that that would create a quite remarkable difference between our pension scheme and others in the public sector. Hon. Members have to reflect on whether they are willing to contemplate the public spending consequences of making a comparable change in those schemes.

[Mr. Cook]

There is no report before the House on the additional costs allowance. However, I recognise the widespread feeling among Members that the present allowance does not reflect the current realities of the London housing market. This is a particular problem for new Members seeking accommodation for the first time at current rates.

An amendment has been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), and many, many other Members. If I understood the point of order earlier, many other Members who have not yet got their name on to the Order Paper also support it. This, again, is a House of Commons matter on which the House must make its own decision. However, the terms of the amendment would result in a very large increase indeed and would produce a new ceiling of £19,300, an increase of 42 per cent.

I fully understand why some Members demand parity with the new overnight allowance recommended for the House of Lords and define parity as 144 nights at £120. However, under the amendment as drafted, we would end up with £2,000 more a year than such parity with the House of Lords allowance would afford. This, I suspect, would be challenging to explain to Members of the House of Lords, let alone to justify to members of the public. But as I said, I recognise that there is a problem with the additional costs allowance. For some years, it has been uprated only in line with the retail prices index, while the London housing market has tended to uprate itself faster than RPI.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I do not know whether my right hon. Friend is aware of the calculations for the last financial year, which show, essentially, that the House of Lords overnight allowance was £84. If one divided the additional costs allowance by the number of days Parliament sat, it came to about £83. Proposing the same proportionate increase would mean that when the total additional costs allowance is divided by the number of days Parliament sits, it comes out at the same figure.

Page 44 of the second volume of the SSRB report states that three-star hotel accommodation has been the traditional way of judging both the overnight allowance for the Lords and the ACA for the Commons. There is the same basis for both schemes, but one is to get an increase this time while the other does not.

Mr. Cook: The issue of principle does not turn the calculation, but the figure I have just mentioned would be the consequence of my hon. Friend's amendment. We would end up with an additional costs allowance of £19,300, which is well above what would be required to meet 144 nights at the overnight allowance of £120 for Members of the House of Lords.

I understand the concern that lies behind my hon. Friend's amendment. I personally would regard it as unfortunate if the House were to depart from the principle that, before increasing our pay or personal allowances, we should first invite assessment by the independent review body. I give an undertaking to the House that, in the event of Members rejecting this amendment, the Government will refer the issue of the additional costs allowance to the SSRB and will invite it to report on an appropriate revised ceiling, as a matter of urgency. That will give us a revised ceiling that will reflect reality and—as a result of independent assessment—will also be one that we can defend.

I turn now to the resolution on Members' allowances and insurance. Let me dispose first of the provision for appropriate insurance. It is a matter of regret that we live in an age which is increasingly litigious, and I have to report that Members of Parliament also are victims of the increasing tendency to sue. Last year, the issue came before the House as the result of an action for defamation brought against an Opposition Member. The House then resolved to make general provision for insurance against action for defamation and to cover the Member for his costs.

This year, the matter comes before the House again because of a legal action claiming negligence against my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I have set out some of the facts of that case in a written answer, and as a legal settlement of the action has yet to be reached, the House will understand if I cannot enlarge on that.

In any case, the particular facts of the case are not the key issue. The central point is that what has happened to my right hon. Friend could have happened to many Members of the House. We all prize the hard work of our constituency staff, but with the best will in the world they can make mistakes under pressure. In today's litigious world we all face the risk of being sued for their mistakes. In most other professions, insurance cover against such a legal risk is routine and Members of Parliament should have the same protection.

The resolution before the House will ensure that all Members are provided with insurance cover against claims for negligence, as well as claims for defamation. That will provide future cover for any Members who find themselves in the same position as my right hon. Friend. It would be unfair to leave my right hon. Friend with any liability that arose from the conduct of his constituency duties, and the separate resolution compensates him for any reasonable costs of the present action. I hope that this resolution will receive all-party support in the same spirit as the resolution compensating the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) last year.

I turn now to the office costs allowance, on which the SSRB proposed sweeping changes. At the outset, I would ask the House to recognise that those changes are so sweeping that—unavoidably—issues will arise in the light of experience that will require adjustment. Indeed, some of the amendments on the Order Paper already highlight problems on which the SSRB report does not offer specific guidance. A good case in point is the amendment from the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) on the use of the staff element to pay for research on a consultancy basis.

We therefore believe that it will be essential to provide more flexibility in the system in order that modest adjustments can be made without the cumbersome procedure of a further review by the SSRB. The resolution therefore proposes that there should be a Speaker's advisory panel to supervise the transition and to advise on the implementation of the new system. The panel will combine cross-party membership with senior officials who can advise on the practical implications of our conclusions.

The resolution also gives authority to the Speaker to make directions as necessary, and those will, of course, be published for Members of the House. That will assist the authorities in responding to the detailed problems that will inevitably occur in phasing in such a radically different system, and in resolving individual cases of difficulty.

The new system represents a radical overhaul of the way in which we fund support for Members in pursuit of their constituency and parliamentary duties. Although it has been proposed by the SSRB, it follows from extensive evidence from Members of the House, and remedies much of the frustration that Members have expressed with the present system.

The new package gives three major benefits. First, Members' staff will be put on a consistent and fair salary structure for the first time since Members started to hire staff.

Secondly, all Members will have access to a standard package of IT equipment that will guarantee them access to the latest technology in a compatible format.

Finally, the overall effect of the package will be a substantial increase in the resources available to Members.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): While he is on the subject of IT equipment, will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall come to that later, and I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman then.

The financial equivalent of the new package will total about £80,000 for most Members.

The previous system needed fundamental reform. It was hard to justify a system which led some Members with heavy case loads to rely on volunteers and foreign interns because they could not afford enough permanent staff. It was even harder to justify a system that obliged a number of Members to dig into their own pockets to make up the pay of their staff. Nor can we justify trading on the high motivation of our staff by paying them at a lower rate.

I am well aware that many Members, particularly new Members, face pressing decisions on the recruitment of staff. I have therefore tabled this resolution, and the other resolutions before the House, to have immediate effect. The result is that, from today, Members will be entitled to a pro rata share of the new annual allowances for staff pay.

The resolution puts before the House the new ceilings proposed by the SSRB—an annual ceiling of up to £70,000 for Members with a London constituency, and £60,000 for Members with a constituency anywhere else. The differential is the single issue on which I have received most representations from hon. Members, and I am not in the least surprised that it has attracted an amendment. The Government are not offering any advice to the House in respect of the amendments to the resolution that have been tabled; they are matters for House to resolve.

It is plainly right that the ceiling for London Members should reflect the higher staff costs that they must necessarily pay in the London labour market. However, many Members with constituencies outside London also employ staff at Westminster. It is a fact of geography that Westminster is in inner London, and all members of staff employed at Westminster will be paid at the same higher London rate, whatever the constituency of their employer. The amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) therefore offers a pro rata increase in the ceiling for Members from outside London who employ staff at Westminster.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the Leader of the House comment on the two amendments that I tabled? They have not been selected for debate, but the right hon. Gentleman may be able to satisfy the House on their subject matter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the Leader of the House will not comment on amendments that have not been selected.

Mr. Cook: I may be able to help the House—

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance? I understood that, although amendments that have not been selected cannot be pressed to a Division, they can be debated.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman changes his wording and talks about the substance of the matter, that might be better.

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Mr. Duncan: Will the Leader of the House give way so that I can ask him to comment on an issue that has arisen in the midst of the debate? The SSRB suggests a ceiling of £60,000, but it would appear that its arithmetic relates to the headline salaries, which when added together already reach that ceiling. National insurance contributions do not appear to be included. Would the right hon. Gentleman therefore consider allowing those contributions to be paid centrally?

Secondly, given that the proposals may involve a number of Members shifting some of their staff and some of the functions of their staff from Westminster to their constituency, it is inevitable that some people may be made redundant. For the sake of our staff—not for us—will the right hon. Gentleman therefore contemplate making statutory redundancy pay provided for centrally?

Mr. Cook: I may not be able to help the hon. Gentleman on his first point, but I can clarify matters. It is important that right hon. and hon. Members should understand what is proposed in the tables of the Senior Salaries Review Body's report. It sets out staff pay rates and makes it quite explicit that the employer's national insurance contribution should also fall to be paid out of the overall ceiling—in other words, the £60,000 for Members outside London and £70,000 for Members inside London must also provide the payment for national insurance contributions by employers. It is important for right hon. and hon. Members to reflect on this point. That 10 per cent. contribution can make quite a significant difference to the final year outturn, as I know to my cost from previous experience.

[Mr. Cook]

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, the standard position is quite clear and does not change with the SSRB report, as far as I understand it. If staff are faced with redundancy as a result of their Member losing his or her seat, redundancy payments will be met. If they are made redundant as a result of the Member restructuring the office—for example, moving it from the constituency to Westminster—that cost falls to be met out of the allowances.

I appreciate that, in phasing in the new system, there will be particular cases to consider. That is why we have taken the power, through the Speaker's advisory panel, to make sure that we can be flexible, and that where there are bona fide cases, we can respond to individual difficulties. In addition, I stress that there is a transitional period. Until April 2003, right hon. and hon. Members can continue with the present arrangement before transferring, and that should help to ease some of the transition problems.

I should like to move on from the ceilings to the new arrangements for incidental expenses.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Will my right hon. Friend give way before he moves on?

Mr. Cook: Of course.

Mr. Lloyd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. It would help the House if he clarified how staff salaries can be protected in the future. We know what is on offer as of today, but can my right hon. Friend assure us that staff salaries will be protected throughout this Parliament and into the future?

Mr. Cook: I am not in a position to give my hon. Friend an assurance if he is referring to future uprating. That lies in the hands of Hay Management Consultants, the SSRB and the authorities. However, it is not our intention to allow Members' staff to suffer. Indeed, my overall impression from the proposals is that the majority of staff will welcome the proposals and package, and will also, in many cases, benefit from the rates of pay set out in the appendix.

If my hon. Friend means by his question to ensure that Members' staff will not face a decrease in pay, I draw his attention to that part of the SSRB report in which the point is made that some Members' staff may have a higher rate of pay at present than allowed for in the appendix. In such circumstances, the SSRB recommended that their pay should be frozen until such time as the pay levels caught up.

As I stressed earlier, this is a radically different system. On balance, it will be better for Members and for their staff. There will be some awkward and difficult cases, which is why it is important that we provide ourselves with some flexibility to respond to individual circumstances.

I was about to turn to the incidental expenses allowance.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. Cook: This must be the last time or else we will never finish, and I am conscious that other right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak.

Sir Michael Spicer: If salaries are to be decreased and there is a review clause in the contract, what will happen to the contract?

Mr. Cook: The SSRB report contains a specific proposal that where there is any legal contractual responsibility, the Fees Office should be able to assist with it. However, I stress that I do not envisage the outcome of these changes to be that Members' staff face a decrease in pay. At most, there may be a necessary period of transition in which they wait until the pay scales catch up. For most Members' staff the rates set out will represent an increase, not a decrease.

I must make progress if the House is to debate these motions. The incidental expenses allowance is set by the SSRB at £14,000. "Incidental" possibly does not do justice to the essential items which this budget must cover, including office rent and rates. The figure proposed by the SSRB incorporates an estimate of constituency spending as assessed by Hay Management Consultants. However, many Members, and if I am frank, my own constituency staff, have questioned whether this figure adequately provides for all the items that Members may have to meet in the course of a full and unpredictable financial year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush has an amendment to the ceiling on incidental expenses. It is for Members to reach their own judgment on that amendment in the light of their own practical experience of running constituency offices.

One problem of the previous system, which Members will know from practical experience, was that a capital purchase could knock a big hole in that year's allowance. One major gain from the new package is that we will never again have to weigh the necessity of purchasing a new computer against the amount that would be left over for staff pay. The new package responds to frequent representations by Members that we should move to centrally funded and managed procurement of IT equipment. Under the terms of the resolution—

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. Cook: I have already given a commitment to make progress.

Under the terms of the resolution every Member will be entitled to three personal computers, one laptop and two combined printer/scanner/copier/fax machines.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Leader of the House confirm that the IT equipment will at all times be owned by the House of Commons authorities? He will be aware that at the time of the dissolution of Parliament for a general election former Members are not allowed access to House facilities. Does that mean that desktop

computers in one's constituency and possibly one's laptop allocated by the House of Commons authority under the scheme would be repossessed for the duration of the general election, in which case we would have to buy ourselves a separate machine?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is correct on his first point: the equipment, having been purchased by the House, will belong to the House and not to individual Members. However, it will be at the disposal of the individual Member until the end of any general election. I stress that it is part of the provision that it should be used only for parliamentary functions, not party political purposes. While it may be right that a Member's staff should continue to deal with constituency correspondence during an election, equipment should not be used for election purposes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to see that all Members of the House are nodding sagely in agreement.

These items will be provided centrally by the Parliamentary Communications Directorate, which will also provide free installation at Westminster or in the constituency, free training on the equipment and free maintenance.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I will give way, but this must be the last time because I have already taken up one fifth of the time available for debate.

Mr. Luff: It is my understanding that the House authorities have anticipated the passage of this motion in relation to procurement and have already entered into a contract with Compaq. The Leader of the House knows that I have in my constituency a major computer manufacturer, evesham.com, which makes the Vale range of computers. It was excluded from bidding for the contract. Indeed, I think that all other manufacturers were also excluded. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that Government Members do not think that public procurement should be conducted openly. It should be, as an amendment on the Order Paper suggests. Will the Leader of the House give a commitment that next time there will be a full, open advertisement for this procurement process and that all manufacturers will be able to bid for the right to supply the House?

Mr. Cook: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and I am sure that his constituents have heard it also. I assure the House that the arrangement has been made through standard public procurement rules, albeit by a process of negotiation, not necessarily open tender. If in future a better package becomes available, it must be considered. That stands to reason.

I commend the Fees Office and the Parliamentary Communications Directorate on the work that they have already done to ensure that we can implement the plans once we have taken a decision. We are facing a massive new logistical exercise which will require the installation of possibly 4,000 items of kit in more than 600 locations. Hon. Members will be able to work out for themselves that that will not happen instantaneously, so I hope that the whole House will understand if we give preference to new Members who have come into the House with no office equipment.

Before concluding, may I say that I would regard it as wholly unfair if tomorrow the increases in our office costs were written up as some kind of perk? No other profession, even including—dare I say it?—newspaper editors would expect the reasonable costs of a secretary and a word processor to be treated as if they were part of their personal remuneration. Nor should MPs. Our staff are there not as a perk to us, but as a service to our constituents. We will be better able to provide that service to our constituents as a result of the proposals of the SSRB.

Although Members may differ from the review body on a number of points of detail, I hope that, in the following debate, we shall not let that obscure the broad welcome for the major improvements of the new package. It represents a radical reform of the way in which our offices are supported. It will bring our offices up to date in access to modern technology. Furthermore, it will ensure that the staff who work hard for us and for our constituencies will get a fair rate for the job. The overhaul is long overdue and I commend it to the House.

2.6 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I shall try not to detain the House unnecessarily, as the matter is one for the House and Back Benchers have tabled amendments to which they want to speak. However, it is important that I raise at the beginning of the debate the points to which I want the Leader of the House to respond at its conclusion, so that we have a record of answers on some unclear issues.

In relation to the ring-fenced budget for staff employment, the Leader of the House referred to appendix E in the SSRB report. Paragraph 3.12 of the report describes that appendix as "a possible guide". Nothing in the motion suggests that the Government have adopted the guide printed in appendix E. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the pay rates attached to the job descriptions in the appendix are in fact the rates that the Government are recommending in the ring-fenced budgets of £60,000 and £70,000? If they are, the sums do not add up.

Let us examine the recommended pay scales together with the review body's statement that such a level of staff remuneration would enable an MP to employ up to the equivalent of three full-time staff, who I accept may not all be London based. When the employer's national insurance contribution of 10 per cent. is subtracted from £60,000 gross, we are left with £54,000 net, which means that there is no way that a Member could employ two senior and one junior full-time members of staff as the report recommends. That is why I, like the Members who have tabled amendments, press the Leader of the House seriously to consider meeting centrally the deduction of £6,000 for the employer's national insurance contribution. If that is not done, the figures will not add up. I should be happy to go through the sums with the House, but if Members have a copy of the report, they will be able to see for themselves.

I refer the Leader of the House to changes made to the arrangements in the Scottish Parliament last month whereby employers' national insurance contributions are

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

met centrally for staff employed by Members of the Scottish Parliament. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be willing to follow that precedent.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend accept that the issue is complicated by the use of median rates, which represent the middle of the band? Some hon. Members have staff of long standing who have been in the House for many years, and they will be at the higher rates of pay, especially if the Member has been here for a long time, so the adding up becomes even worse at the higher end of the band. Furthermore, the rates of pay were assessed in October 2000, so a year will have passed by the time they are implemented, and they are out of date already.

Mrs. Browning: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. I want to pick up the issue that he has just raised, to which the Leader of the House referred in respect of existing contracts that are well above the rates recommended in appendix E. Although the Leader of the House rightly said that transitional arrangements would be available, I am not sure about the suggestion that, under an existing contract of employment, it would be possible to demand that staff accept a pay freeze until the rates equalise. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman is sure about that either and if he is not, we need to take specific legal advice. An employer may not be able to honour annual increments as outlined in contracts of employment because of financial constraints, but I am not sure whether we can legally demand a pay freeze on existing contracts. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will reassure the House that legal advice is being sought from employment lawyers on that very important point.

In section 3.16, the report suggests that Members could also make ad hoc payments to cover research and staff absences from the gross figures of £60,000 and £70,000. Many Members use secretarial bureaux from time to time and have an ad hoc input from data processors, and even more pressure is put on the gross figure when that is taken into account. I urge the Leader of the House to reconsider whether we should have to accommodate the 10 per cent. employer's national insurance contribution in the gross figure.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I have been trying to follow the hon. Lady's figures, and I am a little puzzled by her statement that the review body's report does not envisage staffing arrangements that can be included in the £60,000 sum. In section 5.8 on page 29 of volume 2, the review body offers four different arrangements, all of which it suggests would be suitable.

Mrs. Browning: I was referring to the appendix that the Leader of the House mentioned. I assumed that it was appendix E, which shows the Hay scale—six different job descriptions with separate London and regional rates. The SSRB recommends that a Member should be able to employ three full-time equivalent staff—two at a senior level and one at a more junior level.

Let me use the inner London scales to make my point. The appendix suggests that it would cost £28,500 and £27,000 respectively to employ two people, one at the executive secretary/PA rate and a one at the research assistant or constituency assistant rate, which are not the very highest rates. In other words, it would cost £55,500 to employ just those two people. That does not leave room for a full-time equivalent post, even at the bottom of the regional rate—a constituency assistant with a recommended salary of £12,500 on that scale. That is why I seek clarification.

If we are working to the pay scales outlined in appendix E, it is very difficult, taking into account employer's NICs, to meet the SSRB's requirement that we should employ two full-time equivalent staff at a senior level and one at a more junior level. Even using the regional, outside London, rates, it is difficult to fulfil those criteria.

Dr. Palmer: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I shall give way, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I want Back Benchers to contribute to the debate and to have their say.

If we are working to appendix E, the arithmetic is very simple. If we are working to a different scale, it is a different matter. There is reference to the fact that the SSRB also considered the rates recommended by the Transport and General Workers Union. When we talk about the gross sums and employing three full-time equivalent staff, we need to know which scales and which recommendations we are considering, especially as that is not made clear on the Order Paper. I hope that the Leader of the House will confirm that I have understood him correctly and that we are considering the pay scales as recommended in appendix E of the report. Does the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) still want to intervene?

Dr. Palmer *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Moving on to the transitional arrangements, I have already mentioned the fact that some hon. Members are concerned about existing contracts and the recommended rates, but I wonder whether the Leader of the House will clarify what the position will be for existing shared staff. Sometimes a senior secretary will work part time for two Members, but the pro rata part-time rate is not exactly 50 per cent. of that for a full-time equivalent post. In most workplaces with jobs that command lower salaries, the pro rata rates for part-time staff are often exactly 50 per cent. if the job is done for exactly half the time. In more demanding jobs, often to attract part-time staff, more than 50 per cent. of the full-time equivalent rate has to be paid. That is already the case in some contracts where two Members share a secretary. For those people, the gross salary that the secretary receives from two Members is higher than the rates outlined in appendix E. Again, apart from the problem of hon. Members employing someone on much higher rates, hon. Members seek clarification of those shared arrangements, as well as the shared arrangements for equipment that also exist in some cases.

I shall now deal with the incidental expenses provision. It is extremely good that the right hon. Gentleman has aggregated the £9,000 and the £5,000 sums and put more flexibility into the provision. I thoroughly support that proposal, and I am very much aware of the amendment under which that sum would be increased to £18,000. Every hon. Member's arrangements will be different,

but there is concern about those who may have a set up a constituency parliamentary office from scratch, or who do not have the opportunity to share such a facility, perhaps with an existing association office.

Taking out a lease and all that goes with it can be quite challenging for anyone in business, but from our point of view, taking on a lease on premises out of that budget could cause some problems. For example, full-repairing leases are often used. In other words, at some time during the tenancy, one must carry out repairs to the roof or overall decoration inside and outside the premises. The normal running costs may be deemed to be £14,000—or perhaps the House will agree to £18,000 today. Bearing in mind the fact that I believe that we still cannot carry forward surpluses year on year to budget for a bill that we know comes up every four or five years—for example, to fulfil the requirements of a full-repairing lease—I wonder how hon. Members might meet those obligations under normal commercial leasing conditions.

Mr. Gale: The Leader of the House said in his opening remarks that he had effectively been subsidising his constituency operation out of his own income. That is probably true for very many hon. Members. The provisions before the House distinguish between those Members with staff in London and those outside London, but no provision is made for those Members who choose—it is a choice—to have their offices outside the House of Commons and who do not therefore benefit from the space, heating, lighting, telephones or any of the other equipment provided in the House. I have chosen to subsidise my constituency office to the tune of about £10,000 a year for the past 15 years. I wonder whether there should be some flexibility in the arrangements to make provision for those who choose to have their entire operation outside the House rather than in it.

Mrs. Browning: I am sure the Leader of the House will respond to that point. I understand that the flexibility built into the general services budget would allow for that. It is based on the fact that people need a constituency base, whether it is physically in the constituency or not. That sum has been identified by the SSRB as meeting some of the costs that my hon. Friend mentioned.

I have raised the matter of insurance privately with the Leader of the House, and I would like his reassurance on the record. He mentioned insurance in relation to indemnity for MPs, and I totally agree with the proposal on the Order Paper, particularly in respect of the Foreign Secretary. However, if one sets up an office in a constituency, one requires employers' insurance to cover employees and public liability insurance for people coming into the premises.

Are all those costs to be met centrally on behalf of all Members, regardless of the location of their offices, or would such insurance have to be purchased separately out of the incidental expenses provision? If it were provided centrally, it would clearly not be such a liability and the House could presumably negotiate a good deal because the contract would be large. If MPs had to purchase insurance policies individually, they would represent a charge on the incidental expenses provision.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Will my hon. Friend also impress on the right hon. Gentleman the anomaly that, despite the proposals providing for up to three full-time staff and the equipment for them, many of us do not have the space in this building in which to put them? Parts of the new buildings provide suitable facilities for more than one member of staff for most Members, but Members who are in this building are entitled to only one desk. That is not adequate for the secretaries and equipment with which the motion seeks to provide us.

Mrs. Browning: I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend, and I am sure that the Leader of the House has taken his concerns on board. We are all concerned about that. After nine years in Parliament, I do not think the problem of how and where staff are accommodated is getting any easier, despite the fact that we now have Portcullis House.

The Leader of the House will be aware of the amendments tabled by many hon. Members relating to the information technology package. I am concerned about the public tendering procedure that has been used. I am even more concerned that the equipment has been procured with, as I understand it, no reference to the needs of Members of Parliament. Members of Parliament, the users—the customers, as it were—have not been consulted on the package.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): For the hon. Lady's information, there was very close co-operation on these proposals throughout the previous Parliament between the Officers of the House and the members of the Information Committee. The Committee—working on a cross-party basis and including the former Member for South Dorset, Ian Bruce—was fully behind the proposals. The Officers were very careful to ask Members, as representatives of that Committee, what they wanted.

Mrs. Browning: The package of kit might have been the subject of consultation, but the procurement of specific brands was certainly not. As I understand it, the report that the Information Committee produced, which was considered by the SSRB, says quite clearly that Members sought a choice. Members have not had a choice, particularly in relation to branding. We had hoped for a menu of brands from which Members could choose. In fact, that did not happen. I raise that matter with the Leader of the House because that is not the way to procure such equipment in future. We are all, as end users, entitled to a say in what our preferences and needs are.

The right hon. Gentleman paid tribute to the work done by the Parliamentary Data and Video Network in trying to procure the information technology package. However, in response to many Conservative Back Benchers' comments, I must say to him that if PDVN is to have such an executive role in the procurement and management of IT in the House, it will have to raise its game in terms of consumer service and consumer awareness. It must provide a flexible, high-quality service to Members. The Leader of the House might wish to consider this matter separately and take soundings from Members across the House about the level of service that we get. All too often we are greeted by answerphones, and it often takes a long time for phone calls to be returned when there is a problem. If this were a commercial environment, customers would be leaving in their droves. I hope that

[Mrs. Browning]

the Leader of the House will now guarantee to do something about the service; it has to become customer-oriented.

Michael Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that, when the House is still sitting after 6 o'clock, there is only one person on the Parliamentary Communications Directorate helpdesk because adequate funds are not being made available by the House authorities to the PCD? I hope that the Leader of the House will ensure that, as we have an almost 24-hour job, the PCD will be able to provide an almost 24-hour service.

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the Leader of the House will assure us that it will be a high priority for him personally to ensure that this matter of great concern to Members will be dealt with as effectively and quickly as possible.

2.26 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I am aware of the constraints—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. I must say to the House that we must deal with the motions before us, and not other matters that have been raised during interventions. Also, I am keen to call as many hon. Members as possible to speak. For that, I need the co-operation of the House, and I would expect brief contributions.

Mr. Soley: I was about to say that I was very aware of the constraints of time. It will be very difficult to fit everyone in, so I shall focus most of my comments on the amendments tabled in my name. However, if I may, I shall also make a couple of opening comments.

First, I welcome the latest report from the SSRB and thank the board for it. I felt that it had got the previous one wrong, but it has got this one largely right. Perhaps I would say that, because the report largely follows the evidence that I gave on behalf of the parliamentary Labour party. It also represents a radical break from the past, gives a far better service to MPs and enables them to serve their constituents better, while entrenching the rights and privileges of our staff, on whom we depend so much and who have been seriously undervalued, underestimated and under-protected in the past.

Secondly, measures of this nature are inevitably extremely complicated, especially when making a change of the kind that I recommended and that the SSRB is following. We shall not be able to cross all the t's or dot all the i's in this debate, and one of the things that I most welcome—perhaps we can refer to this on other occasions—is the setting up of a Speaker's advisory panel to include Members of Parliament. We shall then be able to iron out many of the problems as we proceed over the next year or two. I will mention one of those problems in a moment—the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) has already mentioned one or two—but we should not try to solve them all here now, because we shall not be able to. If I had been able to do so in my evidence, I would have done so, but because of the radical changes that we are making, we need to get this right.

I shall make a brief comment on overall pay. I have always taken the view that we are too shy and retiring on this subject. People recognise that MPs need a proper rate of pay for the job. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House put it correctly when he said that a balance must be struck between not underpaying and not overpaying. My experience is that when we ask the public what they think about politicians generally, they have a low opinion of us, but if we ask them about their individual MP, they speak highly of the amount of work and commitment that that MP puts in, even if they do not agree with him or her politically.

We therefore make a serious mistake if we buy the newspaper line that all politicians are hopeless. Indeed, if my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) had his amendment adopted, I would have said to him that he had chosen exactly the wrong group—the way to deal with this matter would have been to link MPs' pay to that of senior journalists and editors. That would fundamentally have changed the nature of the debate. Indeed, if we had linked our pay to that of editors, we would all be being driven home in limousines at the end of the day.

Journalists and MPs have a special relationship and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South said, it is important to recognise that MPs must be properly resourced if we are to make our democracy work. That means being able to respond appropriately and fully to the needs of our constituents. It also requires us to be able to hold the Government to account and undertake the other tasks that we want to fulfil in Parliament. For that, we must have the appropriate research back-up.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Few Members here would disagree that MPs should be properly rewarded, but are we not forgetting that if we are to be paid the proper rate for the job, and I suggest that we are, it would be right and proper to take a fresh look at whether we should be able to engage in outside business interests? If we are being paid a full-time rate for a full-time job, what on earth are we doing moonlighting?

Mr. Soley: I am pleased to say that there are far fewer moonlighters than there used to be. Having said that, as one who does not have an outside job, I take the view that we must acknowledge that MPs need a proper rate of pay for the job. If they do their job, I am not so worried about what they do at other times. However, I would be extremely worried if Members frequently earned large sums in other jobs, and I am glad that we have rowed back on that. We must be careful about where we draw the line, because any of us might earn money by writing an article or writing a book, which seems to be popular from time to time.

I must move on to discuss my amendments, but I should first refer to our staff. Most MPs think that they are good employers, but in my experience many of us, even with the best of intentions, are not. That is one reason why I argued so strongly that MPs should have the right to hire and fire, but that the general administration and servicing of staff should be done by the Fees Office. That would have two enormous advantages, and the first is that it would create transparency for the public.

Our old system was faulty because people could not see the money going straight to our staff, even though that was where it went. In many cases, Members had to put

their hand in their own pocket to pay staff. However, some staff got a poor deal, so we must act. The report provides appropriately for that, which is the second advantage, and I hope that our vote today will make the position solid.

Sir Michael Spicer: Why should maximum salaries be set in the context that the hon. Gentleman has just described?

Mr. Soley: We have to set a maximum value for the pay of our staff, and the judgment is how many staff a Member needs. When I gave evidence, I said that, in my judgment, an MP needs between three and a half and four staff. The SSRB said three. It then produced a salary scale, to which the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred. We may want to revisit the issue through the Speaker's advisory panel, because we do not have it quite right.

I would be reluctant to table detailed amendments before we have had time to see how the proposal works, and I ask Members to bear in mind the fact that it represents a radical improvement. We are moving in the right direction and setting up the structures to deal with these matters, which is the important point.

Mr. Etherington: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Soley: Briefly.

Mr. Etherington: I am always brief, so that is not a problem. Can my hon. Friend explain why no consideration was given to setting minimum rates? MPs have been left in an open position. We should avoid the problems of pay freezes and reductions, which are endemic in the proposal.

Mr. Soley: I am not sure that my hon. Friend is right to use the word "endemic". What are proposed are pay scales that, contrary to rumours going around the House, are set not by the Transport and General Workers Union but by Hay Management Consultants, which has considered the pay range. He will be able to appoint his staff at any point on the scale and there is an uprating procedure, to which the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred. We must consider certain specific problems, however, and, in the light of my hon. Friend's intervention, I shall deal with them now, beginning with a classic example.

We may need to revisit and refer back to the SSRB the circumstances of a highly skilled, highly qualified secretary who has been employed by an MP for a long time. I employ such a person. If such secretaries went to work outside the House, they would earn considerably more than they are paid here. We need a means to pay a person with specialist experience, knowledge and long service, so I hope that the matter is referred back to the SSRB through the Speaker's panel. I shall work to achieve that, because we do not have the answer at the moment.

Joan Ruddock *rose—*

Mr. Soley: I am conscious of the fact that many Back Benchers want to speak, but I shall take a final intervention.

Joan Ruddock: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Will he take it from me—or perhaps he already knows—that a person employed by a Greater London Authority Member would start at close on £25,000 as a caseworker and researcher? For many of us who represent inner-London constituencies, that is the yardstick to which we have to work.

Mr. Soley: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but I cannot add to what I have said. However, I remind Members that the proposal represents a radical improvement and a big step in the right direction. We must build on it, pick out the anomalies and deal with them over the next year or two.

The safety of our staff is incredibly important. The Liberal party suffered a tragic experience in that respect and, although we all think of it as a special case, we know that we sometimes ask our staff to deal with disturbed people. Over the years, Members have done research on their surgeries and I have to tell the House that people with severe paranoid disorders often visit MPs. After all, if a submarine is interfering with a person's brainwaves, who else can that person go to but his MP, who can get the Secretary of State for Defence to make it stop? We sometimes ask our staff to deal with seriously disturbed people and we should not underestimate the demands involved in such a request. That is why I am pleased about the recommendation on safety.

Amendment (o) is straightforward and Members will understand it, but there is a complication that I want to point out. I am aware that many Members employ their staff in London even though they are not London MPs, and my amendment addresses that. When I read the SSRB report, I realised that we had to make a change, but there is a difficulty which I ask Members to bear in mind.

I have taken helpful advice from the Fees Office on the wording of the amendment in order to get it right. A Member who represents a seat outside London but who employs someone here will be able to get the extra £3,500. However, matters will get very complicated for Members if they attempt to break the work up. Staff may be employed part time and I know that it is common for Members to employ someone in London when the House is sitting, but in the constituency when the House is not sitting. I strongly advise Members to talk through such an arrangement with the Fees Office first; otherwise, in certain limited cases, they will run out of money before the end of the year. We must monitor the situation closely and, if necessary, ask the Speaker's panel to address it.

I have already referred to the long-service award, so I shall pass over it. Amendment (d), which is also straightforward, would move the incidental expenses allowance up from £14,000 to £18,000. The SSRB set the figure too low. The media may want to pick up that point and say, "They are giving themselves £4,000 over and above the SSRB recommendation", so let me spell out the importance of the amendment.

Every Member is like a small company. I have tried several times to get a feel for the way in which MPs operate and almost every one operates differently. The amendment would take payment of staff out of the office costs allowance and enable us to deal with it separately. We should establish a pot of money that Members could use flexibly and, within the constraints of parliamentary duties, in any way they liked. The report makes clear how the SSRB reached the sum of £14,000, made up of the rental of accommodation plus a pot of £5,000 for

[Mr. Soley]

incidentals. That pot is interchangeable and remains so in my amendment which would increase the allowance to £18,000. Members may use it as they like so long as it is for parliamentary duties.

I should like to conclude by giving the House a few examples as it is a matter that has frustrated me for many years. I suspect that our constituents want their Members of Parliament to be innovative and develop new ways of working.

Soon after I was first elected, I got involved in Northern Ireland issues. During the dirty protest and what became the hunger strike, I visited some of the prisons. I wanted to visit a prison in southern Ireland which was experiencing similar problems, of which, as a former probation officer, I had some knowledge. We bent the rules slightly inasmuch as my fare was paid even though I was not on a Select Committee and I was on the Front Bench for only part of that period. However, I could not go to Dublin and visit the prison there, so we did daft things like buying a return ticket to Belfast, converting it to one that came back from Dublin and paying the difference or getting the train from Belfast to Dublin and paying the fare ourselves.

The problem has not gone away. If Members representing southern constituencies go to visit the new Parliament in Edinburgh, they can get their ticket paid, but if they stay overnight and make it a two-day visit they will have to pay the difference themselves. It is ludicrous. German Members of Parliament have all their travel paid. One of the recommendations of the Fees Office to the SSRB was that about £4,000 should be set aside for that type of travel. I have tried to deal with the issue by putting the money into a general pot. Many hon. Members have pointed out that £14,000 is not sufficient to pay for the rental of a constituency office and the telephone bill. That has been one of the biggest complaints, so rather than propose an amendment that would allow for the payment of telephone calls, as that would cause many complications, I simply proposed increasing the allowance.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does the hon. Gentleman think that his amendment deals adequately with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale)—that those of us who seek to provide office accommodation in our constituencies are meeting a huge range of costs that would otherwise be met in this building, which means that we will not have the resources for journeys and overnight stays in Dublin such as the hon. Gentleman has described?

Mr. Soley: The answer is that some people will and others will not. Some Members spend £10,000 or more a year on rent. Others are paying only £2,000 or £3,000 a year, often because they are in substandard accommodation and, for a variety of reasons, are paying below the market rent. We cannot get a typical picture, but the hon. Gentleman should recognise that the proposals are a great step forward.

I have often been praised for setting up the evidence-taking sessions. I thought that there should be more such sessions in the House of Commons. The ones on the press Bill were largely paid for, but the ones on the working of the family and on family policy in the country at large were not, so I ended up paying for them myself and getting outside organisations to contribute. If we want Members of Parliament to work innovatively, we ought to be able to carry out such research. In the long run, through the Speaker's panel and perhaps by referral back to the SSRB, we will need to find other ways to improve and expand on this package.

If people want good representation—I know that they do—and if they want their Parliament to be more effective, we have to pay for it. Democracy does not come cheap and if we want good-quality democracy and good-quality Members of Parliament who are well resourced, we are taking a big step in the right direction. We have not got it all right today, but I ask hon. Members to vote for my amendments and for the proposals we are considering today.

2.44 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am sure that all parties are having a free vote today, so it follows that what I have to say today is in no way a party line. I have consulted my 51 right hon. and hon. Friends and have had conversations with a great many other Members, so I hope that my speech will at least be reasonably well informed.

From the previous debate on salaries and allowances I recall several high-minded speeches in which Members said that they would vote against the increases for various reasons and, no doubt, with good motives. With that in mind, when the SSRB report became available earlier this year I asked the then Leader of the House how many hon. Members, in the current financial year, voluntarily elected to forgo any or all of their parliamentary salary. I wonder whether anyone can tell what the answer was: it was, of course, a resounding nought.

Mr. Mullin: I can assist the hon. Gentleman. I took the view that I could give away the proceeds of that last outrageous salary increase more effectively than my right hon. Friend the Chancellor could. I have been taking the increase for the past five years and diverting all but 3 per cent. of it to a donations account, which I give away to good causes of my choice.

Mr. Tyler: That is admirable, but my next point follows precisely from that. I have given away between 15 and 20 per cent. of my salary to my staff. I have had to do that because, as the Leader of the House said, to do a good job of work we have needed staff to provide a service to our constituents and to the nation. We are here not only as constituency Members; as Edmund Burke said, we also represent the whole nation. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) obviously has a very large majority and perhaps he does not have to provide quite the service that I have to provide in North Cornwall, but I can assure him that in a very scattered rural area the staffing required demands a level of resources that has not been available in the past. That is why I entirely endorse the point made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley).

I understood the points that were made in the previous debate, but all right hon. and hon. Members will recognise that what we are doing today is not voting ourselves increases in salaries and allowances but trying to ensure

that we properly resource the services that we provide to our constituents and to the nation as its representatives. Surely that must be what it is all about.

As I said in a previous debate, there are opportunities for humbug, but there are more opportunities for humbug among the media. I recall that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South was a professional journalist before he entered politics, so the proposal by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush is entirely right. If we tied our increases to the remuneration of senior journalists, I suspect that we would have less humbug from the fourth estate. They do not provide their own staff, equipment or offices. Frankly, they do not have a clue about the costs that we have to incur.

Timing is an issue. I very much regret the fact that we are debating this now rather than before the general election. I said publicly and privately to the previous Leader of the House that we should take the matter to the electorate to see what they had to say. Interestingly, despite the fact that all the proposals were in the public domain and were well publicised by the newspapers, I do not recall a single comment from any member of the public during the recent general election. That entirely endorses the point made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush: that although respect for the reputation of Parliament as an institution is pretty low, individual Members representing all parties have a high rating when it comes to serving their constituents. There is growing recognition of that, on which I hope the media will reflect in future.

There are still some important teething problems in the package before us, but that should not obscure the fact that we now have a mechanism by which others outside this place look at the work that we do, provide appropriate comparators and seek to make an objective assessment of what we and our services are worth. We would break that tradition at our peril. That is why I oppose the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South; as soon as we bring in different comparators, everyone will come up with something that is thought to be more appropriate. The SSRB may not be perfect, but it is certainly a great deal better than the House, in effect, contemplating its navel and trying to decide in a very unfortunate way how we should deal with these matters.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The SSRB asked what a person in a comparator job would be paid. Does my hon. Friend accept that, in determining what we should be paid, that is only half the question? Unlike an NHS manager, we are expected to be representatives and to understand the living standards of our constituents. If we merely say that we do the same sort of job as a senior civil servant and so should be paid the same, there is a danger that we will lose touch with our constituents.

Mr. Tyler: I hope that my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to develop that interesting argument. The problem is that, although we look for comparators, the job of a representative of the nation in this place is unique, so it is extremely difficult to find a completely relevant comparator. I take my hon. Friend's point, but I think that he is asking for perfection.

Reference has been made to the role of the Department of Finance and Administration in developing the package of proposals. It will have an extremely difficult task precisely because this is such a unique institution and our job is so unusual. The role of the Speaker's advisory panel will be very important, especially in the transitional phase. It is unfair on Officers of the House to ask them to make political judgments—these are policy issues. The advisory panel will have an important role to play. Mr. Speaker, you and your staff will have to bear a significant added work load, especially in the new system as it develops. We who put that load on you and your staff must be conscious of that.

I do not want to say anything more about salary, because I accept the SSRB recommendation. Although many of us may have concerns about some of the proposals at the fringes, we must maintain the integrity of the package if we can—on that, I am with the Leader of the House. If we ask people outside to make a careful assessment of what is right but then start to play with that assessment, we will open a can of worms.

It is important to remember that the allowances are ceilings; they are not recommended expenditure or perks. We are not being given some money and told to take it. Whatever the allowance may be, individual Members of Parliament may go up to that ceiling for that purpose. Not every Member must go up to the ceiling or feel that that is necessary. I am full of admiration for Members who are able to provide a service to their constituents at a lower rate; that is fine.

It is important that we do not accept the whole of the SSRB report, and the appendices produced by the consultants, as though they were written in stone. It is clear from the table to which the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) referred that Hay did not really get under the skin of Members of Parliament. There is no reference to a case worker. Most Members of Parliament have someone who does case work as a key function in their constituency office. Similarly, it is clear from the job descriptions in that appendix that there will be mixes of different types of operation, and every Member may have a different mix. The motion is not saying that that is how it will be done: it is merely an illustration, and the figures given are median figures.

In addition to the point about national insurance contributions and redundancy figures, there is the extremely important issue of whether these are salary ranges or salary scales. I know from my business experience as well as from my experience in the House that those two things are very different. People on salary ranges may be told, "You'll start there and we'll see how you go." Salary ranges have the important function of ensuring that there is not a glass ceiling on which people soon bang their heads, and are quite different from salary scales. I am sure that the Fees Office will be alive to that.

I understand that we shall be given some salary ranges before the recess, so it will be much easier to see how the issues to which the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred can be dealt with. The onus will still be on Members of Parliament to ensure that we remunerate our staff sensibly and properly, and that we devise realistic rather than artificial job specifications. It would be absurd if we accepted Hay's descriptions, which are not appropriate.

I take the points that have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House about flexibility and about the fact that great care needs to be taken during the transition.

[Mr. Tyler]

We might have to come back to this issue in future, but the present motions offer helpful guidance without being too prescriptive.

I welcome the provision for security. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) knows only too well how inadequately and disgracefully we have protected our staff and our voluntary assistants in the past, because we have not had the resources to do so. I am sure that we all remember the tragic result of that failure.

I endorse the principle behind the special motion relating to the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). It is important to note that it does not refer to him as the Foreign Secretary. We are not indemnifying an officer of the Crown. All Members of Parliament and their staff must be protected against the litigious actions of the public in the work we do on their behalf. I welcome what the Leader of the House has said on the insurance that is built into the package.

As I said at the outset, the Liberal Democrats have a free vote, so my advice is purely that and no stronger. I am worried by the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait). Although I recognise their force, I think I am right in saying that they would negate the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush on the differential between London-based staff and the staff of London Members of Parliament. The logic of the report is that London-based staff will want London rates to apply. I am concerned that if we accepted the amendment of the hon. Member for Beckenham we could not incorporate amendment (o) tabled by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I should like to reassure the hon. Gentleman here and now that my amendment was not drafted with that in mind: it was drafted to build in flexibility. If the amendment is likely to be accepted, I am happy to redraft it.

Mr. Tyler: I do not know whether that is possible, but whoever replies to the debate may deal with that point. As I read the amendment, and according to advice I have received from the Clerks Department, it would negate amendment (o).

I confess that I have some difficulty with the issue of incidental expenses and the ceiling of £14,000 or £18,000. My parliamentary constituency office is not subsidised, but it has been located in its present premises for some time and the rent is relatively low. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), who is newly elected to the House, faces a different rental market. She is an example of a Member who will find it difficult to rent reasonable accommodation that provides safety and security for her staff.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): The important point to make is that it is possible to claim the allowance only if the Member has spent it.

Mr. Tyler: I entirely agree. As I said earlier, these allowances are not automatic—they are ceilings.

The hon. Member for Beckenham has also tabled an amendment on IT equipment and procurement. I listened carefully to the advice given by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Information. We must recognise that the procurement of IT is complicated and difficult. It is not brand choice, but specification choice that is of concern. It is what computers will do that concerns us, not who provides them. The Information Committee has done a very good job in that respect.

I have great sympathy with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on the additional costs allowance—the costs that those of us with constituents in other parts of the country incur when travelling to and spending time in London. I hope that he will explain the logic of his amendment. After all, the SSRB identified this as a real problem, but it was not asked to do so in relation to the House of Commons; it was asked to do so in relation to our noble Friends. The timing was unfortunate, in that when the inquiry was set up the board was not asked to consider the problem on our behalf. It is a particularly serious problem given the cost of finding accommodation in London, which affects all Members but especially new Members.

It is always tempting to follow the hon. Member for Sunderland, South, who is very persuasive, but I think that to tear up the arrangement we have reached with the SSRB and find a completely new comparator would be entirely misguided at this stage, and would open a Pandora's box.

When it comes to parliamentary pensions I take the advice of the trustees very seriously, as I think many Members will. None of us is here for ever, and although I have not yet reached the point of having a special interest—unlike the Leader of the House—I remember only too well, when I first arrived here many years ago, seeing some Members retire on derisory pensions. I therefore hope that Members will listen carefully to what is said by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill).

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) asks for only one of the SSRB's recommendations to be put to the House for comment, at this stage, rather than being kicked into what may be rather longer grass than we intended.

The debate is important and many wish to speak, but let me reiterate one major point: if we decide to tear up the recommendations of those who have been asked to advise us on an objective basis, we shall become involved in some very invidious discussions in this place. I hope we shall not do that.

3.2 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I support all that was said by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Many voices are missing from today's debate, because those involved cannot be here. I refer to the voices of our staff. I hope that at 4 pm we shall agree to move towards the proposed new system, but I also hope that members of all parties will first admit that we have been among both the best and the worst employers in the United Kingdom. I can confirm that from my experience as chairman of the staff liaison committee of the parliamentary Labour party, and from our association with the secretaries council.

Over the years Members have had the best staff they could wish for, both here and in their constituencies; yet we have consistently failed to support them by providing

either proper equipment or proper salaries and conditions. The Transport and General Workers Union is on the staff liaison committee—representing staff of all political parties, not just Labour—and we have had to deal with cases of people whose salaries would shock most people outside.

Just before the SSRB's report, the TGWU conducted a survey whose findings are worth reading. Some staff salaries are shocking—regardless of the party for whom those people work—and bear no relation to the amount that we can claim in office allowances. As I have said, we are among both the best and the worst employers, but we certainly would not stand for some of these employment practices if we discovered them in our constituencies.

The debate gives us an opportunity to make progress. On behalf of the parliamentary Labour party, I and successive chairs of the PLP, dating back to the chairmanship of Lord Orme, have given evidence to the SSRB. At that time, in the first evidence we gave, we argued for a division between our responsibilities—a division between the way in which we hired and fired staff, and the way they were treated as individuals and employees. We argued for the establishment of a personnel department. Although that is not included in this recommendation, I feel that it is one of the issues that your advisory panel should consider, Mr. Speaker. We do need a proper personnel service to ensure that our staff are treated like normal human beings.

We also need to consider, as a separate issue, the equipment that our staff need in order to do their jobs. It has taken us a long time to reach the stage at which that distinction can be made. Many staff work, or at least did work, with obsolete equipment, because the Members for whom they worked could not afford to pay for new equipment. Conversely, many staff did not receive wage increases because the Member involved had bought some equipment instead.

All sorts of peculiar practices have gone on over the years. The review gives us an opportunity to proceed to a system that is fair to our staff, and makes us more accountable to those whom we seek to serve. As I have said, weaknesses remain; I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will soon appoint your advisory panel, and that it will take account of some of the issues raised today.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned public liability. Following an incident when parts of this building fell down and almost killed members of our staff, the Minister for Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney)—who was a member of the PLP staff liaison committee—argued for the provision of public liability cover for every staff member. Each of us should have a public liability certificate displayed wherever we employ staff, both here and in our constituencies.

There are further outstanding problems that your advisory panel should consider, Mr. Speaker. For instance, our staff still do not enjoy superannuation conditions similar to those of other employees of the House or, indeed, of Members themselves. Under the current system, staff can qualify for a payment—we can claim on their behalf, but they cannot claim themselves—of 10 per cent. into a pension of their choice. That is ridiculous. If we do as most Members should do and increase the salaries of our staff each year, we must then increase their pensions as well—and the pension company, whichever it is, rips off the public purse by taking a percentage of the increase as a service charge. The sooner our staff are on a proper superannuation scheme, the better.

I do not want to labour the point, as I think it important for us to reach 4 pm very quickly. *[Interruption.]* I want to allow others a chance to speak. Let me say, however, that the voice of staff has been kept quiet too long here. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that your panel will provide room for representatives of both the TGWU and the secretaries council, to ensure that staff interests are looked after properly.

I entirely support the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley). As I have said, we have waited many years for this day, and on behalf of our staff I thank Members in advance for voting for a proper structure for them.

3.9 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I rise on behalf of fellow trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund and in my capacity as chairman of the parliamentary Members fund, the hardship fund set up to look after Members who fall into financial difficulties, or whose widows and children do so. That gives me a perspective on these issues that perhaps not all right hon. and hon. Members enjoy.

I was disappointed that the Government did not make their own submission on the issue of pensions to the review body. We fully expected that they would; I am puzzled as to why they did not. I understand that the only representation that was made was an oral one by a senior Treasury official. Hon. Members will not be surprised to know that that submission concentrated on the additional costs that would be involved if the amendment standing in my name and that of my fellow trustees were accepted. That may have been one of the things that influenced the recommendation that, sadly, the review body has made.

The review body and those who have taken part in successive debates on the issue have failed to recognise the fundamental difference between employment in this place and employment anywhere else. We try to encourage into this place people of the highest quality, from all walks of life, preferably people who have been successful in other careers, so that they can bring their expertise and make a valuable contribution to debates in this place. In doing so, we often ask them to give up extremely successful careers outside.

It is probably true that the majority of Members have taken a reduction in their income in order to be here. We all knew what we were in for, so there is no complaint about that, but the problem is that, on average, Members serve less than 10 years in this place. They have to pick up careers after they leave. Often, they serve the prime 10 years of their working lives in this place. I, as a trustee of the parliamentary contributory pension fund and as chairman of the parliamentary Members fund, have seen what the impact is on many Members who leave this place. They often do so involuntarily: they may be defeated at an election, the boundaries of their constituency may change, or they may suffer ill health.

After leaving, at least half of all Members are worse off than they were as Members. Probably many more are worse than they were before they became Members. Some

[Mr. John Butterfill]

are seriously worse off. There are still hon. Members who lost their seats in 1997 who remain unemployed. Many Members, particularly those who are older, in their 50s, found it very difficult to get decent full-time re-employment elsewhere, and have had to take part-time jobs or part-time consultancies—they have become supply teachers, for example—and are on much lower incomes than they were on when they were here. Those Members are not able to top up their pension fund to keep it at the level that they would have enjoyed had they remained Members. It is those Members whom I am particularly concerned about. They will and do suffer severe hardship.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: I would like to make some progress because many other hon. Members want to speak and we do not have a long time. If the hon. Lady will allow, I shall continue.

It is those Members whom I am concerned about. It is that interrupted service that is not recognised in any way by the present arrangements.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: I shall.

Dr. Tonge: The hon. Gentleman must surely agree that many women who have children are in exactly the same position.

Mr. Butterfill: Of course, one accepts that that is true, but we are comparing the parliamentary career with the situation of people outside. If someone in employment as an accountant or a lawyer—a large proportion of Members are lawyers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too many."] Still, if an accountant or lawyer loses his job, he can get employment again.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: No, I will not give way again to the hon. Lady. I am already regretting having done so in the first place.

The Leader of the House said that we must look at the impact of the proposal on other public sector employment and at its costs. Almost uniquely in the public sector, our pension scheme is a funded scheme. Almost all other public sector pensions are unfunded. They operate on a pay-as-you-go basis. The Government do not provide a fund of money in order to pay them. They pay them out of current taxation.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) may not remember it, but at one time, hon. Members were paying 9 per cent. of their salary towards their pensions. As a result of that and of the prudent management of funds by the trustees, the pension scheme is and has been in substantial surplus for some years. The consequence has been that the Government contribution has been well below that recommended by the Government Actuary over many years.

The Government Actuary recommends how much should be paid if the scheme were unfunded. He deducts from that what Members are contributing and then arrives at the figure that the Government would need to pay. I will quote the amounts that the Government have saved over the past few years. In 1990, the Government paid 6.6 per cent. less than the Government Actuary recommended; in 1992, 10.2 per cent. less than recommended; in 1995, 9.9 per cent. less; in 1996, 7.9 per cent. less; in 1999, 8.1 per cent. less; and in 2001, 11 per cent. less than recommended. The proposal would mean a 6 per cent. increase in cost—about £28 million. Even if the Government were to accept that, because of the scheme surplus they would still pay significantly less than the Government Actuary recommends they should, so we do not need crocodile tears from the Treasury telling us that the proposal cannot be afforded.

The House voted on the matter in 1980 and recommended that we should increase the accrual rate to one fortieth, which is what the trustees recommend at the moment. Unfortunately, that was not implemented, but it represents the very least that is being obtained in comparable countries.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman let me continue for a just a bit longer?

We are probably the meanest democracy in the western world in the way that we treat our Members of Parliament in terms of pensions. I will demonstrate that with facts and figures, but first I shall give some other public sector comparisons. Only one other public sector involves the principle of interrupted service: when the legal profession moves into the judiciary, sometimes temporarily. The judges' scheme is complicated. They used to receive a full pension after 15 or 20 years, depending on the rank of judge they were, but they are now on an accrual rate of one fortieth, which is what we are asking for.

The police have a complicated accrual rate. The rate is one sixtieth for the first 20 years and two sixtieths for each year thereafter, up to a maximum of forty sixtieths, which means that they receive, effectively, an accrual rate of one fortieth. They achieve a maximum pension of two thirds after 30 years of service. Of course, their retirement age is very much lower than ours. We retire at 65, although it is possible to retire at 60 if one is willing to take a substantially reduced pension. In the police service, however, the pension is payable from the age of 50. Normal retirement age in the police is 55, and 60 for inspectors and superintendents, except in the Metropolitan police, for whom it is 55.

Similarly, in the armed forces, to which reference has been made, the scheme grants a full pension after 34 years' service. That is similar to our scheme, but the armed forces' retirement age is 55 and they can retire after 16 years' reckonable service. Unlike our scheme, theirs is non-contributory.

Mr. Todd: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the comparison made by the trustees in their evidence. They regarded the range and diversity of a Member of Parliament's job as comparable to that of directors and senior executives in the private sector. Having left such a

role to come to this place, I have no pension from that period of service that is comparable to what he is proposing. Moreover, I fail to see any justifiable comparison with the responsibilities.

Mr. Butterfill: All I can say is that the review body thought that MPs were comparable with senior management and junior directors. The hon. Gentleman might have forgotten that it was making a comparison with the ordinary duties of a Back Bencher, and perhaps overlooked the fact that Members undertake considerable additional and onerous unpaid appointments, whether as Parliamentary Private Secretaries, members or Chairmen of Select Committees, members of the Chairmen's Panel, or Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. A large number of the appointments that the majority of Members undertake substantially increase their work load. So the hon. Gentleman's comparison is not terribly accurate.

I want to make a comparison with what happens in other Parliaments. In Australia, pensions are payable after 12 years or four parliamentary terms in the case of voluntary retirement, and after eight years or three parliamentary terms in the case of involuntary retirement. The scheme provides for a maximum pension of 75 per cent. of basic salary after only 18 years.

In Denmark, pensions are linked to civil service grade No. 49, and are payable in full after 20 years' membership of the Danish House.

In Finland, the full pension is payable after 15 years as an MP. Those born before 1940 get 66 per cent. of MPs' pay from the age of 60. Those born after 1940 are eligible for 60 per cent. at 65. However, Members who are defeated receive what is called an "adjustment pension" for the rest of their lives, at the current rate of 1,250 ecu a month. When an MP dies, his spouse and children receive his full pension.

In France, Members can accrue a maximum pension of 84.375 per cent. of final salary after twenty-two and a half years. In Germany, the maximum pension is 75 per cent. of final salary after seventeen and a half years.

In the Republic of Ireland, the accrual rate is one fortieth and Members receive two thirds of their pay after twenty-six and two thirds years. That is in line with our suggestion, and is one of the less generous overseas schemes.

In the Isle of Man, the accrual rate is one fortieth, but the maximum pension payable after 30 years' service is 75 per cent. of final salary. In the United States of America, the maximum pension is 80 per cent. of final salary, with an accrual rate of one fortieth.

The combined resources of the Fees Office and the House of Commons Library have not enabled me to find a single other western country that pays such a mean rate of pension as we do, and it is about time we put that right.

3.24 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I have a feeling that my contribution to today's proceedings may prove a mite less popular with my colleagues than my speech yesterday. Indeed, colleagues whose judgment I respect have advised me that it is not a wise career move for someone like me—young, ambitious, upwardly mobile—to table such amendments. Well, that is something I shall just have to live with. I came to this place to do what I believe to be right, not to bask in the warm glow of colleagues' approbation, pleasant though that is. Whatever view they take, I hope that hon. Members will at least accept the spirit in which I speak.

I should say at the outset that I am strongly in favour of the motion on Members' allowances, which will place the employment of our staff on a proper footing. That is long overdue, and I congratulate those responsible, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), and for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), who played a leading part in achieving the reform.

I turn to the amendment that is in my name and those of several other hon. Members. I do not believe that there is any justification for awarding ourselves an extra £4,000 over the next two years, and my amendment would rescind that. Nor should we be in the invidious position of having to vote on our own pay, and my amendment would put an end to that embarrassment once and for all. It would do so by linking our fortunes not to those of some anonymous civil servant, as we have attempted to do in the past, but to a cross-section of public servants—nurses, teachers, doctors and dentists—with whom our constituents can readily identify.

If the amendment is accepted, our pay will rise each year by the average of the increase received by those professions. The figure for last year would have been about 3.7 per cent., and for the previous year about 3.3 per cent. That is not very different from the increases that we received. We would not, however, receive the extra £4,000.

There is a view that certain so-called top people should be immune from the laws of the market—in which, in all other respects, they usually believe strongly—that apply to ordinary mortals. I do not share that view. So far as possible, elected representatives should share the same sunshine and rainfall as those whom they represent. I do not accept that £49,000 a year is an inadequate salary. We are in the top 10 per cent. of income earners. We earn more than the overwhelming majority of our constituents, although I appreciate that that is less true of those who represent the more prosperous areas. However, the fact remains that £49,000 a year is a good salary, even in the most prosperous areas. I agree with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in opening the debate: we should not undervalue our work, and our present salary does not do so.

It might be possible to justify an increase this time if we could argue that ours is a profession that finds it difficult to attract candidates of the right calibre, or if seats were left unfilled owing to a lack of applications. The truth, however, is that all parties are heavily oversubscribed with applicants for winnable seats. Perhaps it has escaped my attention, but I have not noticed any unfilled vacancies. Unlike nurses, teachers and doctors, there is no shortage of people wanting to become Members of Parliament.

It is a tribute to the fact that the public service ethic is not entirely dead, and to the undoubted attractions of the job, that there are individuals who are prepared to give up

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

highly paid jobs in business or the professions to seek election to Parliament. As long as that remains the case, there is no justification for a large salary increase.

Mr. Tyler: As a former Minister, does the hon. Gentleman think that the same principle applies to the recent increase in ministerial salaries?

Mr. Mullin: We are not debating ministerial salaries. Should the hon. Gentleman's talents come to the attention of the Prime Minister and in due course he becomes a Minister, I assure him that I, for one, will not resent whatever salary happens to be paid for that job.

It cannot have escaped our attention that Members' standing in the esteem of the public is not all that high at present. No doubt there are a variety of reasons for that, many of them unfair, but we are not in such a strong position that we can afford to take even a little gamble with public opinion. I know that there is a view that this is a small storm and it will all blow over in a few days, but I do not agree: every time we do something like this, it adds to the great ocean of cynicism lapping at the foundations of the democratic process. Nor will it be forgotten as quickly as some Members think. Even now, after five years, people still raise with me the last outrageous salary increase that we voted ourselves, in July 1996.

Over the past four weeks, I have participated in various discussions about the urgent need to restore respect for politicians and the political process. I am not clear how awarding ourselves a large increase in salary will help to achieve that. I look forward to hearing from anyone who thinks that it will.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): There is a strong case for awarding nurses and others in this category a large increase. Suppose that my hon. Friend's amendment were accepted and that those people then got the pay increase they deserved. Would it not increase people's cynicism, and would they not say, "Ah, they only got the extra money because MPs' salaries are now linked to theirs."

Mr. Mullin: I have to accept that some people are capable of finding cynical motives anywhere, but linking our salaries to professions with which our constituents could readily identify would be easier to defend than the present situation.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mullin: I would like to get on.

Mr. Butterfill: But you asked for people to comment.

Mr. Mullin: Oh, well then—please be my guest.

Mr. Butterfill: Of course there continue to be many people who are prepared to give up high salaries to come here for a lower one. The question is whether there are as many as there used to be. If we are to believe the media, the quality of people coming here is getting poorer and poorer. If they are right, that may be a reason.

Mr. Mullin: I do not want to get involved in discussing the quality of my colleagues, other than to say that, in 14 years in this place, I have found people of an amazing range of talents and abilities. I have already done enough to hone down my vote in any internal party elections without commenting further.

If this is such a good idea, why did we not vote on it before the general election? The report has been around for some time and could easily have been dealt with before 7 June. We all know why it was not.

I tabled my amendment to give those who are against the proposed salary increase, be they ever so few, an opportunity to place their opposition on the record.

3.33 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): In both constituencies that I have represented here, I have become well known, if not notorious, for believing that our remuneration package needs to be improved, so I hope that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) will not complain if I do not follow down his path.

My points are based on my experience of having to think flexibly and laterally about how to manage on the limited resources provided by the office costs allowance. I acknowledge that the total has increased, but we need to build in much more flexibility than is found in either the report or the Government's recommendations. I was glad that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) recognised that.

The report seemed to be pervaded by the belief that we are all dreadful employers. There have been conflicting comments about how good or bad we are, but if we are to enhance our abilities, it would be better for us to get training on how to be a good employer rather than to inflict inflexible regimes on everybody, regardless of their qualities as an employer. If we had such training, we might be able to use our resources more flexibly.

In employing my staff, I have found that the draft, and very brief, job description, as outlined in the report, and the salary allied to it, do not fit with what I expect to need. We are all being dragooned into going down a route that may not be the most effective way of delivering services to our constituents and to the House. I would like the Leader of the House to clarify whether there is flexibility in our discussions with the Fees Office about both the contract and the pay that goes with it.

The Leader of the House referred to the use of consultants. In order to provide the best possible service with the limited sum available, I have used consultants in various areas, and not only in research. The right hon. Gentleman said that he believed that such a practice should be allowed to continue. Does he believe that we should be able to continue to use consultants within our staff budget from 5 July, or does he want to refer the matter to the Speaker's panel?

I know that there are various views on how information technology needs would best be provided. I use IT extensively, although anyone who knows me is aware that I am not a specialist in it. I already use three desktops and two laptops, across two staff, so the recommended package does not even meet my current needs. I have two combined fax, copiers, scanners and printers, plus one very robust printer for the vast volume of letters that my secretary has to print off. That, again, is not covered.

I understand that it has been mooted that we should be able to buy the extra equipment that we need through our discretionary allowance, but given the speed of

technological change, upgrading every four years is not good enough. I am concerned that, because of the IT budget, our IT will go the way of our internal telephone system, which it took 20 years to upgrade. I fear that we will not only not upgrade as often as we should but find ourselves sliding back into using the equivalent of the old manual typewriters.

In order to keep my equipment going, I have my own computer consultants who provide me not only with training but with instant back-up, whenever I need it, including weekends and evenings. I am a great believer in avoiding having a monopoly provider. I hope that, out of our increased expenses, we will be allowed to keep our own computer support staff.

If the Leader of the House can give me assurances on all those points, I will be most grateful. If not, I will want to take the necessary action.

3.39 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I rise to speak to amendment (e) on the additional costs allowance. I thank those hon. Members who have supported my proposal. I should add that I will be supporting the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), and the amendment tabled collectively and unanimously by our pension trustees, who belong to parties on both sides of the House.

We all wish that the question of additional costs had been referred to the SSRB when the other allowances were, but it was not. That is unique. The SSRB last looked at these matters in 1996, when the overnight allowances for Members of the House of Lords and the additional costs allowance for hon. Members were considered at the same time.

It may be contended that the two allowances are not exactly comparable, and that is true. One is an overnight allowance, and the other is a yearly allowance. However, the SSRB concluded that they existed for the same purposes, and made a direct comparison between those allowances and allowances elsewhere in the public and private sectors.

That comparison can be found on page 93 of the 1996 report, which was report No. 38. The SSRB concluded that the two allowances were roughly similar, as the overnight allowance for Members of the House of Lords was £74 per night, and the additional costs allowance for hon. Members, when divided by that Session's 159 sitting days, came to £76.86 per night.

The figures for the most recent year go up to March 2001, and show that the House of Lords allowance was £84 per night. I had an exchange earlier on this matter with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, and the information that I have obtained from the House of Commons Library is that there were 159 sitting days last year. Dividing hon. Members' additional costs allowance of £13,322 by that figure puts our nightly rate at £83.79. The two figures are therefore very similar indeed.

The two allowances have the same purpose, as the SSRB has decided in the past. It has also decided that they should be calculated on essentially the same basis. I therefore conclude that the same percentage increase—of 42 per cent.—should apply.

In fact, the House of Lords has done a little better than that. The SSRB said that, in future, Members of the House of Lords can claim for the nights on which they sit and for the Sunday night before a sitting week. In the coming Session, therefore, it is recommended that, if the Lords sits for four days, the maximum allowance for that week will rise not by 42 per cent. but by 78 per cent.

Before my right hon. Friend has a slight heart attack at that, I assure him that I shall not press an increase of 78 per cent. However, there is strong evidence that the percentage increase should be the same for both allowances, as historically they have been calculated on the same basis. The current report is No. 48, and paragraph 4.4 of section IV of part 3 of volume 2 states that

"there is no doubt that the cost of accommodation in central London has in recent years risen faster than the overnight allowance. So have rents and the price of properties. In the past, the SSRB has assumed that accommodation in a 3-star hotel would be a broadly appropriate benchmark for both MPs and peers."

It adds that, on that basis, a House of Lords overnight allowance

"of at least £110 and preferably £120 now seems appropriate. This seems a reasonable estimate."

The SSRB accepts that both hon. Members' additional costs allowance and peers' overnight allowance have been calculated in the past on the basis of the cost of a three-star hotel. It concludes that a 42 per cent. increase in the House of Lords allowance—from £84 to £120—is right.

Hon. Members may consider that using the cost of a three-star hotel as the basis for calculation might have been appropriate in the past but that a better indication of how our allowance is spent should now be the change in rents or property prices over the years. If, over the past few years, those increases had been substantially lower than increases in the cost of three-star hotels, I might concede that my amendment was too generous. Figures from the Library show that the average rent in the fourth quarter of last year for a one-bedroom flat in inner London was £275 a week. By itself, that would come to more than the current allowance.

The increase in central-London rent levels from the fourth quarter of 1995 to the fourth quarter of 2000 amounts to 39.36 per cent. That is a period of five years, and the rise is only fractionally lower than the proposed 42 per cent. rise in the House of Lords overnight allowance, which is based on a seven-year period. In general, London property prices rose by 130 per cent. between 1994 and 2001, and prices for flats rose by 152 per cent.

Even if the SSRB were to abandon the three-star hotel basis for calculation of these allowances, and move to a calculation based on rents or property prices, there is no evidence that what they would find would force them to conclude that a rise of 42 per cent. was over-generous, given the increase in costs over the past few years.

We must get away from the idea that any increase in the maximum figure is necessarily applicable to everyone. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made a telling point when he said that we are talking about allowances. The maximum figure is the limit up to which a claim can be made, not an automatic payment made to everyone.

Some hon. Members may not claim the maximum figure for the current additional costs allowance, and they would not be affected. Others may claim up to the maximum and have no further expense, and they will not

[Mr. Clive Betts]

be affected either. However, I already know that some hon. Members spend more on these costs than they can claim. Some hon. Members will find that their rents will go up so much in the next few years, given the current rising trend, that they will go beyond the amount contained in the proposal. Certainly, some new Members of Parliament will find that property prices have doubled in the past few years. They will face a difficult problem if we do not resolve this matter.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made a very interesting offer earlier when he said that we could always refer this matter to the SSRB now. As I said then, I should have been much happier had the additional costs allowance been so referred a few months ago, along with all the other allowances.

I could have plucked a figure out of thin air for the amount by which hon. Members' additional costs should be increased, referred that number to the SSRB and delayed matters for a while. However, I think that I have been able to show that the amendment is based on what the SSRB has done in the past. Its direct comparisons have caused it to determine that peers' overnight allowance and hon. Members' additional costs allowance existed for the same purpose. In its most recent report, the SSRB states that, traditionally, it has used the same basis to calculate both allowances. My conclusion, therefore, is that it is fair to say that the same percentage increase should apply to both now.

My right hon. Friend might suggest that, if the matter were to be referred back to the SSRB, that body might find a different comparator based on rents or property prices. I think that I have drawn a fair and reasonable comparison between the allowances that I have described.

Delay in implementation of the proposal in the amendment could cause considerable problems for many hon. Members. Traditionally, new hon. Members go looking for property to rent or buy in the summer period, when returning hon. Members consider their accommodation arrangements for the next five years. It would place an unfair burden on hon. Members to tell them that nothing can be done over the summer, that the proposal has had to be referred to the SSRB and will not come back until the autumn, and that Christmas is the earliest date by which we might know what the increase is to be.

It would be unfair to delay, especially as I think that I have shown that the comparison proposed in the amendment is one that the SSRB has made in the past. My amendment is based on the information that that body has used to calculate the overnight allowance for Members of the House of Lords.

3.48 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I rise to speak briefly to amendment (b) on parliamentary pensions, which is tabled in my name and the names of many other hon. Members from all parties. I am grateful to those who have signed it and to those who have indicated that they would have signed it if they had had more time.

I stress that I have no particular vested interest in the proposal. The records show that I am the marrying kind, and that as a result no one with whom I am connected would benefit from the change.

Recommendation 8 of the report states that trustees should canvass the views of members of the parliamentary contributory pension fund on the issue of survivors pensions for unmarried partners, but what will happen after views have been canvassed? The motion merely calls on trustees to consider recommendation 8, together with recommendations 4 and 6. It does not speak about how best to implement the recommendation, as it does with recommendation 2. Opinion in this House would invite the trustees to go further and to act. That is why I thought it appropriate to give the House an opportunity, through a Division or by general assent, to give a view on the matter.

This proposal relates to the domestic arrangements of hon. Members in this day and age and is a reflection of current society. Also, we should be cautious not to penalise those who are bereaved, those who are the partners of a member who has died but do not happen to be married to them. By passing the amendment, we will indicate our wish to see our own practice reflect best practice in the private sector and the aspirations of those in the public sector.

There is a long-term TUC campaign that the House of Commons Library note describes as a pension provision for unmarried partners. A document, "Pensions and prejudice—how public sector pension schemes discriminate against non-married partners", argues for the introduction of benefits for non-married adult survivors in public sector pensions schemes. For those who feel it important to see that the Government do not oppose such proposals, it should be noted that the Government's own Green Paper—called, interestingly, "Partnerships in pensions"—states that the Government would be prepared to consider how practical arrangements can be devised for achieving the extension of eligibility for survivors' pensions to unmarried partners in the context of a statutory scheme.

The Government, in their evidence, indicated that they are prepared to consider extending eligibility for survivors' pensions to unmarried partners of members of statutory schemes, provided that the members are prepared to meet the additional costs. I believe that we should indicate that we are prepared to meet those small additional costs.

This proposal will not benefit the majority of Members; I accept that. This will be, in effect, an altruistic act by many current contributors to a minority, but a minority that exists in all parties and whose domestic arrangements, which reflect a significant proportion of current society, are not those of living with a married partner. It would not come at a cost to the Exchequer and it would satisfy those who worship private sector practice—as, now, probably a majority of private sector schemes have such a measure—and those who seek common cause with public sector workers.

In conclusion, the key question is the existence of a committed relationship and the financial dependence and/or interdependence of that partner; the key factor is not the presence or absence of a marriage certificate or the sexuality of the bereaved person. We have an opportunity to indicate that we want to go down a non-discriminatory path, which is in keeping with best practice in the private and public sectors in this day and age. I warmly commend amendment (b) to motion No. 4 to the House.

3.52 pm

Mr. Robin Cook: We have had a very good debate and I am glad that the time allowed for the debate has permitted all those with selected amendments to speak to them.

I hope hon. Members will forgive me if I am unable to respond to all the questions that were put to me in the time available. However, I shall endeavour to respond in writing to all Members who put questions to me. I shall try to respond to some of the questions from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who asked one or two questions of detail.

First—I appreciate that this is important in terms of how Members may approach the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley)—the hon. Lady asked about the rates of pay and the job descriptions. It would be our understanding that the Department of Finance and Administration would implement, broadly speaking, the rates of pay as set out in appendix E. We would envisage that being done within the range of a band of, perhaps, £2,000 above to £2,000 below the median point set out in appendix E, so there would be some flexibility for Members to nominate the particular figure for a member of staff.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton asked also about insurance. I reassure her that employer's liability and personal accident will continue to be centrally covered. Of course local matters, such as insurance cover for the structure and contents of a constituency office, will be for Members to find out of the incidental expenses provision, which, again, is a matter to bear in mind when considering the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush.

I say to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, and others who took part in the debate, that I very much welcome the support that has been shown for the Speaker's advisory panel and the recognition that that will provide us with a degree of flexibility to look at some of the difficult questions that arise in the process of transition. I welcome also the maturity shown in the debate and the recognition that there are bound to be teething problems. Inevitably, there will be difficult cases and it is right that, through the advisory panel, we should have the mechanism to consider these and, through the Speaker, the ability to assist in putting them right and providing a remedy.

In terms of the first two amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), on consultancies, I say that, in the event that she does not press them, I will undertake that they are considered early within the advisory panel to consider what remedy is available to us. Her amendments, and the others before the House, are House matters.

Mrs. Lait: Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Lady will be very brief, I will give way, but I only have five minutes.

Mrs. Lait: That is absolutely understood and I will be brief. What about the contracts that we already have with consultants? If we move immediately to the new pay scale, will we have to break those contracts?

Mr. Cook: There is specific provision in the SSRB report for central assistance to Members who find that they have legally binding contractual commitments, be it with an IT provider, a member of staff or a consultancy. Those individual cases will be considered to see if we can find a way forward.

The amendments are, of course, for the House to decide. On a number of them, I offer no view to the House. However, there are some on which I would invite the House to reflect before supporting them. I must say to the hon. Member for Beckenham that that applies very strongly to her amendment (l) on the IT package. It would be impractical for us to enter into the individual commitments that she wants. If we are to have a centrally funded and managed procurement system, we cannot at the same time, in practical terms, provide that degree of individual response. I hope that she will not press that amendment.

On the amendment from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush, we take no view. It is for the House to decide and for Members to judge in the light of their experience.

I have already told my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) that I am willing to put the additional cost to the SSRB and to invite them to respond urgently. I am pleased that he regards that as a tempting offer; I hope that I can tempt him further. *[Laughter.]* I hope that I can prove more tempting to my hon. Friend than the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton. If he does push his amendment, we will have to explain and justify to the public a 42 per cent. increase that does not proceed from any independent assessment. Personally, I would feel much more comfortable if we first went through such a process.

I invite other Members to join me in resisting the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). As I understood his speech, he believes that we are paid too much and should be paid less. The effect of the amendment, of course, would be to pay us more. This is what, in an earlier phase of his career, he would have described as an inherent contradiction in the system. I would strongly suggest that he not press his amendment; otherwise we may be obliged to advise the electors of Sunderland, South that he believes that Members of Parliament should be paid more.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) spoke with authority as a trustee, and I fully respect that, but the SSRB considered and rejected the course of action that he proposed, and the Government have grave concerns about the impact on public spending if the proposal were to become a bargaining point across the public sector.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the fact that the overall package is a dramatic change for the better. It involves higher ceilings for our staff costs, it involves better pay for the great majority of Members' staff and it gives a sound basis for access to modern technology. Whatever view hon. Members may form on the amendments, I very much hope that they will support the proposals, so that we can bring the support services of the House into the 21st century and enable us to serve our constituents better.

It being Four o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *pursuant to Order [this day], put the Questions necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) wish to press amendment (j)?

Mrs. Lait: I am minded to do so.

Mr. Speaker: I should mention that if her amendment were agreed, I would not be able to put the question on amendment (o). Does the hon. Lady realise that?

Mrs. Lait: I have had no discussions with the mover of amendment (o).

Mr. Soley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was not approached by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait). If I had been, I would certainly have recommended that she did not press her amendment to a vote, because then the other amendments will fall and that is not—I believe—the feeling of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Having heard the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), what is the hon. Lady's intention?

Mrs. Lait: Having heard the hon. Gentleman's comment, I shall not press the amendment, but I hope that its substance will be addressed by the Leader of the House.

Amendments made: (o) to the motion on members' allowances, insurance &c, in paragraph (2)(c), leave out from 'above' to 'these' and insert:

'should not in any financial year exceed—

(i) £70,000 in the case of a Member representing a London constituency; and

(ii) £60,000 in the case of any other Member, plus £3,500 in respect of each full-time (or full-time equivalent) staff person employed by that Member whose duties are wholly or mainly required to be performed within Greater London, provided that the aggregate sum payable in respect of any Member shall not exceed £70,000.'.

(d) in paragraph (2)(d), leave out '£14,000' and insert '£18,000'.—[*Mr. Soley.*]

Amendment proposed: (l), at end of paragraph (f), insert—

'(h) that Members should be consulted on their IT needs and requirements before any contracts are let centrally; that the central purchase of any IT equipment should be subject to public procurement requirements; that a wide range of provision is offered and updated as required by each Member and that Members should have access to more than one IT support service of their own choosing.'.—[*Mrs. Lait.*]

Question, That the amendment be made, *put and negatived.*

Amendment proposed: (e) in paragraph (2), at end insert—

'(2A) The House of Commons Additional Costs Allowance should be increased by the same proportion as that proposed for the House of Lords Overnight Allowance under Recommendation 16 of the Review Body on Senior Salaries Report No. 48.'.—[*Mr. Betts.*]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 117.

Division No. 11] **[4.2 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Coventry NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barker, Greg
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burgon, Colin
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Curry, Rt Hon David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heyes, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laxton, Bob
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David

Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Merron, Gillian
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Soley, Clive
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Waller, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
White, Brian
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Miller and
Mr. Kevin Barron.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Berry, Roger
Blears, Ms Hazel
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Bryant, Chris
Burnside, David
Cable, Dr Vincent
Callon, Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
David, Wayne
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dodds, Nigel
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Peter
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Rosemary
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Randall, John
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Shaw, Jonathan
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, agreed to,

MEMBERS' PAY (EXPRESSION OF OPINION)

Amendment proposed: (a), to leave out from the second 'House' to end and insert—

'(1) the Resolution of this House of 10th July 1996 relating to Members' salaries be rescinded; and

(2) for each year starting with 1st April from 2002 onwards, the salary of a Member shall be increased by the average of the percentage increase recommended in that year by the Nurses', School Teachers', and Doctors' and Dentists' Pay Review Bodies.'—*[Mr. Mullin.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 66, Noes 260.

Division No. 12] **[4.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Austin, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Cairns, David
Callon, Patsy
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coleman, Iain

Collins, Tim
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Efford, Clive
Ewing, Annebelle
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibeon, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Khabra, Piara S
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mullin, Chris
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pollard, Kerry
Randall, John
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Southworth, Helen
Stinchcombe, Paul
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Vis, Dr Rudi
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wishart, Pete
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mrs. Anne Campbell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Duncan, Peter
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
Gilroy, Linda
Goodman, Paul
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stratford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Spink, Dr Robert
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Sloale, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*

Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 42.

Division No. 13] **[4.24 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Curry, Rt Hon David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spink, Dr Robert
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Steele, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill

Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Austin, John
Berry, Roger
Brennan, Kevin
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Peter
Ewing, Annabelle
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Letwin, Oliver
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pollard, Kerry
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Skinner, Dennis
Stinchcombe, Paul
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Wishart, Pete
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Mark Todd.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 20th June 2001 and ending with 31st March 2002 the salary of a Member shall be increased by £2,000 per annum.

(2) That salary shall be increased by a further £2,000 per annum from 1st April 2002.

(3) The increases referred to above shall be additional to any increase resulting from the operation of paragraph (2) of the Resolution of this House of 10th July 1996.

PARLIAMENTARY PENSIONS

Amendment proposed: (a), at end to add—

"And that this House further endorses the recommendation of the Trustees of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund that the accrual rate be increased to 1/40th and that the additional cost be borne by the Exchequer".—[*Mr. Butterfill.*]

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 172.

Division No. 14] **[4.37 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barker, Greg
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Curry, Rt Hon David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Tony
Luff, Peter
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan

Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. George Mudie.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Annette
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Rt Hon Robin (Livingston)
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cruddas, Jon
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbs, Nigel
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Peter
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Goodman, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randel, David
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'dns)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Graham Stringer and
Mr. John Heppell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment proposed: (b), at end to add—

"And that this House believes that survivors' benefits could apply to unmarried partners as well as spouses"—*[Dr. Harris.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 33.

Division No. 15] **[4.48 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent

Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan
Duncan, Peter
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goodman, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Malleber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Millbend, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'hs)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Bakiry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burnside, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Dodds, Nigel
Francois, Mark
Hayes, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Kidney, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Paterson, Owen
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, agreed to.

MEMBERS' INSURANCE: REIMBURSEMENT OF COSTS INCURRED BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR BLACKBURN

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, provision should be made to reimburse the Right honourable Member for Blackburn for reasonable legal expenditure including damages arising in consequence of an action brought against him alleging vicarious liability for an act of negligence committed in the course of his duties as a Member of this House.—*[Mr. Robin Cook.]*

MEMBERS' PAY (MONEY RESOLUTION)

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That the following provision shall be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 20th June 2001 and ending with 31st March 2002 the salary of a Member shall be increased by £2,000 per annum.

(2) That salary shall be increased by a further £2,000 per annum from 1st April 2002.

(3) The increases referred to above shall be additional to any increase resulting from the operation of paragraph (2) of the Resolution of this House of 10th July 1996.—*[Mr. Robin Cook.]*

Select Committees

5 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That the following amendments be made to Standing Orders:

A. Select Committee Quorums

S.O. No. 124 (Quorum of Select Committees):

in line 1, at the beginning, insert—

'(A) Except as otherwise provided, the quorum of a select committee shall be three or a quarter of the number of its members, whichever is the greater; and in calculating the quorum fractions shall be counted as one.

(B) Where more than two select committees or sub-committees thereof meet concurrently for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, pursuant to Standing Order (Select Committees: power to work with other committees), the quorum of each shall be two.'.

S.O. No. 139 (Select Committee on Broadcasting):

in line 5, leave out from 'Members' to end of line 6.

S.O. No. 141 (Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee):

leave out paragraph (10).

S.O. No. 142 (Domestic Committees):

in line 9, leave out from 'Members' to end of the line.

S.O. No. 144 (Finance and Services Committee):

in line 19, leave out from 'Members' to end of the line.

S.O. No. 145 (Liaison Committee):

leave out paragraph (5).

S.O. No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration):

in line 10, leave out from 'Members' to end of line 11.

S.O. No. 147 (Procedure Committee):

leave out paragraph (3).

S.O. No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts):

in line 7, leave out from 'Members' to 'The' in line 8.

S.O. No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments):

in line 7, after 'concerned', insert 'and'.

in line 8, leave out from 'committee' to 'shall'.

in the table in paragraph (2), leave out the fourth column ('Quorum').

leave out paragraph (5).

S.O. No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee):

in line 9, leave out from 'Members' to end of line 10.

B. Select Committees (Power to Work with Other Committees)

That—

(1) The following Standing Order (Select Committees: power to work with other committees) be made:

'(1) Any select committee or sub-committee with power to send for persons, papers and records shall have power—

(a) to communicate its evidence to any other select committee or sub-committee of either House of Parliament; provided that evidence from the National Audit Office shall first have been agreed between that Office and the government department or departments concerned;

(b) to meet concurrently with any such committee or sub-committee for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence; and

(c) to meet concurrently with any other select committee of this House for the purpose of considering a draft report.

(2) Where two or more select committees have agreed reports to the House in identical terms, those reports may be published as a joint report; and

(2) That the following amendments be made to Standing Orders:'

S.O. No. 139 (Select Committee on Broadcasting):

in line 16, leave out from 'communicate' to end of line 33, and insert 'its evidence to the House of Commons Commission'.

S.O. No. 141 (Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee):

leave out lines 116 to 126.

S.O. No. 142 (Domestic Committees):

in line 23, leave out from 'communicate' to end of line 40, and insert 'its evidence to the House of Commons Commission'.

S.O. No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee):

leave out paragraphs (12) and (13).

S.O. No. 144 (Finance and Services Committee):

in line 28, leave out from 'communicate' to end of line 45, and insert 'its evidence to the House of Commons Commission'.

S.O. No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration):

leave out lines 21 to 26.

S.O. No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts):

leave out paragraphs (3) and (4).

S.O. No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments):

leave out lines 29 to 42.

in line 47, leave out from 'proceedings' to 'and' in line 52.

S.O. No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee):

leave out lines 23 to 34.

C. Select Committees Related to Government Departments

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments) be amended, by leaving out items 1, 4, 5 and 13 in the Table in paragraph (2) and inserting the following items at the appropriate places:

'Education and Skills/Department for Education and Skills/11';

'Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/17';

'Transport, Local Government and the Regions/Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions/17'; and

'Work and Pensions/Department for Work and Pensions/11'.

D. Select Committees (Power to Appoint Sub-Committees)

That the following amendments to Standing Orders be made:

S.O. No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration):

in line 29, at end add the following words:

'(5) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(6) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

(7) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.

S.O. No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments):

leave out lines 9 to 14, and insert the following words:

'(3) Each select committee appointed under this order shall have the power to appoint a sub-committee, and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee shall have power to appoint two sub-committees.'.

S.O. No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee):

in line 34, at end, add the following words:

'(5) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(6) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

(7) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss motion No. 8:

European Standing Committees

That the following amendments be made to Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees):

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Agriculture, Fisheries and Food', and insert 'Environment, Food and Rural Affairs'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Environment, Transport and the Regions', and insert 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Scottish, Welsh', and insert 'Scotland, Wales'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Social Security', and insert 'Work and Pensions'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Education and Employment', and insert 'Education and Skills'.

Mr. Cook: It may be convenient for the House, especially as so many hon. Members are heading in that direction, if I say that an explanatory memorandum is available in the Vote Office that details the terms and significance of the motion. During last Thursday's debate on programming, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) suggested that an explanatory memorandum would have been valuable. I am pleased to say that we have been able to respond, and I hope that colleagues who read that testimonial to him will appreciate it. For technical and legal reasons, we have not yet resolved whether we can put it on the Order Paper, but we shall continue to consider that.

I can be brief, because I believe that the motion reflects a broad consensus in many quarters of the House, although I may not carry everyone with me on that. I discussed the motion with the three senior Members appointed by the Liaison Committee in the previous Parliament to continue the work of preparing for the Select Committees and, save for one modest change of detail, the motion fully implements the table and schedule that they presented to me. I hope that the motion will achieve consensus and gain the support of the House.

The motion has two main consequences. First, it will reconfigure the departmental Select Committees so that they track the departmental changes in Whitehall. I anticipate no disagreement with that, especially given the modest attendance. Plainly, those who remain fully understand such matters and know perfectly well that there is no point in having departmental Select Committees that reflect the Departments of the previous Parliament rather than those of this. I hope that hon. Members will support that.

The motion's second main consequence is several modest but important steps that will give Select Committees more freedom and flexibility over their arrangements in two principal ways. First, Select Committees will have the freedom to appoint Sub-Committees. Until now, we have specified by a decision of the House which departmental Select Committees can form a Sub-Committee. Given the importance and stability of Select Committees, that is now unnecessary and old fashioned. We are leaving it to Select Committees to decide for themselves whether forming a Sub-Committee at a particular time and on a particular issue would be of value. That must be right.

Secondly, we are giving every Select Committee the right to form a Joint Committee with any other Select Committee. Again, hitherto, a specific decision of the House was required to enable a Select Committee to form a Joint Committee. Last year, Liaison Committee reports drew attention to the fact that the evolution of government towards joined-up government had created cross-cutting initiatives that were difficult for a Select Committee to track in isolation. They advocated more flexibility in enabling Select Committees to track joined-up government through Joint Committees. The motion gives Select Committees the freedom to form Joint Committees.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): My right hon. Friend referred to the Liaison Committee report and said quite rightly that these welcome reforms will have wide support within the House. Will he also reflect on the fact that many hon. Members representing all parties have subscribed to early-day motion 50—and many more will—which calls on the Government to reconsider the Liaison Committee report, particularly those parts of it that deal with the selection of Select Committees? Will he use this opportunity to give the House an undertaking that those matters will be seriously considered and brought back to the House for debate as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to reassure my hon. Friend that I look at the Order Paper first thing every day and have noted with interest the number of names attached to the early-day motion. I have said to my hon. and learned Friend privately and on the record at business questions that I am willing to look again at some of the issues and some of the recommendations made by the Liaison Committee in the previous Parliament and will want to return to that in the autumn, perhaps through the Modernisation Committee and through other channels. However, as I have always stressed, the important and urgent business is to get the Select Committees started and to get them under way. Therefore, I have to do so under the existing process of selection and approval. I hope that my hon. Friend will be patient on further changes until we resume after the summer recess.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am grateful to the Leader of the House. He has just talked about Joint Committees and greater flexibility. Will he share with the House whether he has in mind a Joint Committee of the Procedure Committee, which I had the honour to chair in the previous Parliament, and the Modernisation Committee, which he will chair in this Parliament and of which I was a member in the previous Parliament, because quite clearly there is a lot of common ground between the two Select Committees?

Mr. Cook: As I understand the motion, there is nothing to prevent those two Select Committees, should they choose to do so, from examining some work together. I look forward very much to working with the hon. Gentleman on some of these issues. I hope that he will return to the Modernisation Committee in which he played a distinguished and very creative role in the previous Parliament—*[Interruption.]* I hope that I have not done the hon. Gentleman any damage by that comment. If it is helpful, I will now attack him in order to restore his standing with his party.

I should refer to one other consequence of the motion before I turn to the amendments. The opening passage of the motion addresses in some detail the quorums of Select Committees. The broad effect of that passage is to place the quorums of all Select Committees on a consistent basis, set, broadly speaking, at a quarter of the membership. That will be helpful in a number of Select Committees that have had to struggle with a rather larger quorum, which sometimes has not been realistic in terms of the attendance. In particular, the proposed changes on quorums will be of great value to the Joint Committees, which under the present rules have to produce the full quorum of each of the Select Committees from which they are drawn. The proposed provision creates a new quorum for a Joint Committee in its own right, which will enable it to get on with its work with confidence.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am most grateful to the Leader of the House. If Select Committees are as important as Members like to claim, how is it that the Leader of the House can find himself using the phrase that Select Committees struggle to get a quorum? Does he not find it strange that these very important Committees of the House that do very important work, often in far-flung parts of the world, struggle to make a quorum? Would people not be entitled to be slightly suspicious that if we cannot even make a quorum in those Committees, Members themselves do not value their work very much?

Mr. Cook: I do not think that the problem of making a quorum arises very much for departmental Select Committees, but the House appoints a large number of Select Committees, not every meeting of which is fascinating to every Member and most of which are not held in far-flung places. However, I would not disagree with the right hon. Gentleman's central point, if I can refashion it in a slightly more diplomatic way, that right hon. and hon. Members also have to accept their responsibility for ensuring the status and the good work of Select Committees. In its report last year, the Liaison Committee had some strong words to say about the importance of attendance at Select Committees.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) has tabled two amendments, the second of which proposes that every Sub-Committee should contain a member of the Liberal Democrat party or another minority party. I submit that the trend of the motion that I have put before the House is to give Select Committees more discretion, more flexibility and more freedom. It is for them to decide whom to put on a Sub-Committee. As a generality, I hope and expect that they would include a representative of the

[Mr. Cook]

minority parties in any such Sub-Committee, but it would be wrong in principle and inconsistent with the trend of the motion if we were to make it a blanket prescription by the House.

The hon. Gentleman's other amendment calls for an increase in the membership of Select Committees, typically from 11 to 13. I understand the broad, general case for an increase in the membership of Select Committees, which was argued with vigour by the Hansard Society in its recent report. As I said, I shall want to return to and consult on a number of such issues in the autumn through the work of the Modernisation Committee. In considering further reforms, I shall be happy to examine whether there is a case for larger numbers on Select Committees, as was advocated by the Hansard Society, although we must bear in mind the point made by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and ensure that we appoint willing members who will attend the Committees.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): If it is the right hon. Gentleman's intention to reconsider the membership of Select Committees with a view to increasing the numbers, is it proper now to reduce the quorum?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman on that point. The quorum is typically set at a quarter of the membership, so if we increased the numbers, the quorum would automatically rise. The hon. Gentleman can set his mind at rest on that difficulty.

If we are to return to some of these matters and to consult on and discuss them, I hope that we can reserve the larger question of the size of Select Committees until then. I am keen to get the Select Committees started in the next two weeks, so I am anxious that there is no unnecessary controversy in the way.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): What time scale does the Leader of the House have for this further review? He may agree with me that reviews have often been promised but seldom delivered.

Mr. Cook: We have gone at a fairly cracking pace on some of these issues in the past three weeks, especially on how to proceed with Select Committees. If no progress is made, it will not be for want of trying or for lack of intention on our part, but I cannot offer a major change in Select Committees without consultation and without broad consensus.

The size of a Select Committee could be contentious. I do not want to reduce what I hope will be a pleasant House of Commons debate to a partisan affair, but I cannot resist pointing out that a membership of 13 is the figure that most benefits the Liberal Democrats. Under the present distribution of seats in the House, 13 is the first point at which the Liberal Democrats become entitled to two seats, not one. That figure applies until we reach Select Committees with a membership of 21. Some hon. Members may think that if we are going to go for 13, we might as well go for 15 or 17, which would provide added seats for members of other parties, including the large number of Back Benchers in my party who may not otherwise secure a place on a Select Committee.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I take the right hon. Gentleman's point, and there may be strong pressure for that from Labour Members. The trigger of 13 enables us to include a Liberal Democrat as well as a member of one of the minority parties. Up to that point, it is impossible for both groups to be represented, and that is a real difficulty.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but I think he may share my view that if we are to have a membership of 13 to accommodate that problem, the view in other quarters may be that we should have up to 15 or 17 members to resolve other under-representations. I ask that we reserve this surprisingly contentious question until we can consider Select Committees in the round. In the meantime, I hope that the House will approve the motions that I have submitted to it.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Would the right hon. Gentleman be good enough to look at an essay by Sir Edward Fellowes? It appears in a book to which Bernard Crick and others have contributed, entitled "The Commons in Transition", and was written in about 1970. I will not go into the details, but Sir Edward said that in 1886—that may seem a long time ago, but the consequences are still with us—the power of the Whips, in other words the handing over of control of Standing Orders to the Executive rather than the Speaker, had left the House of Commons in a parlous condition. I paraphrase Sir Edward, but that is what he said.

Would the right hon. Gentleman consider this possibility? Might it not be highly desirable, in the interest of the independence of Back Benchers, to reach a decision enabling them—in consultation with the Government—to ensure the provision of more of that independence? That would be in line with the general principles of the Liaison Committee, but would apply to all Select Committee matters.

Mr. Cook: I am even now compiling my reading list for my summer holiday. I shall ensure that Sir Edward's article is included.

Many complex and thoughtful proposals have of course been presented by the Liaison Committee, the Hansard Society and the Norton commission, which was established by the hon. Gentleman's party. We should reflect on many of those proposals, and see whether we can find ways of making incremental improvements to the system. I certainly agree that we should obtain the right balance between the Government's ability to secure the legislation on the basis of which they were elected, and the House's right to scrutinise that and other Government legislation.

I believe that the timetable for Select Committees with which we are pressing ahead demonstrates our good faith in that regard. As I announced earlier today, we intend to confirm nominations on Monday week, which will enable the Committees to meet before the House rises on 20 July.

That will be the greatest speed at which any Government have set up Select Committees following the commencement of a new Parliament.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cook: I will, but then I must allow the debate to proceed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: My intervention will be very brief.

We are delighted by my right hon. Friend's clear indication that he appreciates the importance of Select Committees. He will understand that we also place much reliance on his undertaking to examine some of the other aspects of the Liaison Committee's report, to which the House will wish to return in due course.

Mr. Cook: I am delighted that I gave way to my hon. Friend. I hope that I shall have her support, as well as that of others, when we return from the recess.

The commitment that we have made in regard to Select Committees reflects the importance we attach to scrutiny. It also reflects my own view that scrutiny of Government does not necessarily constitute an adversarial relationship between Executive and Parliament—certainly not through the Select Committee system.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) mentioned Bernard Crick. Some time ago, Bernard Crick said that parliamentary control of the Executive was not the enemy of effective government, but the condition of effective government. I believe that we have a common interest in ensuring that we arrive at a proper, effective system of scrutiny through Select Committees, and it is in that spirit that I commend the motion. I hope that it will command consensus support.

5.18 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The last words of the Leader of the House were attractive, if I may put it that way. I was happy to hear them, and happy to note the spirit in which I believe they were uttered.

All I can say on behalf of the official Opposition is that I hope the right hon. Gentleman will indeed go away and consider that reading list. I remind him that it was suggested not just by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) but by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who, I seem to recall, quoted the same source in an earlier debate on programme motions. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will do that reading, because he has an opportunity to provide leadership, and because he could gain the appreciation of members of all parties for his work.

I do not want to take up a lot of the House's time. It is clear that the measures that have been proposed are very sensible. They all appear to be minor improvements on the way in which the Select Committee system runs. The measure on quorums is exceptionally sensible in enabling one to avoid making some recondite calculations, which seems to have occurred on previous occasions. Another measure may be the chrysalis of a better future for Select Committees, enabling them to link up with others and to set up Sub-Committee structures. That is a real improvement. I am grateful to the Leader of the House for having taken that on.

I was slightly amused by the Leader of the House's comments about the need for Members to attend Select Committees. I agree, but I am sure that he will agree that people attend Select Committees in measure of their relevance and, as he rightly said, the interest that is generated. On the Select Committee on Environmental Audit, we were amused to study the way in which certain Cabinet sub-committees worked under the previous Government. One was about greening government and brought the Ministers of various Departments—the green Ministers—together. It was trumpeted as an important organ of government. We discovered after a certain amount of questioning that, although some 14 out of 16 departmental Ministers charged with responsibilities in the committee had turned up on the first day for the group photograph, thereafter they had sent along permanent officials and had not turned up. Presumably, that was a reflection of the effectiveness that they perceived the committee to have.

It must be the same thing with Select Committees. We may trumpet them as important. They may look important on paper, but if their recommendations are routinely placed in the lower tray and not looked at, if their work is not recognised, and if on top of that they are perceived ultimately to be under enormous Government control—subtle but real—they will not succeed in evolving further. After a commendable period when Norman St. John-Stevas was Leader of the House and Select Committees took off, one has the impression that they have to an extent stagnated, except perhaps in so far as the work of Committees has been extended: they can look across different Government Departments.

If things are to progress along the lines that the Leader of the House mentioned, the Liaison Committee's report of 2000 and its further report of 2001, in which it reviewed the progress of Select Committees, need to be given proper consideration. Part I, the introduction, of the report of 8 March 2001 deals with the point about Select Committee membership being under Government and Executive control. It says:

> "We felt the time was right. Improvements could be based upon twenty years of practical experience. The Government was committed to a programme of constitutional change, including modernisation of the House. With a sharp decline in attendance in the Chamber, it was all the more important to stress an area of the House's work that is seen by the general public as valuable and constructive."

Paragraph 6 says:

> "the Government's response was disappointing."

Paragraph 21 states:

> "It is clear that the system for nominating members of select committees must be changed. It is also clear that there is widespread support for such a change."

I am sure that the Leader of the House will have to acknowledge that there is no suggestion that that support has in any way eroded. I welcome the measures that he has introduced, but they should be the first building block towards some sensible changes.

I fully appreciate that the Executive and Government are bound to be wary of measures that give an impression that they might lose control. However, there is much good will towards looking constructively at those matters—if the right hon. Gentleman and the Government wish to do so. We are in the Government's hands, and it would be very nice if there were an opportunity for debate in the next 12 months—and not just in Opposition time, as on

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

the previous occasion—in which we could start sensibly to make progress. If we do, I am convinced that the Government will ultimately benefit. As Lord Norton said, if scrutiny and transparency are improved, a good Government are the ultimate winners. Without such improvement, and however much I might welcome today's proposals, we are just tinkering at the edges.

5.25 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I shall not detain the House for long, as I welcome the motions.

The House of Commons does itself real credit when it takes its work seriously, but sometimes we are not perceived as doing so. There are all sorts of reasons why people outside the House do not know what goes on here. They know little about our procedures and there is no particular reason why they should. In some instances, they interpret our role as consisting solely of the work that we are seen to do in our constituencies.

The reality is that, if one makes laws, this is the place to make them. If one scrutinises the work of the Executive, this is the place to do so. It is absolutely essential that any self-confident Government should be prepared to allow that scrutiny in Select Committees, by people who have a vested interest not in causing unnecessary difficulty, but in ensuring that the truth and the responsible decisions of Government are fully and closely examined.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—it is very good that we as a Government have been prepared to support the rapid setting up of the Select Committees. It is precisely because people outside see the movement away from the Chamber and into Select Committees that the Select Committee on Liaison decided that it was time to produce a report. The report is important, and I hope that we shall return to it and examine it closely.

This is one of the few Parliaments in the world in which close examination of the Executive is carried out by people selected by their own Government. We can argue about the niceties of how people become members of Select Committees, but a great deal of control is still exercised over who is selected for which role and when.

I happen to think that the House of Commons is now quite a grown-up institution, and can trust all its Back Benchers. It is the consensus at which they arrive, the work that they do together and the evidence that they take which inform their Select Committee reports. That is absolutely essential to the good working of the Government. A good Government are confident enough to answer for their decisions in public and to trust Members of Parliament to say things that are not always comfortable or flattering. A good Government are determined enough to ensure that their work can be examined with care, because they know that they have taken the right decisions to protect the rights and interests of the electorate.

This Government can set an important precedent by giving the House of Commons such trust. I and my colleagues on the previous Liaison Committee were privileged to serve, and to have the chance to talk to the Leader of the House and the Chief Whips about what we wanted to achieve. Only when such scrutiny is available, and there is such confidence between the Executive and individual Members, will we get change.

This place evolves—it changes all the time—from a position of confidence. I know that Her Majesty's Government will allow us to return to this matter in the autumn.

5.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): In many ways, this is a more important topic than the one on which we spent the earlier part of the day, even though there may be less excitement and Member interest in the question of how the House is to come to terms with an ever stronger Executive—that is not a party political point, and the process has been going on for decades—and a Parliament that finds it more and more difficult to hold them to account. I agree with the Leader of the House that a good Government have nothing to fear, and in fact a great deal to gain, from close examination.

I am not speaking on behalf of a party, as this is a matter for Members at large, but there are issues that directly affect the capacity of certain Members to participate in such holding to account. We warmly welcome the motions and we are delighted at the rapid pace of bringing the Select Committees back into full use, but we think that there is scope to go further. My amendments set out how that might be achieved.

We agree that the reconfiguration of Select Committees to match Departments is right, and that there should be some Committees with a membership of 17. We welcome the capacity for all the Committees to have Sub-Committees and believe that increasing the use of Joint Committees is very worth while. Now, however, I come to the need for the amendments. I apologise for the length of one and the brevity of the other. The complexity of our Standing Orders means that it is hard to express one's intention in plain words.

The intention is that the smaller variety of Select Committee should be increased in size so as to have two representatives from third and minority parties. The purpose is not to seek a benefit for the Liberal Democrats—[HON. MEMBERS: "Of course not."] Hon. Members are clearly sceptical, but we could equally have tabled amendments that directly paralleled the proposals of the Hansard Society or the alternative laid out by the Leader of the House—that all Select Committees should consist of 17. One reason for not doing that was the caution shown by Conservative Front Benchers in discussions about increasing the number of Select Committees in the previous Parliament.

When the Modernisation Committee was considering ways of improving the scrutiny of European legislation, and was minded to propose that there should be five European Scrutiny Committees, to try to get to grips with the great volume of legislation coming from Europe, the Conservative party argued for a lesser growth in Select Committees, and said that it would not be able to provide the additional members.

Perhaps in a new Parliament the Conservatives are more willing, or perhaps more able, to participate in Select Committee proceedings, but one reason for our proposals was to save them the embarrassment of being unable to provide the additional members. I would not be

concerned should the House decide that a larger size of Select Committee, with a greater representation from the Conservatives, was appropriate.

Mr. Grieve: There was no embarrassment on the part of the official Opposition in making the points that we did. Our points reflected the reality of staffing Select Committees, participating in Standing Committees and ensuring representation in the Chamber. It would have been irresponsible to say that we could do more. My recollection of the Select Committee on which I served is that the attendance of members of the hon. Gentleman's party tended to be rather less regular, and more à la carte, than ours.

Mr. Stunell: The hon. Gentleman has made my point for me, confirming my assertion that Conservative Members in the previous Parliament had difficulty servicing Select Committees and that that was the main reason for their objection to increased European scrutiny and the creation of two additional Committees. I simply pray that in aid of a proposal that would leave Conservative representation on Select Committees at its current level. However, if alternative proposals are introduced that would increase the level of Conservative representation, I shall be happy to hear the arguments.

Mr. Tyler: It is true that for a long time the Conservative party found it difficult to get former Ministers and senior members to serve on these Committees. It is understandable that hon. Members who have held great offices of state might find it difficult to serve in that rather menial capacity, but if they now take a different view, we must welcome it.

Mr. Stunell: The point being debated is not the substantive point of the amendments, but hon. Members seem to consider that this is in some way a self-serving amendment. It is not: we should be very willing to have the representation on Select Committees of Opposition parties increased. I take the point made by the Leader of the House, which was that Labour Back Benchers might be just as effective at providing opposition on occasions. One hopes that they might be more effective than they were in the previous Parliament, but such things change.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) noted, the representation secured for third and minority parties covers nine political parties in this House. It is therefore necessary for consideration to be given to the cause of all those parties, and as result, smaller Committees contain no Liberal Democrat Members.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the House would be more persuaded of the enthusiasm of his party and other Opposition parties if there were more evidence of their attendance at this debate? I find it difficult to believe what the hon. Gentleman says about the enthusiasm of his and other parties when I see the empty Benches surrounding him. Moreover, if he raises once more the alleged differential in attendance between his colleagues and mine, I shall invite him to examine the public record of attendance at all Select Committees. I think that that would leave him very embarrassed.

Mr. Stunell: It is always as well to do the sums before making such an intervention. In fact, a higher proportion of Liberal Democrat Members than Conservatives is now present in the Chamber. I am not sure that the argument is won entirely on statistics. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. This argument is getting slightly circular. Perhaps we can get back to the important business before the House.

Mr. Stunell: I accept your rebuke, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and apologise if I have led the House in an inappropriate direction.

Amendment (b) deals with the membership of Sub-Committees. I understand the reluctance of the Leader of the House to give instructions to Select Committees on how to form Sub-Committees. When Sub-Committees are established—I hope they will be—to deal with specific tasks or responsibilities in the Select Committee's overall remit, they will contain a sub-set of members of the Select Committee. However, if the membership of Select Committees is maintained at 11, the difficulty will arise that, if two or more Sub-Committees are established—and hon. Members are not entitled to serve on more than one of those Committees—it is axiomatic that one of them will contain only Labour and Conservative Members. That would weaken the accountability and effectiveness not only of the Select Committee, but of the Government, who must be challenged at every point.

We welcome the speed with which the Government have tabled the motion, and its intention. We shall certainly support it, but there is also legitimate interest in getting improved accountability, and support for our amendments will achieve that.

5.40 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am pleased to have the chance to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on getting the motion before the House so quickly, and I hope that we can have the Committees in being in the last week before the recess.

On the question of the quorum, I welcome the fact that that has been made flexible, but there are two sides to the question. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said that if a Select Committee is usually well attended, the quorum should not be a problem. That is correct, but I can remember two occasions in the last Parliament when there might have been a difficulty with the quorum.

On one occasion, a Wednesday morning, there was the funeral of an ex-Member, and clearly a lot of members of the Select Committee wanted to attend that. On the other hand, witnesses had travelled a considerable distance and it would also have been unfair to cancel the Committee at that point; but there was a chance of not having a quorum in that Select Committee.

The other problem is when a Select Committee meets at the same time in the afternoon as a Government statement takes place on the Floor of the House. On those occasions, it seems to me that having a low quorum may avoid embarrassment. However, if we are to have a low quorum, the other side is that there is a responsibility on Members who put their names forward to serve on a Select Committee that they intend to attend.

There is a spat among Opposition Members to do with looking at the record to see whose people turned up most frequently. Sadly, the record is pretty appalling, because

[Andrew Bennett]

all it shows is whether someone was in a Select Committee for a few seconds, just to get the Clerk to recognise that they were there. We have all come across people who nip in, get their mark and disappear. We should spell out to Members who put their names forward to go on a Select Committee that they are committing themselves to doing a piece of work and that they are not just going to get their mark and disappear.

Mr. Forth: It occurs to me that one of the problems—I recognise that there are two sides to this matter—is that once a colleague is made a member of a Select Committee, he or she is effectively irremovable, and colleagues may trade on that. It might be worth our considering the possibility of attaching the privilege of membership to the responsibility to turn up; that might concentrate some minds effectively.

Andrew Bennett: There are arguments along that line. The problem is actually measuring how people turn up.

The second point is that there are people who turn up fairly regularly but then dodge in and out of the Committee, spending more time on the telephone in the Corridor. We should spell it out to Members that if a Committee sits for two hours, they should be there and participating for those two hours.

That brings me to the question of the size of a Select Committee. I can understand the argument that the more members a Committee has, the more useful things there are for Members of Parliament to do. However, the House also needs to think about the way in which a Select Committee works. My experience is that, in a Committee of 11 members, having eight or so present is about right, from the point of view of chairing the Committee and feeling that everyone is participating.

When there is a larger Committee—I chaired a previous Environment Committee and a Transport Committee that had 17 members—there can be a lot of people there. If 15 or 16 turn up, there can be very little opportunity to participate and it becomes difficult for the Committee to be spontaneous. One cannot let people just jump in with a question when they want to push the questioning in a particular direction. One has to plan the questions formally, and allocate time or take other measures. We should not rush to make the Committees larger, if we want them to be effective and people to attend most of the time. It is not necessarily a good idea to make the Committees larger if we want them to work more effectively.

The motion proposes the creation of two large Committees, one for environment, food and rural affairs and the other for transport, local government and the regions. If we are to have two such big Committees, a strong case may be made for having joint Chairs of those Committees. In the previous Parliament, the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee was jointly chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and me.

Some unease was felt about whether the joint chairing would work. People asked, for example, from whom the Clerks would take instruction. However, I believe that we managed to make it work, and I plead with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to consider having joint Chairs for those two large Committees. In that way, we would have more participation in the management of the Committees than would be possible if they had only one Chair.

The strength of Select Committees' reports is that they are based on the evidence heard and on the reaction of Members who heard it. One of the difficulties for a Sub-Committee is that it hears the evidence but does not have ownership of the report. It reports to the main Committee, which then reports to the House. Members on the main Committee who were not on the Sub-Committee may wish to go back through the evidence and alter the report, without having heard the evidence. It could be argued that the Sub-Committee should be able to report to the House, instead of to the main Committee, and that point should be considered.

If the Select Committees are to work effectively, they must be properly staffed. It is important that when they are set up a little more time is spent on ensuring that they have the right resources. I do not ask for large resources, but there is a shortage of Clerks to cover the Select Committees proposed in the motion. The issue of specialist assistance and secretarial back-up is yet another question.

We must also make much better use of new technology. It is welcome that Select Committee reports now appear on the web, but it is important to examine how we can get the evidence on to the web quickly, so that the Select Committee process can become more of a dialogue. People could read what had been said in evidence to the Select Committee and then send in supplementary evidence.

I welcome the fact that the Government are getting on with making the changes. I look forward to seeing the names down on the Order Paper late next week, and I hope that the Select Committees will be up and running, and effectively scrutinising the Government, when we come back in October.

5.48 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I welcome the appointment of the Leader of the House. Over the years I have been in the House, I have developed not only an affection for him, which he may not have understood, but considerable respect for his ability and skill in the conduct of the various positions that he has held, even though I have recently had reason to disagree with him on matters that I need not mention tonight. Having said that, the issue before us is enormously important and I am glad to hear that the Leader of the House intends to review the situation in the autumn.

It is a complex task to get the balance right between the conduct of business on the Floor of the House and the important matter of the hearing of evidence.

On the Floor of the House we deal with things in a fairly broad fashion. However, the absolute requirement of a Select Committee is that it operate on the basis of evidence and analysis. There is therefore one essential requirement for any great reformer of the House—and there is no doubt that we need one. The "Parliament First" early-day motion is supported by some very distinguished Members in all parts of the House, because it is clear that among the fundamental issues that faced us at the general election were apathy, Parliament's failure to connect with people, and the need to restore both faith in politics and an understanding that what we say and do in the House is at the heart of what the voters want.

When we are dealing with matters of great importance, whatever the subject matter investigated by any Select Committee may be, it is essential not only that the evidence be properly evaluated but that the Government take it seriously and do not simply, as a knee-jerk reaction, give a short response that effectively ditches the Select Committee's proposals. The Government should give Select Committee recommendations the kind of weight that will enable the members of Select Committees—and the public as a whole, which is what this is all about—to have confidence in the Committees and in the parliamentary process.

We have much to learn from those such as Bernard Crick and others who have studied those questions. I have no doubt that, given the seriousness with which the right hon. Gentleman is taking his new role, he could turn out to be a great reforming Leader of the House.

I can skip over several points quite quickly, because I gave evidence to the Norton committee, and the simplest way of dealing with those subjects, rather than going into them all now, is to send the right hon. Gentleman the evidence that I submitted to that committee, and also to put it in the Library.

I also spoke on the constitutional issues in the debate on the Queen's Speech. The first part of my speech dealt with the reform of Parliament, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be good enough to read that, because it contains a lot of the points that I want to make.

There are still a number of issues that I would like to draw attention to now. First, in the interests of freedom of information, we need to think about the difficult subject of the advice given by civil servants to Ministers, and the extent to which Select Committees can have the opportunity to look at what was going on behind the scenes. There has to be a degree of sensitivity, there are parameters, and it is not an easy area—I do understand that—but there is a serious case, which should be carefully considered.

There is also a case for suggesting that the House should have a free vote on Select Committee reports. That brings me back to a bigger question, to which I am returning, I believe, for the fourth time in a year—the question of amending Standing Orders to reduce the power of the Whips. I do not say that because I do not like the whipping system; after all, I have lived with it for some time. I am happy with the idea, in so far as it is connected with the need for parties to be able to deliver their policies.

However, we are Members of Parliament, and there is an important feature that distinguishes the United Kingdom Parliament from many others that operate list systems, whereby recalcitrant Members—I shall not mention them by name—can simply be struck off the list by the party leaders. That is not in the interests of democracy, because Members of Parliament who have stood out have often eventually managed to convince not only their own party, but the parliamentary process and the electorate as a whole of the wisdom of their views.

There is also the question of the chairmanship of scrutiny Committees. In a sense all Select Committees are scrutiny Committees, but we know what that phrase really means, and there are, I think, only three such Committees in the House—the Public Accounts Committee, the Modernisation Committee and the European Scrutiny Committee. There is a powerful case for the chairmanship of those committees to be in the hands of the Opposition.

Mr. Tyler: Two other Committees fall into that category. The Select Committee on Environmental Audit is very much on a par with the Public Accounts Committee, and the Joint Committee on Human Rights, on which Members of both Houses of Parliament serve, is also very germane to the point that the hon. Gentleman makes.

Mr. Cash: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman because I was looking for guidance. I think that the principle is right. To put it bluntly, it does not look good for the membership of Committees to be based on party proportionality of the House so that the majority and the chairmanship are automatically with the Government. The status quo does not provide sufficient balance in the interests of democracy and accountability or in the information that comes out of the deliberations of the Committee for the benefit of the electorate—which is what this is all about.

Andrew Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a contradiction in what he says? He wants to reduce the power of the Whips. Surely if we do that we should be conferring power on each individual. Any individual in the House should be entitled to chair one of these Committees, not necessarily an Opposition Member.

Mr. Cash: I am prepared to concede that. I would have agreed with Martin Bell chairing a Committee, for example, had he been provided with the opportunity to do so. I do not think that there is any inconsistency in my argument. By Opposition, I mean non-government. To that extent, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is a serious point. It is essential that the Government be seen to have the confidence to deal with effective, serious and reasoned opposition.

The media are often the interviewers of the nation. I think that that is entirely wrong. I have great respect for people such as John Humphrys and Jeremy Paxman, but they are not elected and do not have the exclusive right to be the nation's arbiters. They do their job well—I have been at the receiving end of quite a lot of their interviews. However, it is not their prerogative, on behalf of the nation—through the taxpayers' licence fee—to be the only people determining exchanges between Members of Parliament and the Government. It is an enormously important subject which needs to be considered.

Over the past few months, I have corresponded and had several meetings with Greg Dyke, Tony Hall—before he went to the Royal Opera House—Mark Damazer and their teams on the manner in which such interviews are conducted and the research on the basis of which questions are asked. It gets very political; I do not want to go into it now because it is a separate subject in itself. I think that those people do a great job—I am entirely in favour of the media having the best possible opportunity to take part in national debate—but those in the House of Commons and the House of Lords ought to raise their game to ensure that they perform a function that can be

[Mr. Cash]

seen to be completely impartial. It cannot be impartial if the Executive effectively controls the Select Committee system.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Does he accept that if the Government gave more serious consideration to the reports of the Liaison Committee in the previous Parliament—not least "Shifting the Balance", which is well known to the Leader of the House—the very concerns expressed by my hon. Friend would be dealt with at a stroke? Will he, at an early date, urge the Leader of the House to allow a full day's debate on "Shifting the Balance" and to ensure that the Government are bound by the decisions of the House at the end of that debate?

Mr. Cash: I have great sympathy with that view. Indeed, I pointed out that a free vote on such matters was essential. The Government for the second time have achieved a substantial majority and they should have confidence in the system of democracy and accountability in this House. This is a test of the good faith of the Government and the Leader of the House. I trust in the right hon. Gentleman's perspicacity in these matters and I believe that he will take the matter seriously. He has every reason to do so because if he were to go down as a great reforming Leader of the House, it would be a tremendous tribute to the success that he has achieved over many years. I say that despite some of my differences with him on a number of points.

More generally, would it not also be a good idea to increase through education in schools the amount of information about the manner in which these systems of government operate? It is an important responsibility to afford to young people as they grow up and to students at universities special opportunities to study the workings of Parliament in relation to what is going on elsewhere in the world and in the European Union.

As a member of 15 years' standing who serves on the European Scrutiny Committee I believe that there is something seriously wrong with the way in which we scrutinise the legislation, given that under the European Communities Act 1972 there is much of it that we cannot avoid. Let us not camouflage the issue: whether we like it or not, majority voting is implicit in the workings of the EU. It follows, therefore, that decisions are taken which affect this House. Bills which cannot be amended without infringing the fundamental rules laid down by the acquis communautaire are continually passing through the House. Once the Council of Ministers takes a decision by majority voting and even before it is implemented through our enactment, it is binding on us by virtue of the rules established under section 2 of the European Communities Act.

Mrs. Dunwoody: A lot of this is built on stilts of very thin paper. If the House did its job properly and Members of Parliament turned up to all European Committees and could not only question Ministers openly but table amendments, as they have the right to do in Standing Committees, there would be a different attitude towards much of the rubbish that flows from Brussels.

Mr. Cash: It will be no surprise to the hon. Lady to hear that she has given me an opportunity to say that, only yesterday, for that very good reason, I tabled 240 amendments to the Bill implementing the Nice treaty.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: That is only a starting point.

Mr. Cash: Indeed it is. Of course debate has been truncated by the programme motion. That in itself raises a question which comes straight to the responsibility of the Leader of the House and the integrity of his arguments. Nice is an important treaty, but I certainly will not go into it now because we will have some opportunity to look into it during a four-day debate that is truncated by a programme motion. It is essential that hon. Members in all quarters of the House table amendments. I am sorry to say, despite all I have said, that the Leader of the House was the progenitor of the programme motion. It was a terrible shame and he has not heard the end of it yet.

That does not alter the fact that we could be in serious trouble with the grouping of the amendments. The Chairman of Ways and Means will decide on Tuesday whether the matters raised are properly discussed—common foreign security policy, the question of human rights, the movement of the centre of gravity as a result of the enhanced co-operation procedures and so on. I must not and will not go into those matters now, but it is absolutely necessary for people outside the House to understand them, and they will not be able to do so unless there is debate. That is why I tabled 240 amendments on the Maastricht Bill. Whether people liked it or not—whether the former Prime Minister, John Major, liked it or not—as a result of the determination and political will of several Members, we put on the record what was going on in that Bill. That would not have happened otherwise. We can look back to those days with some pride.

Will the Leader of the House be good enough to consider holding a serious meeting with some of us—I look especially to my constituency neighbour the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) who is the main mover and shaker of the "Parliament First" group motion—so that we can have a good and proper discussion about the operating principles?

There is much to be said for referring draft Bills to Select Committees for consideration, so that we can winkle out some of the absurdities that will need to be changed. There were certainly plenty of those during the previous Parliament and no doubt there will be many under this Government. We must sort that out.

If the European Scrutiny Committee, having regard to the ambit of the legislation on which it is involved, puts on a reserve stating that a matter should be debated on the Floor of the House and that a decision should not be taken in the Council of Ministers until this place has come to a resolution, for heaven's sake let us make certain that that principle is adhered to. Over and over again, the decision of the European Scrutiny Committee is frustrated when it insists on debate on the Floor of the House on highly sensitive matters on which the Government do not want to hear opinions with which they do not agree.

The House is where decisions have to be taken. This is about democracy and accountability. I am extremely glad that the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)

holds his current position. I look forward to seeing him develop and evolve the ideas being expressed today in a way that is truly in the interests of democracy and of the electorate of this country.

6.8 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): What a remarkable and interesting debate. So far, every contribution has been thoughtful and based on experience. Speeches have been cross-party and concise. It is hard to imagine a debate of which that could be said of every contribution. Furthermore, to his great credit, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has remained in his place throughout the debate—as has his junior Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office. The debate has been a model—a rare occasion. If it is to be typical of debates in this Parliament, perhaps we really are entering a new era under my right hon. Friend's leadership of the House.

I join everyone else who has spoken in congratulating the Leader of the House on the speed with which he has moved in setting up the Select Committees. We may have already forgotten that this Parliament is only two weeks old. My right hon. Friend was pressed on day one of the Parliament to set up the Select Committees. He promised that he would do so and he is well on the way to delivering that promise. That is enormously to his credit.

I support thoroughly the detail of the motion—the reconfiguration of the Committees; the wider arrangements; and the changes to quorums. They are right, realistic and reasonable.

The Leader of the House explained why changes to quorums were necessary. Most colleagues on both sides of the House will sympathise and agree with his argument about the attendance figures. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) made an extremely shrewd and experienced speech about the reality of attendance rather than the actual existence of an attendance record. I hope that his subtle remarks were heard by all those Members on both sides of the House who next week will be rushing to put their names forward for membership of Select Committees but who, during the next few months, will not rush to attend the Committees in quite the same way.

I suggest that if the new Select Committees had and were seen to have the importance and effectiveness of scrutiny that they ought to have—the status in the eyes of the House, the media and the public—there would be no problem with attendance. The problem is that they do not have the powers and thus the status, so they are not always given priority in people's diaries.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one possibility is that at the point at which right hon. and hon. Members volunteer for membership of a Select Committee, they should make available an undated letter of resignation to be held by the Chairman and used if their attendance record is less than satisfactory?

Mr. Fisher: I have heard of smoking guns, but the right hon. Gentleman suggests that an about to be smoking gun should be left in someone's hand. That is an interesting suggestion, as was that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, who said that continuing Select Committee membership should be linked to attendance in some way. That is true of local authority committee membership, and the principle could be adapted to membership of Select Committees. However, it is not a matter of press-ganging Members to join.

All of us would want to be members of Select Committee, and to be assiduous as members, if we really felt that all the Select Committees at all times not only did the work that they should do, but were listened to by the Government and the world outside. Their status and the effectiveness of their scrutiny will determine the enthusiasm of those who serve on them.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that a causal link exists between the low esteem in which Select Committees are held and the influence of the respective Whips Offices in determining their composition?

Mr. Fisher: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, but there is no simple causal link, nor does any such link cover all Select Committees. Undoubtedly, there was no problem with the commitment and work rate of many Select Committees in the previous Parliament and earlier ones—or, indeed, with their status in the outside world. Examples are the admirable Public Accounts Committee under the excellent chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) and the Transport Sub-Committee under the valiant leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). It is not a simple thing and the causes are subtle and various, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish said, but there is possibly some link, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

That brings me to the wider agenda that is only implicit—or is perhaps the dog that is not barking—in the motions tabled by the Leader of the House: the wider agenda of the Liaison Committee report of the previous Parliament and the Hansard Society report, with their rather specific recommendations on powers, selection of membership, resources, status and whether the Chairman should be paid. I very much welcome the positive remarks made today by the Leader of the House, who said that we would debate such matters again later, but not too much later, in this Parliament.

The principle behind those reports, which should inform all our thinking on the issue, is that Select Committees are about the power of scrutiny. When the scrutiny powers of our Select Committees are compared with those, for example, of the Senate Committees in the United States, we can see how very gently toothless our Committees are. There is no direct comparison because we have very different democratic systems, but the principle is the same: those elected on behalf of the electorate have a duty to scrutinise, with real rigour and thoroughness, the actions of the Government. That is good for politics in any country and very good for the quality of government. It is quite sobering to compare how Senate Committees work with the detail and effectiveness of scrutiny of our own Committees.

My other point on the wider agenda in our discussion of Select Committees is the only qualification to my praise for the Leader of the House in setting them up. The price that Parliament has paid for setting the Committees up quickly is that we have not been able to change the

[Mr. Fisher]

basis on which they are made. While I congratulate the Leader of the House, I am sure that he understands that many hon. Members believe that these are parliamentary Committees—reference has been made to the early day motion relating to Parliament First—not governmental Committees. That being so, Parliament, not the Government, should decide their powers, status, responsibilities and membership.

It is quite wrong—as it would be in any other organisation—for the Government to appoint or have any influence over their own scrutineers. That does not make sense. The public would not understand it if they were to focus on that point, and we must return to this issue. The Government would be the greatest beneficiary—in the widest sense of the word—of those changes if they were to work with Parliament to return to the Committees the idea that they are parliamentary Committees, and that the responsibility to run, appoint and arrange their affairs should rest with Parliament, not with the Government.

The Leader of the House sensibly and wisely volunteered the quotation by Professor Crick to the effect that we had a common interest. I would go further and say that the Government have, in the long term, the greater interest. Let us imagine the way in which the press and the public would respond if the Government gave away some of their powers for the first time in 100 years. The credibility that would be heaped on the Government would be enormous, and it would not be at the cost of any effective power or any ability to get their programme through. They would still be able to do that only too easily. However, their esteem would rise in the eyes of the House, of the public and of the world generally.

My right hon. Friend is right: there is a lot to go on, here. I congratulate him on his encouraging use of that quotation from Professor Crick, and I believe that he recognises what we are saying about the importance of these matters and the credit that would accrue to the Government. This debate, and the way in which the Leader of the House is pushing forward these matters, are enormously encouraging for Parliament.

6.17 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who is the leading light in the Parliament First campaign, which supplemented the activities of the Liaison Committee in the last 12 months of the previous Parliament. He has spoken with great eloquence and he knows that he has wide support in the House. All Members of the House support the campaign that he is leading, and he also knows that he has my 100 per cent. support for what he is doing.

I am grateful for the positive way in which the Leader of the House and his team have responded to the approaches made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—who cannot be here today—and me. The Leader of the House was very positive when we all met. He suggested that there might be problems in interpreting and implementing the Liaison Committee's report, "Shifting the Balance", before the parliamentary recess. However, on balance, we believe that setting up the Select Committees at a very early date was the priority and I am grateful to him for saying today that he will look again at all the recommendations and observations made by the Liaison Committee in the three excellent reports that it produced towards the end of the previous Parliament.

I also endorse the views of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett), who has made a good contribution to Select Committees over many years, jointly chairing—as it were—the large Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich in the previous Parliament. I particularly endorse the reference that he made to quorums. I believe that flexibility on that matter is right, and that reducing the quorum is right. The Procedure Committee—which I chaired—had difficulty meeting its quorum on some occasions during the previous Parliament when we had important people coming before us to give evidence, not least because the Committee of Selection, or perhaps the Government Deputy Chief Whip, had not appointed the full complement of members to that Committee.

I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to what I considered to be an abuse. A Government Member who served on that Committee did not attend once in the final three years of the Parliament. He had told the Government Chief Whip that he wanted to be removed from the Committee, but he was prevailed on to remain a member, although he was told that he need not attend. That is, I believe, a reliable explanation of what happened. I do not intend to name the Member involved, as I blame not him, but the system for allowing that to happen.

I warmly support the views expressed by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish in a concise and eloquent speech. What matters is not the number of Members selected to serve on a particular Committee, but their dedication and commitment to serving and to doing the job that the Committee is there to do.

The majority of the Government Members on the Procedure Committee were extremely assiduous and regular in their attendance, which made it much easier for us to do our job. I commend the majority of members for their work and dedication in producing our reports in the previous Parliament. The Leader of the House has been exemplary in tabling amendments to the Standing Orders and trying to set up the Select Committees as quickly as possible.

Nine years ago, I had an experience that exemplifies the remarks of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central about the abuse of the Select Committee system by the Executive of the day. We must take control of Select Committees away from the Executive of the day and put it back in the hands of the House of Commons as a whole.

I used to chair the Health Committee. I pay tribute to that Committee and to a particular member of it who is no longer with us, the former hon. Member for Preston, Mrs. Audrey Wise. I am considered right of centre in the political spectrum and she was considered very much to the left of centre, but I tell you this, Mr. Deputy Speaker: we worked together on that Committee as one. It was a magnificent Committee. Indeed, it achieved so much influence that it embarrassed the Government of the day to such an extent that they indulged in a fraudulent practice with the connivance of the then Chairman of the Committee of Selection. They created a rule that worked

against me to try to break the Committee's influence and impact, even though it comprised not just me, but all those who were members of it, and they succeeded. That was a tragic abuse of the House that shows how an Executive can manipulate the Select Committee system.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Winterton: I hesitate, but will do so if my hon. Friend is brief.

Mr. Cash: I endorse my hon. Friend's comments and would add that, unless the Whip system is curtailed through Standing Orders, such changes will be made to no avail.

Mr. Winterton: I thoroughly endorse my hon. Friend's observation, and I know that the Leader of the House is well aware of the important Liaison Committee report on the matter. My hon. Friend is right that the power of the Whips, the usual channels and the establishment in trying to influence, if not dictate, who serves on Select Committees must be ended. That power must be put back in the hands of Back-Bench Members.

The Leader of the House has done a magnificent job and I am delighted to say that from the Conservative Benches. I went to see him with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, because at the end of the last Parliamentwe had been mandated by the Liaison Committee to act as a co-ordinating group to get the Select Committees set up and he has honoured in every way the commitments that he gave us. I hope and believe that he is sincere because I have great regard for the right hon. Gentleman. Whichever Department he has been in, he has done a magnificent job, both in opposition and in government. If, along with the House and those Members who value the role of Select Committees, he will look at the recommendations of the Liaison Committee, I believe that he will strengthen Government, because a House of Commons that can properly hold to account the Government and the Executive of the day will produce a better Government and better legislation.

6.26 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I do not intend to detain the House long, although it would not be to the inconvenience of a great many Members were I to choose to do so. I hate to introduce a note of dissent to the debate, but I am afraid that my experience of serving on some three Select Committees during the last Parliament does not fill me with quite the same awe of those Committees as has been expressed today. A real measure of the importance that we actually attach to those Committees can be made from noting the attendance at this debate.

I principally wish to discuss quorums and the measure that we have before us which, for the greater convenience of Select Committee members, proposes reducing those quorums. It certainly would have been for my greater convenience. I can recall on one occasion during the last Parliament rushing from one Select Committee meeting in the Upper Committee Corridor, down the stairs to the floor below to another Select Committee meeting. Of course that was down to the Committee of Selection, which appointed me to two Select Committees that met at the same time on the same day. Nevertheless, I had to rush from one Select Committee to the other in order to maintain the quorum on the floor below and to prevent the embarrassment that would otherwise attend that Committee, as witnesses had come from far afield in order to be interrogated. It certainly would have been to our convenience if the quorum had been lower.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) has explained one of the problems that attaches to maintaining a quorum. Of course it might be difficult if a Committee meeting is held when a statement is being given to the House. However, it strikes me that there is a measure of contributory negligence in that, by arranging for a Select Committee to meet when there is likely to be a statement to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) gave us two examples of how it is difficult to maintain a quorum, given the existing system for appointing members to Select Committees and, without giving names, he cast aspersions on the Members concerned. However, the answer must be to reform the system by which we make appointments to Select Committees, not simply to accommodate that corrupt system by reducing the quorum. It strikes me as absolutely monstrous to table a motion to reduce the quorums when the glaring problem is the very way in which we appoint Members to Select Committees. I believe that Select Committees would indeed achieve the importance that we allegedly attach to them if their members had to seek the approval of the whole House before their appointment. If they had to canvass support among their fellow hon. Members rather than have the privilege conferred on them by the Committee of Selection, greater importance would attach to their appointment and, of course, they would be under much greater pressure actually to attend the meetings.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Nicholas Winterton *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Swayne: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash).

Mr. Cash: I have great sympathy with the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks, but as was shown by the number of Members who leapt to their feet, there is a problem with his argument. He is right if the decision taken by the whole House were on a genuinely free vote—which takes me back to the necessity of changing Standing Orders so that the Whips cannot interfere in those votes. However, it would not produce the right result.

Mr. Swayne: I am not sure that I agree with my hon. Friend that it would not produce the right result. I am constantly assured that the importance of Select Committee work is that it is non-partisan, but I am not convinced of the merits of non-partisanship. I think that confrontation does a great deal to increase attendance at Committees. If we accept the often used argument that Select Committee work should be entirely non-partisan, I do not agree that a vote by the whole House would produce the wrong result.

Mr. Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that Select Committee reports should be based on the evidence

[Mr. Winterton]

given, whether it is oral or written? That is the importance of Select Committees. Decisions and recommendations should not be made according to people's individual partisan views or prejudices.

Mr. Swayne: Of course. However, a clever member of a Select Committee can elicit the evidence that he wants by influencing the choice of witnesses to be called and by skilful questioning of those witnesses. I certainly believe that members can have great influence. It is my experience—from one Select Committee in particular—that a member can have a great deal of influence on the report that is produced.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend's speech is veritably warming the cockles of my heart. However, leaving aside the logistical inconvenience of having speedily to transport himself from one Committee to another, does he agree that Select Committees often suffer from a triple problem? First, there is a tendency in some of them towards a rather formulaic style of questioning, which does not necessarily illuminate the subject matter. Secondly, the Whips are far too influential in determining the composition of those Committees. Thirdly, there is an alarming tendency, which has been exacerbated under this Government, for Ministers, in advance of the publication of the reports of the Committees, to brief against them with all the advantages of the government machine at their disposal. That does nothing to encourage confidence in the system.

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend is quite right, although I assure him that it was not my intention to have any effect on the cockles of his heart, whatever they may be.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Or wherever.

Mr. Swayne: Indeed, or wherever they may be.

My hon. Friend draws attention to an important issue. It has been my experience in one or two Select Committees that members are often busy and have not had time to do all the reading, so when they arrive at the Committee they are presented with a list of questions drawn up by the Clerks. It is, in effect, the Clerks who do the interrogation, even though their questions are put into the mouths of the Committee members. I suspect that the Clerks have a greater role than the public may imagine in writing the reports of the Select Committees.

A great deal of nonsense is talked about Select Committees. We attach huge importance to them and the great work that they do. Undoubtedly, some Select Committees do their jobs effectively, but not all of them are in the same league.

6.34 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): One of the more intriguing aspects of the debate is that it gives rise to a phenomenon with which some of us are fairly familiar. We all do a balletic dance around the subject at issue. We have an interest in doing that, because most, if not all, of those forgathered here have a deep emotional attachment to the concept of Select Committees and the way in which they work. There are distinguished Select Committee Chairman present, as well as a number of colleagues who have spent a great deal of their time and commitment on the work of Select Committees. That, however, should not blind us to a fact to which my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) just alluded. I suspect that I agree with him more than some earlier speakers.

Let us look back to the genesis of Select Committees. I think that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) mentioned this. We fooled ourselves for the best part of 20 years. As I recall, someone somewhere looked fondly across the Atlantic and said "Our American friends have the most wonderful system of legislative scrutiny and accountability; can we have some of that?" With all good will, that system was imported across the Atlantic.

I am very much in favour of things being imported across the Atlantic. I imported Mrs. Forth from across the Atlantic. What more can I say? Mrs. Forth probably works better than the Select Committees. But on this occasion the problem was glaringly obvious from the start. We chose to ignore the fundamental difference between a legislature that has Congress on the one hand only, and a legislature—this legislature—in which the Executive is, in fact, part of the legislature and has control over it.

Most of the difficulties that have been described today flow from that fundamental fact. We are perpetually caught by the same problem: we want a system of Select Committees that allows us to scrutinise the Executive effectively, but at the same time we must live with the fact that in our system of parliamentary government the Executive control the House. I fear that, until we find a way of breaking out of that system, we shall be stuck with the problem for a long time.

The Liaison Committee report has rightly been mentioned frequently today. I admit that it will be difficult to solve the problem in one leap, but the report constitutes a considered, moderate and modulated effort to move us in the right direction. Nevertheless, I can see why the Government, and even a parliamentarian of the stature of the Leader of the House, will always be reluctant to take that step: Governments find the existing arrangement all too convenient. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) illustrated one of the more extreme examples, but there are almost certainly many others.

So here we are, struggling with this motion. The Leader of the House—I join the many others who have given him credit—has responded rapidly to requests made to him, and to his colleagues, to accelerate the process of appointment of Select Committees, and we must all welcome that; but there is a catch. He knows and we know and we know he knows, and so on.

If we had tried to hold up the establishment of Select Committees—which, I submit, would have been within our grasp—we would have been hoist by our own petard. Had we told the Government and the Leader of the House that we were profoundly dissatisfied with the means by which Select Committees are currently established, we would have delayed the establishment of Select Committees, and found ourselves with exactly the same problem as before.

Thanks to the Leader of the House, we shall have our Select Committees, but they will be established under the very procedure with which we are nearly all profoundly

dissatisfied. Is that progress, or is it not? I hesitate to make the judgment, but the dilemma in which we find ourselves can be seen very readily.

The motions give us an opportunity to be grateful for the limited progress that we are making, but also to point out that the Leader of the House has neither fooled us—although I am sure that that was not his intention—nor seduced us into thinking that all is well, and that the accelerated appointment of Select Committees legitimises the process whereby they are already being established. It should be understood that any progress we are making is very limited, and that mutual congratulation is not in order.

Mr. Bercow: If the Leader of the House was keen to set up the Select Committees as early as possible in the current Parliament—principally, if not exclusively, to avoid the charge that he has created, or allowed to continue, a vacuum—but was perfectly open to the idea of a change in their composition, would it not be helpful if he said just that before the end of the debate? Would it not be helpful if he said "Yes, I want us to get on with our work, but I am entirely open to the idea of competitive elections to Select Committees, in which the Whips Office will have no involvement whatever"?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is legendary for his optimism and generosity of spirit. I suspect that I may be almost as legendary for my lack of those characteristics. I cannot share his view. I hope to give the Leader of the House an opportunity to sum up the debate, which I am sure he will do with his usual skill, but not before I have said a few more words about one or two other matters.

Regrettably, I cannot agree with the analysis of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). The other fact of parliamentary life that we all understand all too well is that our Front Benchers and our business managers all share a joint and mutual understanding of the power of patronage, which is so important to them and which is expressed, among many other means, in the ability to appoint members of Select Committees. I believe that the parliamentary Labour party works in a different way. It has told us that it elects its members of Select Committees, so in a funny way the Labour party is perhaps less guilty of that offence than others.

In my party, the system seems to work in the traditional way. Members are asked whether they would like to participate in a Select Committee, but our usual channels arrogate and keep firmly to themselves—certainly, they have done so hitherto—the power to give colleagues a place on an appropriate Select Committee. It is worse than that.

The other truth that usually dares not speak its name—I am about to reveal it since we are in revelatory mood, as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West has illustrated—is that there is then a disgraceful little carve-up of Select Committee chairmanships by the Front Benchers—talking of which, I give way to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

Mr. Tyler: I, too, have been in revelatory mood as an ex-member of the usual channels. The other night, I pointed out to the House that not all Select Committee memberships must be put on the Order Paper by an Officer of the Crown; some Select Committees can be elected by the House. Indeed, it is possible for hon. Members to make representations to the Committee of Selection that the recommendations from the usual channels are not appropriate, so, even within the existing rules, there are some ways in which we might make some progress along the lines indicated by the ever optimistic hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is correct—at least technically he is correct—and these are motions to which amendments can be made, but the reality lurking behind all that is that, in this Parliament, as in the previous one, the Government have been given a huge majority by the electorate. In the end, the Government will have their way. Indeed, the Front Benchers will have their way because my right hon. and hon. Friends are in the conspiracy right up to their necks, along with the Government—talking of which, I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning).

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Before my right hon. Friend ventures any further down that route, I ask him to refer to the report in *Hansard* of the debate on a motion for the Adjournment just before the House rose for the election. He will find that, on behalf of the Conservative Front-Bench team, I supported the Liaison Committee's view on changing the system of selection and election for Select Committees. He must have missed that bit.

Mr. Forth: No, I did not miss that bit at all. I am talking about something quite different, before my hon. Friend gets too upset. I am talking about the fact that we do not elect members of Select Committees, as the Labour party does. I am also talking about the fact that, as I understand it, our so-called usual channels, or whatever they call themselves these days, still do a deal with Government Whips and Front Benchers on who will get what chairmanships. I suspect that our Front Benchers allocate the chairmanships to certain privileged colleagues. That is all I am saying.

There is nothing particularly secretive about it, but I say that to illustrate the point and lest we kid ourselves that the Select Committee procedure is a creature of the entire House. It is nothing of the kind. As far as I know, it is, has been and remains a creature of the Front Benchers. Let there be no illusions about that.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend suggested that I was unduly optimistic, but I certainly do not want to be mistaken for an imitator of Dr. Pangloss. He should not take the Labour party's evident approach to these matters entirely at face value. Has it occurred to his fertile mind that the fact that there is an election process in the Government party on the composition of Select Committees does not mean that there is not a sinister, invisible hand at work in the form of covert intervention, back-slapping, threats and so on from the Patronage Secretary?

Mr. Forth: That may be, but provided that the ballot is secret, most of my hon. Friend's dark suspicions are addressed. As in the up-coming election for the leadership of our party, and for reasons that the House well understands, the secret ballot may well bring about many surprises that will shock some of the candidates.

[Mr. Forth]

However, I want to move on because in a few more minutes I will sit down to allow brief winding-up speeches.

I want to say a few words about the matter of the quorum, which is one of the other distressing aspects of the debate. It is rather sad that we must wash such linen very publicly, but inevitable, I am afraid. How can Select Committees, grand and important though they are, vital though their work is to our democratic processes, occasionally find it so difficult to muster a quorum? That must be to our collective shame. We must try much harder to find an answer to that problem. It appears that colleagues are all too ready to submit their names to serve on Select Committees, but that if they find it just a tad inconvenient to attend and do their work, they are not present when it matters. We must turn our attention much more urgently to that tendency.

Another argument that has arisen in the debate concerns the size of Committees. In this case, size really does matter. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) gave an acute analysis of the issue, and I am with him on it. I suspect that, if Select Committees are to be as effective as we all hope, the smaller they are the better—and for a number of reasons. With his enormous experience, the hon. Gentleman summed up those reasons much better than I could. Therefore, I resist, certainly for the time being, the blandishments of the Liberal Democrats on the matter. If we increase the size of Committees, we may reduce their effectiveness even further.

Worse, there is a budgetary aspect to the argument. I say to the Leader of the House and to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton, as members of the House of Commons Commission, that in increasing the size of Select Committees, we shall increase the size of the travelling caravanserai that they so often become. That will happen unless we cap Select Committees' total travel budget and let them argue among themselves about its allocation. In that case the bigger ones would travel less because there are more people on them. That solution appeals to me, but I should like the reassurance of the Leader of the House that he agrees.

I predict with some confidence that if we increase the size of Committees but do not cap the travel budget, the Liaison Committee would say, "We need more money for travel because there are more of us on Select Committees and we've no intention of curtailing our travel plans." These matters are never as obvious or straightforward as they seem. There are always wheels within wheels, which is a rather good metaphor for travelling Select Committees.

I hope that some good can come from this debate and our deliberations on these matters, so that we can look with much greater honesty at Select Committees, the work that they do, the work that we expect them to do and their membership. Then, we would be able to make some positive and constructive suggestions to improve their workings. On that, I shall attempt to be an optimist.

6.49 pm

Mr. Grieve: What started as a debate on a narrow issue has snowballed to cover a large number of topics, for the simple reason that there are many topics to be covered.

I entirely endorse the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), that we should not live in a Panglossian world, imagining that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. There are many aspects of Select Committees that are formulaic and could do with being reformed, but that will start only when the ball gets rolling. If this is going to start that ball rolling, it is a tremendous event, but if not, we are missing a tremendous opportunity. I hope that the Government will grasp the opportunity that they have been given.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): We have had an excellent short debate on a set of proposals that has proved largely uncontroversial, which may explain why the debate has ranged rather wide of them.

I begin where the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) began: it is right to place this debate in the context of the need to reconnect people with politics and in particular to try to make Parliament more relevant to the lives of ordinary people, especially in the light of the low turnout at the general election. That is a sensible background for consideration of the proposals.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made it clear that the various proposals from the Liaison Committee, the Parliament First campaign, the Hansard Society and the Norton commission ranged far wider than what we are discussing today. I repeat his undertaking that we will return to those proposals, as we accept that this is a real debate that is happening both within the House and more widely.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) spoke about resourcing and staffing support—a legitimate issue, but not one that is properly a matter for Government: it is a matter for the House of Commons Commission. The Leader of the House sits on the Commission, and that is the right place for the matter to be considered. We will ensure that that happens.

The hon. Member for Stone raised the broader question of education in schools about Parliament and its work. I very much associate myself with his remarks. The issue of citizenship in schools is a live one, and we should all seek to make this place more relevant to both primary and secondary schools.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of draft Bills being referred to Select Committees. The Government certainly favour greater pre-legislative scrutiny. The matter was considered at great length in the previous Parliament in the Modernisation and Procedure Committees. The Government have undertaken that draft Bills that relate to a single Department may be scrutinised by the appropriate Committee. That is clearly a first step, but there is scope for considerable further work if we are to have the broadest and deepest pre-legislative scrutiny that we can achieve.

Several hon. Members spoke about quorums. It is important to emphasise that a quorum is a minimum, not a target. We do not aim to have only a small proportion of a Committee present. We simply want to ensure that its work can continue. The matter should clearly be kept under very close review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish spoke about having joint Chairs. My understanding is that that is a matter for the Committees themselves. As he

said, that was the practice followed by the then Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament. If the new departmental Committees want to continue that practice, it is up to them.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) spoke to his two amendments. In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House set out the Government's response to those amendments, and I urge the hon. Gentleman not to press them to a Division. We have seen that there are various points of view in the House about the appropriateness of increasing the size of Committees. Certainly, I am sympathetic to the point about ensuring representation for the Liberal Democrats—they form the third party in the House—and for other, smaller parties. However, we must also take into account the needs and interests of all hon. Members, including those who belong to the principal Opposition party, as that party will not benefit from the proposed change with regard to Select Committee representation.

Labour Back Benchers must also be kept in mind, and my right hon. Friend undertook to ensure that the question of membership would be reviewed. I hope that that undertaking will enable the hon. Member for Hazel Grove not to press the matter to a vote.

Amendment (b) deals with Sub-Committees. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, the proposals before the House would enable Select Committees to make such decisions for themselves. Like my right hon. Friend, I expect that it would be proper for a Select Committee to include on a Sub-Committee any minor party member who wished to be on it. However, I think that that should not be imposed by a decision of the House today, and therefore hope once again that the hon. Member for Hazel Grove will not press the matter to a vote.

The debate has ranged beyond the specific proposals before the House. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) placed the matter in the broader context of the history of Parliament, and set out some of the factors that make the British Parliament distinctive among other legislatures in the world. All hon. Members will agree that the British constitution is evolving. There has been much change in recent years, starting with the introduction of Select Committees 20 years ago, and this Government introduced important changes in their first term.

The remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in opening the debate reflected the Government's determination to address the matter of Select Committees, and the relationship between the legislature and the Executive, in a serious manner. There is a determination that hon. Members of all parties should be able to contribute to that debate.

I welcome the tone and content of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), who praised the proposals and said that they were sensible. He pointed out that they amounted only to the first building block, and suggested that good will exists among Opposition Members on this matter. As a result, the debate has been good tempered, and several positive contributions have been made, both about the proposals and, perhaps more important, about the need for a broader strengthening of Parliament's scrutiny role. That strengthening would require greater power for the Select Committees.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend is grateful for the many kind remarks about his appointment and about his record as a very effective parliamentarian. I should like to thank in particular the three hon. Members from the Select Committee on Liaison who are now present in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made supportive remarks in the debate, which reflects the real good will evident in most contributions to today's proceedings.

I am sure that the House will return to these matters in the weeks and months ahead, but I think that there is cross-party consensus in favour of the proposals. If the House approves them, we will aim to get the Select Committees up and running before the summer recess, so that their very important role in scrutinising the Executive can begin. On that basis, I appeal for support from all hon. Members for these proposals.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following amendments be made to Standing Orders:

A. Select Committee Meetings

S.O. No. 124 (Quorum of Select Committees):

in line 1, at the beginning, insert—

'(A) Except as otherwise provided, the quorum of a select committee shall be three or a quarter of the number of its members, whichever is the greater; and in calculating the quorum fractions shall be counted as one.

(B) Where more than two select committees or sub-committees thereof meet concurrently for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, pursuant to Standing Order (Select Committees: power to work with other committees), the quorum of each shall be two.'.

S.O. No. 139 (Select Committee on Broadcasting):

in line 5, leave out from 'Members' to end of line 6.

S.O. No. 141 (Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee):

leave out paragraph (10).

S.O. No. 142 (Domestic Committees):

in line 9, leave out from 'Members' to end of the line.

S.O. No. 144 (Finance and Services Committee):

in line 19, leave out from 'Members' to end of the line.

S.O. No. 145 (Liaison Committee):

leave out paragraph (5).

S.O. No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration):

in line 10, leave out from 'Members' to end of line 11.

S.O. No. 147 (Procedure Committee):

leave out paragraph (3).

S.O. No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts):

in line 7, leave out from 'Members' to 'The' in line 8.

S.O. No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments):

in line 7, after 'concerned', insert 'and'.

in line 8, leave out from 'committee' to 'shall'.

in the table in paragraph (2), leave out the fourth column ('Quorum').

leave out paragraph (5).

S.O. No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee):

in line 9, leave out from 'Members' to end of line 10.

B. Select Committees (Power to Work with other Committees)

That—

(1) The following Standing Order (Select Committees: power to work with other committees) be made:

'(1) Any select committee or sub-committee with power to send for persons, papers and records shall have power—

(a) to communicate its evidence to any other select committee or sub-committee of either House of Parliament; provided that evidence from the National Audit Office shall first have been agreed between that Office and the government department or departments concerned;

(b) to meet concurrently with any such committee or sub-committee for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence; and

(c) to meet concurrently with any other select committee of this House for the purpose of considering a draft report.

(2) Where two or more select committees have agreed reports to the House in identical terms, those reports may be published as a joint report; and

(2) That the following amendments be made to Standing Orders:'

S.O. No. 139 (Select Committee on Broadcasting):

in line 16, leave out from 'communicate' to end of line 33, and insert 'its evidence to the House of Commons Commission'.

S.O. No. 141 (Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee):

leave out lines 116 to 126.

S.O. No. 142 (Domestic Committees):

in line 23, leave out from 'communicate' to end of line 40, and insert 'its evidence to the House of Commons Commission'.

S.O. No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee):

leave out paragraphs (12) and (13).

S.O. No. 144 (Finance and Services Committee):

in line 28, leave out from 'communicate' to end of line 45, and insert 'its evidence to the House of Commons Commission'.

S.O. No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration):

leave out lines 21 to 26.

S.O. No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts):

leave out paragraphs (3) and (4).

S.O. No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments):

leave out lines 29 to 42.

in line 47, leave out from 'proceedings' to 'and' in line 52.

S.O. No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee):

leave out lines 23 to 34.

C. Select Committees related to Government Departments

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments) be amended, by leaving out items 1, 4, 5 and 13 in the Table in paragraph (2) and inserting the following items at the appropriate places:

'Education and Skills/Department for Education and Skills/11';

'Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/17';

'Transport, Local Government and the Regions/Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions/17'; and

'Work and Pensions/Department for Work and Pensions/11'.

D. Select Committees (Power to appoint Sub-Committees)

That the following amendments to Standing Orders be made:

S.O. No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration):

in line 29, at end add the following words:

'(5) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(6) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

(7) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.

S.O. No. 152 (Select Committees related to government departments):

leave out lines 9 to 14, and insert the following words:

'(3) Each select committee appointed under this order shall have the power to appoint a sub-committee, and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee shall have power to appoint two sub-committees.'.

S.O. No. 152A (Environmental Audit Committee):

in line 34, at end, add the following words:

'(5) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(6) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

(7) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.

European Standing Committees

Resolved,

That the following amendments be made to Standing Order No. 119 (European Standing Committees):

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Agriculture, Fisheries and Food', and insert 'Environment, Food and Rural Affairs'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Environment, Transport and the Regions', and insert 'Transport, Local Government and the Regions'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Scottish, Welsh', and insert 'Scotland, Wales'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Social Security', and insert 'Work and Pensions'.

In the Table, in the column 'Principal subject matter', leave out 'Education and Employment', and insert 'Education and Skills'.— *[Angela Smith.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 June].

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.— *[Mr. Heppell].*

Question again proposed,

6.59 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) *rose—*

It being Seven o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 9 July.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE

Motion made,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. David Chaytor, Brian Cotter, John Cryer, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Paul Goodman, Andy King, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Mr. Andrew Love, John McDonnell, Mr. Denis Murphy, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Andrew Rosindell, Mr. Anthony Steen, Ian Stewart and Brian White be members of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Foot and Mouth (Tiverton and Honiton)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

7 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): My purpose tonight is to seek information from Ministers, and I am seeking specific answers to specific questions. I did not want to table a lot of written questions and, perhaps, wait a long time for the answers. I hope that if the Minister cannot answer my specific questions when he responds, he will at least undertake to send me written, substantive replies to the many questions from my constituents. Although the Government have said that we are now on the home straight as far as foot and mouth is concerned, that is certainly not the way in which my constituents in my rural seat see the situation.

I should like to begin by referring to matters relating to the farming and agriculture industry. There is a great deal of confusion within the farming community about whether the Government have finally decided that, if the disease continues, the vaccination of animals has been ruled out. The subject keeps cropping up and I must admit—even as a former Agriculture Minister—that there is a duty on the Government immediately to establish a committee that will bring together all the relevant information, so that it can be considered over the coming weeks.

The fear among my farming constituents is that there may be a large resurgence of outbreaks in the autumn, when the weather changes and the disease is more likely to spring up again. If there is any question of the Government recommending vaccination, the work, preparation and analysis of all the available data will have been carried out over the summer months. We may reach autumn without having had a proper analysis and the farming community may be suddenly faced with a proposal for vaccination at a time when, perhaps, there will not be the opportunity for that to be properly considered. I urge the Minister to put together a committee of expertise and to put the information in the public domain before the autumn.

I have to express to the Minister my concerns and those of my constituents about the way in which the contiguous culls have been conducted. I agree in principle that where an outbreak occurs one should throw a cordon around it by culling out the adjacent farms in order to contain the disease. Other countries have done that and have managed to contain the disease.

What is not acceptable is when the contiguous culls are dealt with not within the first 24 or 48 hours of an outbreak, but days and weeks later. I have done some special pleading on behalf of farms in my constituency that were threatened with having their entire livestock slaughtered up to 21 days after an outbreak. If cases continue and contiguous culling proves necessary, I hope that the Minister will ensure that it is carried out quickly: leaving it for a long time would defeat the object of the exercise.

Since the election, there have been more outbreaks of foot and mouth in my constituency than before. Worryingly, the parish of Clayhanger, which previously had no identified outbreaks, has seen a crop of outbreaks in the past two to three weeks.

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

The issue of footpaths was raised at business questions today, but no real answer was given and perhaps the Minister could look into the matter. Who exactly has the final say about the opening of footpaths? Is it the Government or the local authority? The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has said that there is no risk in walkers and others using footpaths, but my constituents are very concerned about the situation, especially in areas where livestock are kept on land immediately adjacent to footpaths.

Many of my constituents are still on farm, where they have been for several months, because they have been extremely cautious about their own movements on and off farm. Some of my constituents have effectively locked themselves away for several months and are concerned that others will come on to the land. Every time footpaths are opened, my office is inundated with telephone calls and I wish to know to whom I, as a Member of Parliament, should make representations. Is it to the local authority, or directly to the Minister's office? We are batted to and fro, with no definitive answer given.

Farmers who might survive foot and mouth still face practical problems. We are already aware of the financial pressures that veterinary inspection is imposing on farmers who wish to avail themselves of the derestrictions on movement. I alert the Minister yet again to the fact that the financial position of many farmers in my constituency is dire, and I shall give specific examples later in my speech. Farmers are also concerned about artificial insemination services gaining access to farms, because they are trying to plan for the future. What is the Minister's advice to farmers who wish to plan in that way? Sheep farmers also face specific problems with shearers gaining access to sheep.

All those issues are not only bound up with what has happened in the past few months, but they constrain farmers who are just about hanging on and who do not know whether they have a future or not. Therefore, I hope that the Department is addressing those practical problems and will be able to give specific advice to farmers.

Another problem is the holding pit that was built, at short notice, on a property called Westlake farm in the parish of Oakford in my constituency. It is north of Tiverton, right up on the Exmoor border, and I have been to see the holding pit myself. I was shocked. It looked like a massive strip of runway for an airport. It is huge and it must have cost millions of pounds. It has not been used and I have corresponded with the Environment Agency about how the project was instigated, because there was no consultation with the parish council or local people. It has had a dire impact on people in the area who wish to sell their properties and on nearby farms that do farmhouse bed and breakfast, because it is a massive blot on the landscape in that rural and beautiful parish.

My question for the Environment Agency is whether the area will be restored to its greenfield status, so that the people who live around it can try to get back to normal as soon as possible. I received a letter from the Minister at the beginning of the foot and mouth outbreak telling me that the Environment Agency was responsible for such projects, but I have now had a letter from the Environment Agency saying that the future of the site and the question of its reinstatement should be directed to the Department. Tonight, I am doing just that. I hope that the Minister will have the answer, but if he does not I can tell him that the people of the parish of Oakford would like an answer. I urge the Minister to look into that situation, which is causing a huge problem. If the pit is not to be used, why was it put there in the first place—and why is it still in that state?

Another parish on the other side of my constituency has a problem, too. My constituency covers 600 square miles, so the two places are quite a long way apart. Burlescombe is just off junction 27 of the M5, near the A38, which goes to Wellington. During the election campaign, several people from the parish expressed to me their concern about material being stored off the A38 in sealed drums, watched over by security guards. Since the election I have had more telephone calls from constituents expressing further concerns about the material being stored in Burlescombe. They had also seen trailers clearly containing carcases, with only tarpaulins over the top, and with no motorised cabs attached, abandoned in lay-bys off the A38.

People are very concerned about that. We have all heard that in other sites in Devon, some of the ash from the pyres may be contaminated, and the people of Burlescombe want to know what the parish is being used for in terms of storing carcases or other material connected with foot and mouth.

Again, I ask the Minister to investigate for me. As a Member of Parliament, I have not been able to get answers to my questions. Can he tell me what is going on in my constituency? If he reassures me, I would like to go and take a look to reassure myself that my constituents' fears are unfounded. The parish is a long way from any foot and mouth outbreak; it is "clean", and my constituents have a right to know what is being done on their doorstep.

I shall now talk about the support—or rather, the lack of support—for businesses affected by foot and mouth. I shall give the Minister an example of that by reading a letter that I received this week from a farmer in the hilly sheep country north of Tiverton. Like many farmers, the people on that farm have diversified. They keep special breeds—rare sheep, which are kept for their wool alone—and have set up on farm a business manufacturing woollen garments and gifts with the wool from their own sheep.

The wool cannot leave the farm, and because those sheep are sheared in winter, the last shearing was in January. The farmer has therefore had no income since the beginning of the outbreak of foot and mouth. She wrote to me:

"Our son brought us a food parcel last week with toilet rolls and soap powder—we did not have enough money for a loaf of bread."

My constituent asked me what was happening to all the money that we keep hearing about—the millions of pounds and all those schemes that are supposedly helping people who, through no fault of their own, are not only finding it tough but are almost at the limit. I shall not read the rest of the letter, because although my constituent knows that I am raising her case in the House tonight, in all fairness, and for obvious reasons, I do not wish to give her name and address. These people are on the edge, and it is no good Ministers standing up and saying that there is a million pounds for this or a million pounds for that; they need help, and they need it quickly.

I have another letter, from Devonshire Heartland Association, which is focused mainly on Crediton, Tiverton, and the rest of mid-Devon. That organisation says that because of the crisis it has lost half its members, who cannot afford the membership fees.

The tourism industry in my constituency is in dire straits. There was an awful lot of good will among many people and organisations that voluntarily raised money to help. They were not simply looking to the Government for handouts. Many people in the west country contributed to the green welly campaign, for example, including local newspapers such as *The Western Morning News*. When the Minister for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), came to Devon, it was promised that that fund would be matched, pound for pound. Now we find that that did not include any corporate donations. There is a feeling in Devon that the Government have reneged on a promise that was designed to support and help the people I have just described.

We have just read of the report of the New Local Government Network, a think-tank close to the Government. It has, astonishingly, suggested a £3 a night tourism levy. I hope that the Minister will recognise the plight of the tourism industry and reject any such proposals.

The Government have told us that the small business loans guarantee scheme is available to help those who have problems as a result of foot and mouth. A written answer shows that only four tourism businesses have been awarded such grants. Where is the money going? I received a letter from my regional development agency saying that so many millions were going on this and so many millions on that. The money is clearly not going to the people who need it or to the sharp end. I believe that it is being spent on jobs for the boys—to the people who are analysing the problems, offering consultancy and doing everything but putting the money where it should go and should have been received weeks ago.

We should look at how this public money is being used. It is certainly not helping my constituents, and I believe that it should. It is incumbent on the Government to check how public money is being used, because clearly it is not going to the right place.

There was expectation of support for the farming community in Devon through the First Aid music festival, which was planned for the bank holiday weekend at the end of May. Small businesses and farmers in Devon had expected that to be another fillip that would help them, but the festival was cancelled. There was speculation that public money was spent on the event, which was then cancelled. I should like the Minister to look into that. Why was it cancelled? Was public money spent on it? If so, why is public money being used in that way, when farming, tourism and associated businesses in the county of Devon and in my constituency in particular need it?

These people will not survive, through no fault of their own. I refer not just to those who have had confirmed cases of foot and mouth but to many other businesses, all of which are inter-related. Some people are still stuck on their farms after many weeks, some can see no future and many are looking to the Government for the answers. I hope that the Minister will give me some answers tonight.

7.18 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I have two difficulties when it comes to answering the questions of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). First, she asked many specific questions. I understand her wish for a response to them, and had I had advance notice, we would have done some work to provide answers to them. However, I will certainly take away all the specific questions that she asked and respond as quickly as possible. I shall respond now, in the 11 minutes remaining to me—that is the second difficulty—to the greatest extent possible.

I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate and introducing a series of very important issues through her questions. The impact of foot and mouth disease on rural issues has been massive for farmers and the wider rural community, and the hon. Lady referred to both elements. I welcome the opportunity to respond as far as I can to some of her questions.

The hon. Lady asked about the future of a specific site in her constituency. In general terms, it was very difficult in the early stages of the impact of foot and mouth to anticipate what requirements there would be. It was a fast-moving situation. Indeed, I had some experience of that in my constituency, with a site that in the event turned out not to be required. Everybody concerned had to move quickly. I will look at the specific circumstances and write to the hon. Lady.

The hon. Lady referred to the situation in Burlescombe, concerns about storage, and reports of vehicles in lay-bys with carcases simply covered by tarpaulin. If such a report is a rumour, it is difficult to respond to, but if there is specific evidence of circumstances, time and place, clearly one can investigate. If information is provided contemporaneously, it is much easier to investigate. As I am sure the hon. Lady will acknowledge, a lot of information doing the rounds is not rooted in fact, but is based on misunderstanding. It is important for parliamentarians to distinguish between the two. If she can provide me with more specific facts, figures, dates and times, I will be able to pursue the matter further. It is difficult to deal with rumour.

The hon. Lady gave a specific example of a farm business. Clearly someone has tried through diversification to make a viable business. There is great sympathy for those in such circumstances who have had no income for a period of time. Again, I am happy to look at the specific case if she will provide the information. From the information provided so far I do not know whether that individual has explored all the possibilities available, but we can look at that.

There are concerns that people do not always use the information, health and support available to them. Last week a report was published which surveyed farm businesses and businesses generally in rural communities in the west midlands. It highlighted the financial impact on the rural economy and the number of people directly affected. It surveyed their concerns about the future. It also asked whether they had sought advice or help from the services available. Eighty per cent. had not done so. Sixty per cent. had not come up with ideas to diversify, change or market their business. In the depths of the direct impact of foot and mouth disease that is understandable, but we need to encourage people to use the support

[Alun Michael]

available and to question whether the information and opportunities are reaching them. Again, if the hon. Lady will provide the information, I will look into it.

We are looking at the operation of the scheme to match donations by the public. It has moved a lot of money quickly into help for people through welfare activities which the voluntary sector can often deal with more speedily and effectively than the public sector. The undertaking was to match pound for pound donations from members of the public, and that has been kept. I understand the hon. Lady's concern, but that promise has been kept.

The hon. Lady asked about tourism and whether I and my colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were aware of its plight. Yes, we are. My two first meetings with ministerial colleagues on taking up my present role were with the Minister at the Home Office who has responsibility for the voluntary sector and the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), who has responsibility for tourism. We looked at ways in which our officials could work together to ensure that we do all we can to restore tourism in the countryside.

The hon. Lady asked about opening footpaths. The urgency in that is to ensure that rural businesses in tourism, hotels, farms that have diversified into accommodation, and so on, can restore their business as quickly as possible. Many of them face a massive challenge.

The hon. Lady also asked who has the responsibility for reopening footpaths. The matter is clear. Perhaps I could send her a copy of a letter that I wrote today clarifying the whole situation for one of her colleagues, following an Adjournment debate yesterday—I am becoming a specialist. That letter sets out the situation comprehensively. In essence, the power of footpath closure lies with local authorities. At an early stage of the outbreak, local authorities were given the power to introduce blanket bans under which an area can be put under a prohibition through a single signature, instead of each footpath having to be signed off.

We are currently holding consultations on lifting blanket bans where they are no longer needed—I hope to make a decision during the next week. In some counties there have been no—or few—incidences of the disease, so the continuation of a blanket ban, which was introduced swiftly to enable a local authority to get a grip on the situation as a precautionary measure, is no longer appropriate. I have given local authorities the opportunity to put the case for a blanket ban where they think it justified. We should not be surprised to receive applications from those areas which experienced the largest outbreaks, including Cumbria and north Devon. We shall consider such requests carefully.

When a blanket ban is lifted, the power of footpath closure is left with the local authority, as is normally the case. The advice is that a 3 km area around an incidence should be the subject of such precautionary closures. That is greater than the distance needed in respect of the threat or the dangers, but it is a precautionary measure.

The damage to rural businesses from the closure of footpaths is enormous. Biosecurity is crucial. The big danger is from people having contact with animals, or from contact between animals. That is why advice was issued earlier this week in an excellent video. I understand that the hon. Lady has a copy, even though you may not yet have received yours Mr. Deputy Speaker. The video is worth watching, because it makes clear the measures that are necessary for protection from the dangers of spread. It also explains that footpath openings will continue unless there is a need for protection against the danger of infection.

This is the right balance. It fits well with the balance mentioned by the hon. Lady when, in opening the debate, she referred to the damage that was done directly to farmers through the impact of foot and mouth disease and to its knock-on effects on those rural businesses—including the closure of footpaths.

I told the hon. Lady earlier that it would be difficult to answer all her questions in the short time available, but I will try to pick up on some of them. She asked where the money is going. We have the strongest possible commitment to ensure that the money goes to the sharp end. Indeed, I pay tribute to the work that is being undertaken by the people in our regional offices in conjunction with the regional development agencies and with local partners who are giving direct business advice.

I visited a regional office last week and met people who had just returned after working long hours directly combating foot and mouth disease and were then going straight on to help rural businesses and farmers. We should appreciate the pressure on our staff, as well as that on rural communities, and pay tribute to their work.

The hon. Lady's point about the financial pressures of veterinary inspection and her other points are well understood. I assure her that Ministers have those issues under active consideration.

It is not surprising that we are debating the impact of foot and mouth for the third time this week, because it is such an immediate and challenging problem. I understand the pressures on people and the concerns that the hon. Lady has understandably expressed on behalf of her constituency. I shall write to her taking up the specific points that she raised during her half of this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 9 July 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Heavy Lift Aircraft

1. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the availability of heavy lift aircraft for the European rapid reaction force. [1183]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): There is no standing European rapid reaction force. European Union member states have nominated those elements of their own national forces that they believe could contribute to the requirements of the headline goal, including existing transport aircraft where appropriate, which could be assembled case by case to meet particular contingencies.

At the Paris air show on 19 June, I signed a memorandum of understanding with other partner nations committing the United Kingdom to purchase 25 of the new A400M aircraft. We have also leased four American C17 aircraft to provide a new outsize strategic lift capability until the A400M enters service. Two have been delivered, ahead of schedule, and I expect the remaining two to be delivered next month.

Our aircraft will be available for operations under either NATO or the EU, as well as for national operations.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Secretary of State for that helpful answer. Does the memorandum of understanding to which he referred go as far as a contract? Does it mean that a contract will be signed this year for the A400M or does he share the concern of Conservative Members that defence cuts in Germany will result in the 180 A400Ms not being produced and the Airbus Industrie target therefore not being reached? Will a contract be signed this year?

Mr. Hoon: A memorandum of understanding is a memorandum of understanding. It is not a contract, as the hon. Gentleman so perceptively noticed in following up my earlier answer. I am optimistic about the prospect of a contract being signed this year, and I am confident that the German Government will be part of that contract.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): My right hon. Friend will understand that many Labour Members are pleased that he was able to sign the memorandum at the Paris air show, but can he confirm that, in procurement of this or any other aircraft, the Department will always take account of the opinions of aircrew and ground crew in particular? That will ensure that we have a sustainable, well maintained product that will do what this country needs it to do—provide adequate defence.

Mr. Hoon: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. In coming to what were difficult decisions about the right choice of heavy lift aircraft for the Royal Air Force, we took account of the views of the RAF, those who are responsible for servicing those aircraft and, crucially, the military leadership, which required us to make available a strategic heavy lift capability.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can the Secretary of State assure the House that, notwithstanding the undoubted political, industrial and, ultimately, operational benefits of bringing the A400M into service, the RAF will still need genuine heavy lift aircraft such as the C17s, which have been leased? When the A400M enters squadron service, will he ensure either that the C17s are run on or that Antonovs are available on lease from Air Foyle or Heavy Lift Cargo Airlines?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right in his analysis of the need to have heavy lift capability available. That is precisely why we have chosen to lease C17s immediately, to fill the gap until the A400M becomes available. I can give him the assurance that he seeks: those C17s will remain with the RAF unless and until the A400M is available.

National Missile Defence

2. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): What discussions he has had with his European counterparts about US proposals for a national missile defence system. [1184]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I continue to have regular bilateral discussions on missile defence with NATO allies, European partners and others.

Mr. Lloyd: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is sufficient uncertainty in the technology in the programme to make it difficult for us to draw definitive conclusions—certainly those that would allow us to go ahead and support the scheme—and, in particular, that that uncertainty, coupled with a lack of proper negotiation with the Russians, is itself problematic for Europeans? If the Americans were to abrogate the anti-ballistic missile treaty and if Russia then stepped back and put its own missiles on hair-trigger alert, this uncertain long-term technology would simply not be worth the massive increase in insecurity in Europe.

Mr. Hoon: That is precisely why the Government have not yet taken any decision on whether to use assets in the United Kingdom for those purposes and why it makes sense for us to await any decision by the United States, which must be taken in the light of the available technology. I accept my hon. Friend's assertion that there

is little purpose in going to the trouble of taking such a decision unless and until the United States has a system that it is confident will work.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that Menwith Hill in my constituency performs a vital role in collecting *intelligence that protects the lives of British* service men serving abroad in peacekeeping operations? Does he equally accept that Menwith Hill is well respected and well integrated in the local community?

In deciding how to deal with the recent incursions by clowns in costumes, will the right hon. Gentleman bear it in mind that we do not want to turn Menwith Hill into a prison camp, but that the operational area of the base should be properly defended? The section of the base that is a local community living in North Yorkshire should be enabled to continue to integrate as successfully as it has up to now.

Mr. Hoon: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, I visited Menwith Hill last Thursday, and I agree about the importance of that facility to Britain's armed forces, and, equally, to the local community. While the present security arrangements are far from satisfactory, and will be reviewed, I accept the importance of ensuring that the people who live at Menwith Hill do so in tolerable circumstances.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that it is time for Britain to convey to the United States the clear message that the promotion of national missile defence—the whole star wars experiment—fundamentally undermines the nuclear disarmament process, would undermine all the treaties that have been so carefully and painstakingly negotiated over the past 40 years, and constitutes a massive escalation of nuclear firepower around the world? Our job is not to be a broker between the United States and the rest of the world but to say bluntly, "We want to live in a nuclear-free world, and it is time you did the same."

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that at all. The reason why I do not accept it is that my hon. Friend—I think deliberately—confuses two separate approaches to the problem of nuclear proliferation. He keeps talking about star wars, awakening echoes of President Reagan's programme to develop a comprehensive anti-missile system, rather than examining the specific proposals developed by the last US Administration to deal with a modest number of missiles fired by states of concern. That is the position that the present Administration seek to address.

It would help my hon. Friend, when he talks about this important subject, if he concentrated on what is being suggested rather than harking back to bygone days.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Government want to have it both ways. The Secretary of State is busy trying to slap down his colleague, while at the same time saying that the Government have not taken a view.

The reality is that the Government are in a complete mess over this issue. Before the general election, the Prime Minister was publicly saying that they did not have a position, but behind the scenes his own briefer, Mr. Campbell, was busily telling the press that they were in favour of the American position, and had reached a conclusion. Then, in their party manifesto, the Government came up with what is probably one of the most pathetic phrases ever seen in any manifesto. They said:

"We will encourage the US to consult closely with Nato allies on *its ideas for missile defence*".

That was powerful language, but has the Secretary of State missed the point? A week and a half ago, the President of the United States came round and did his consulting.

Just exactly what is the Government's position? Are they in favour of this, or are they opposed to it?

Mr. Hoon: I want to demonstrate that I am entirely even-handed in the way in which I deal with these matters. Talking of harking back to bygone days, the hon. Gentleman really ought to look carefully at the proposals that the present Administration are examining. They are not examining President Clinton's proposals for national missile defence; they are examining a range of different systems that they might decide to deploy.

The hon. Gentleman's problem—and, indeed, his party's problem—is that the Conservatives have already said what kind of system they would like, without having the funds, or any of the other resources, to deploy it. They are telling the United States what sort of system they believe that it should deploy. We do not consider that right, which is why it is entirely sensible for us to say what we are saying. Unless and until the United States comes forward with a specific proposal—we do not know what that proposal is yet, and I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that in the consultations the US Administration have not made clear what specific proposal they will present—the position of Her Majesty's Government is wholly consistent and wholly straightforward.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Secretary of State is simply not telling the truth. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that remark.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

The Secretary of State is avoiding reaching a conclusion. He is doing so because almost 200 Labour Members have signed an early-day motion that utterly opposes such a system. The French utterly oppose such a system.

The Secretary of State is privately telling the Americans that the Government are in favour of the system, but he cannot make that statement publicly because he is scared stiff of his Back Benchers and of some of his European counterparts. Has he not left it to countries such as Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic and Poland to say that they are in favour of the system while we fail to give leadership? The Government are no longer sitting on the fence, they are impaled on it.

Mr. Hoon: A cursory examination of the countries that the hon. Gentleman mentioned would show him that a vigorous debate is taking place right across Europe. In France, which he mentioned, there are those who are in

favour of such a system and those who are against it. Equally, if he checks, he will find that in the United States Congress, there are those who are in favour as there are those who are against. It is important that we should have a debate and that these sensitive matters, following consultation by the United States, should be considered carefully. Unfortunately, in terms of debate and careful consideration, the hon. Gentleman fails on both counts.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Last week, in a written answer, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the conference on disarmament was the right place to discuss the military use of space and that he wanted a committee of that conference to discuss the prevention of an arms race in space. Is it correct, therefore, that the British Government's policy is that there can be no question of the United Kingdom participating directly or indirectly in the weaponisation of space until an international agreement for that exists?

Mr. Hoon: That is not quite the Government's position—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry that Opposition Members find this entertaining. There are circumstances in which it would be necessary for us to use space for technology that allows us to protect British forces deployed in theatre. It is important that we should continue to do that while at the same time examining ways of restricting the proliferation of weapons in space and finding international agreement to that. Certainly we would want to reserve the position on the use of space to protect deployed British forces.

Army Deployments

3. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If he will list the five largest deployments of the British Army abroad. [1185]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): We have sizeable numbers of British Army personnel permanently based in Germany and deployed on operations in Northern Ireland. The five largest operational deployments of the British Army outside the United Kingdom are in Kosovo, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus and in support of coalition operations in the Gulf.

Chris Grayling: The Minister will be aware of the significant operational difficulties that the Army faces owing to the Government's failure to meet their targets for recruitment and retention. Against that background, will he tell the House what contingency arrangements he has been able to make should British forces have to be deployed in Macedonia? Should such an eventuality arise, what form might such a deployment take?

Mr. Ingram: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise that we have been unsuccessful; although there are difficulties in recruitment and retention right across the armed forces, there are many successful schemes to tackle them all. The current deployment level is 20 per cent., which is consistent with the level that operational commanders believe is necessary to maintain the Army's operational readiness to tackle any development such as Macedonia. Of course, no detailed decision has yet been taken on a deployment in Macedonia because all the ingredients are not yet in place to achieve that objective. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, if those conditions apply, we would want the British Army to be deployed in sufficient strength alongside NATO forces to achieve the objective of disarming the National Liberation Army.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Liberal Democrat Members have always supported British and NATO deployment in the Balkans, which is the principal deployment area. As we will be the spearhead nation in Macedonia, can the Minister tell us what regiments have been earmarked to go there if necessary? Will that affect our continued commitment in Kosovo and Bosnia? Can he also tell us the exit strategy from Macedonia? Although we believe that any NATO force should be supported by other NATO members, we also believe that it must be a force that can move out as well as it moves in.

Mr. Ingram: I am surprised at the latter part of that question.

The hon. Gentleman asked which forces we had decided to send to Macedonia. As I said earlier, we are not yet at the stage of deployment. If we made a decision today, it would be a certain configuration, but if we made it three or six months hence it would be a different configuration, so it would be wrong to make a pronouncement now. The United Kingdom has offered a brigade headquarters as part of our contribution should NATO deploy to disarm the NLA, as part of the peace agreement for which we all hope.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I welcome the Minister to the Defence portfolio, and I hope that he will enjoy what is the second best job in the British Government, after that of Secretary of State for Defence. I hope that he does not occupy the position for too long.

A direct consequence of overstretch and shortened tour intervals is huge strain on Army families. Will the Minister investigate why the 3 per cent. efficiency savings continue to apply to Army welfare services—in effect, another 3 per cent. cut in those services this year—with the direct consequence, in the garrison towns around Salisbury plain, that the county council social services have to find another £400,000 to support military families? That should be the job of the Ministry of Defence, and it would not even need to be done if the Ministry matched its resources with its commitments.

Mr. Ingram: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to me in my new portfolio. I do not know who he wished to remain in his post for a short duration, myself or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I look forward to this portfolio, having served in another difficult job on behalf of the Government, in the Northern Ireland Office. I will try to be gracious to the hon. Gentleman as often as he is gracious to me.

The impact on military families around Salisbury plain that the hon. Gentleman describes is precisely the reason for our having set up a joint services taskforce, which I chair, to examine how we can begin to deal with some of the issues. Contrary to what he says, there have not been cuts. It is a matter of trying to ensure that all arms of Government service delivery, including social security, best meet the needs of our armed forces. That is not an easy task, but we have begun to tackle it, unlike the

previous Administration. If the hon. Gentleman's wish for me to have a short duration in post was a wish for his party, rather than mine, to be in power, I am sure that many people in the armed forces would wish otherwise.

Peacekeeping

4. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What changes there have been in the global security environment and the role of the UK's defence forces with respect to peacekeeping since the 1998 strategic defence review. [1186]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): In February, the Ministry of Defence published its reappraisal of the future strategic context for defence, which reaffirmed the assessments made in the strategic defence review of a rapidly changing security environment. It confirmed the lack of an immediate and direct military threat to the United Kingdom but forecast a continuing need for our armed forces to engage in preventing conflict and restoring and maintaining peace.

Since 1998, our armed forces have been involved in a number of peacekeeping operations, including those in the Balkans, Sierra Leone and East Timor. Those recent experiences have demonstrated the excellence of our armed forces in a peacekeeping role and their valuable contribution to Britain's role as a force for good in the world.

We are not complacent, however, about the burden that peacekeeping operations place on our armed forces. That is why we continually reassess the levels of commitment, reducing numbers as soon as is realistic.

Mr. Borrow: When the strategic defence review was published in July 1998, it anticipated a greater peacekeeping role for our service men and women, and in fact the increase in that role has been greater than many of us then anticipated. What actions is the Ministry taking to ensure that that is recognised in the structures of our services, and how does the Minister anticipate that role will change—does he foresee an increase or a decrease?

Mr. Hoon: We have always recognised that the armed forces need to be trained to fulfil the most demanding of tasks—fighting wars—but it is the case around the world that those armed forces that are best trained for war fighting also happen to be the ones that are best suited to peacekeeping, because of the demands on them made in areas such as the Balkans. That is why we have kept careful control over the number and quantity of deployments. As was said earlier, it is important when considering a new deployment that we anticipate its end, perhaps by reducing force levels as the deployment continues. Since I became Secretary of State, we have certainly sought to reduce numbers deployed where we can, both in Bosnia and in Kosovo. We try to minimise our involvement, consistent with our obligations to the international community.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I warmly endorse the Secretary of State's comments about the absolute requirement for troops to be trained for the most demanding levels of warfare, but does he acknowledge that because of the extensive and, in many cases, welcome deployments of our forces, the intervals between deployments and the amount of high-quality training available to troops are becoming increasingly limited? That, in turn, could lead to a degrading of the truly exceptional capabilities of the British armed forces. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that he will ensure—as much as he is able, given the demands made of our soldiers, sailors and airmen—that training time will be kept sacrosanct?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is right, and it is often overlooked, in the enthusiasm and, perhaps, the excitement of a deployment, that if forces are to remain in a theatre for any length of time, the personnel must be replaced. Other forces that have had appropriate training have to replace them, and those who have been deployed in a particular theatre must maintain the level of their training for the future. We keep that need in mind, although I do not pretend that it is always easy, given our present range of deployments. The chiefs advise me on the issue, and I certainly take that advice into account.

Royal Navy

5. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If he will make a statement on policy priorities for the Royal Navy; and how they have changed since the publication of the strategic defence review. [1187]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Policy priorities for the Royal Navy have not changed since the strategic defence review. The strategic direction and development of the Royal Navy was set out by the Admiralty Board in November 2000 in a paper entitled "The Future Navy". Copies of this paper have been placed in the Library of the House. As it makes clear, the key policy priority for the Royal Navy is to retain its core emphasis on war fighting and the ability to operate and sustain forces worldwide, achieved through the continued development of a versatile maritime force.

In that light, I have today approved the plan of the Commander-in-Chief, Fleet to streamline and relocate key elements of his headquarters to Whale Island in Portsmouth. That will bring together, in a single modern headquarters, the key defence and management expertise needed to allow him to continue to deliver a world class navy, fit for its wide range of key operational tasks in the 21st century. The organisational restructuring will be in place by April 2002, and the new headquarters building will be available from late 2003.

Mr. Miller: My right hon. Friend's announcement will be welcomed by many people, but will he assure the House that the proposals are driven by the need for greater effectiveness, rather than for cost savings? Will he also assure the House that proper steps have been taken to protect the interests of civilian staff?

Mr. Ingram: I can give my hon. Friend assurances on both counts. The changes were not driven by the need to make cost savings, although substantial savings will result from the rationalisation and relocation, to the extent of £10 million, which will be retained by the Navy for its use. It will be necessary to consult the trade unions and civilian staff affected by the changes. All staff at the sites

that will no longer be used will be given the option to relocate to the new location or help in finding another post in the same area.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): While Ministers reorganise the organisation chart of the Royal Navy yet again, will the Minister confirm that today, compared with four years ago, we have fewer sailors, with a higher proportion of them medically unfit; fewer submarines, with a higher proportion on maintenance; and far fewer frigates? Will he also confirm that we are planning two enormous aircraft carriers for the distant future, while the number of fixed-wing, fast-jet pilots in the Navy has collapsed to an all-time low?

Mr. Ingram: In so far as there may be fewer personnel employed in some wings of the armed forces, that is about the most effective and efficient use of the armed personnel that we have. It is about ensuring that they have the best equipment. We are dealing with a completely changed world environment, which is why the strategic defence review was originally put in place. If we had continued with the previous Administration's policies, there would have been cut upon cut. That is not the future for the modern armed forces in this country.

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): I welcome the Minister to his post and also thank his predecessor, who did a magnificent job for four years.

I welcome today's statement, particularly as Whale Island is in my constituency. It further consolidates an area that has HMS Excellent, as well as making the Navy much more secure in Portsmouth and providing more jobs. As the icing on the cake, is there any news on the type 45 destroyer contract? I understand that a statement should be imminent, but I need more information.

Mr. Ingram: On behalf of my predecessor, I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. I am sure that my predecessor will read avidly everything that is said today by his successor. He will keep a close watch on his previous brief, as all Ministers do with their former Departments. My hon. Friend's compliments will therefore not go amiss, but in case my predecessor does not read *Hansard*, I will make sure that they are brought to his attention.

I also thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for today's announcement which, as he says, will greatly benefit not only the Navy but his constituency. On the T45 programme, I think that he should wait. Christmas is coming, but there may be an announcement sooner than that.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): On that point, the Minister will be aware that for the Royal Navy to meet its policy objectives, it needs these ships and the type 45 destroyer as soon as possible. This is already long delayed. I accept his point about making a statement later, but can he confirm that it will not be delayed any further than necessary, and that the Government's commitment to Vosper Thornycroft and BAE Marine that the work for construction will be shared fairly and equally will be maintained when that announcement is made?

Mr. Ingram: I think that the hon. Gentleman should await the announcement. I have not made it today, and I will not anticipate what it will say. However, the term "fair distribution" shows how we will approach the matter.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I warmly welcome the right hon. Gentleman to the Defence team. Has he yet had a chance to read Admiral Essenhigh's annexe to the fleet risk register? If he has, can he think when there has ever been such a devastating or authoritative indictment of the state of the Royal Navy and of Government neglect of it? Let me quote a very few of the charges:

"FA2 pilot numbers are well below requirement with PVR—

premature voluntary release—

"rising critically . . . The upgrade of FA2 engines to 1161 standard is still required in order to make the aircraft properly operable world-wide . . . There are serious limitations in current underwater capability, including sensors, weapons and self-protection . . . There is a failure to meet spares demands in support activity across all Type Command impacting Fleet ability to meet tasking . . . Continued pressure, both financial and operational, impacts upon the ability to conduct the full training packages".

Of the attack helicopter, it says:

"System procured currently unable to operate from the sea as envisaged".

It goes on and on. Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate the seriousness of the situation described by Admiral Essenhigh, or does he simply think that the admiral does not know what he is talking about?

Mr. Ingram: From my experience during the short time I have spent in this post, I believe that Admiral Essenhigh does know what he is talking about. It is an important requirement that all senior commanders-in-chief look at the worst-case scenarios and take a proper view of all the risks that they have to deal with. Of course, the hon. Gentleman quotes from a leaked document, and we deplore the fact that it has been leaked. While it may allow some knockabout in the Chamber, it also provides people who may be hostile to this country with views about our planning scenarios, so we treat these issues with some sensitivity, which is why we do not put them into the public domain.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of points, and I cannot go into them all in detail. However, as he refers to the need to identify issues by means of a risk register, may I recommend the same approach to his party? The Conservatives may want to think about the worst-case scenario in respect of their procedures for the appointment of a new leader.

Mr. Davies: This is a serious matter.

Mr. Ingram: Of course it is; the real thrust is that the document is important. It should not have been leaked, and it should not have been exploited to the extent that it has. However, even more important is the fact that the Royal Navy continues to meet its operational commitments across a whole spectrum of defence missions. I hope that answers the hon. Gentleman's questions.

Surplus Land and Buildings

6. **Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): What steps he is taking to involve local communities in the sale of his Department's former sites. [1188]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The disposal of surplus Ministry of Defence land and buildings is conducted in accordance with Government accounting regulations—normally on the open market, in the interests of taxpayers generally. Sites are usually sold with the benefit of outline planning permission or a planning brief. Thus, in the case of a major closure or draw-down, it is normal practice for officials in Defence Estates to work closely with the relevant local authorities, and to liaise with recognised local community bodies as part of the disposal process. We seek to take local aspirations into account wherever possible. The Ministry of Defence recognises that that can be particularly important when surplus sites are in rural or isolated locations.

Sir Robert Smith: I thank the Minister for his reply. As he knows, constituents of mine at RAF Edzell have been occupying housing that was formerly on the MOD base there. Will he take into account their experience when he considers future sales? Will he consider the qualities of future purchasers or developers, and the way in which they handle the sale of property to private individuals?

Dr. Moonie: It is generally assumed that people who can find the financial backing to take over such a scheme are competent to deal with the issues involved—but if the hon. Gentleman wants to make specific points, I shall be happy to meet him to discuss them.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I welcome my hon. Friend's reply to the question. Does he also think that it would be good policy for companies owned by the Ministry of Defence to consult local communities before those companies acquire new sites? The Defence Aviation Repair Agency, in St. Athan in my constituency, has managed to alienate almost the entire community of Rhoose in the Vale of Glamorgan, although the decision to move has not yet even been taken. Local people should be consulted.

Dr. Moonie: That is a good point, but one on which I must confess that I know little, because it is not part of my brief. I shall look into the matter for my hon. Friend and send him a note about it.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Minister make my constituents and me an offer similar to the one he made to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith)? From exchanges that he witnessed between myself and his hon. Friend the Minister for Transport—when his hon. Friend was part of the Defence team—he will know that when officers from my local authority were asked to keep the plans to convert the staff college building into a luxury hotel secret, they showed great sensitivity. Those plans were stopped only when it was revealed that the staff college in my constituency contained a war memorial. As concern has been expressed that some civil servants who work for the Minister have not been as sensitive and as sensible as my local authority officers in dealing with such issues, will he agree to meet a delegation, including the leader of Surrey Heath council, to ensure that there is no repetition of those problems?

Dr. Moonie: Yes, I shall be happy to do so.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will my hon. Friend take a personal interest in the proposed sale of Derby barracks on Fletcher street in my constituency, which is the home of Bolton sea cadets and several community groups? Those organisations are trying to raise money by various means—including lottery funding—but will my hon. Friend consider renting the premises to them rather than selling the buildings from under their feet in the near future?

Dr. Moonie: I am certainly prepared to consider that. However, where we decide to sell barracks, it is our normal practice to try to ensure that re-provision is made.

RAF Saxa Vord

7. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): What plans he has for the disposal of housing stock owned and maintained by his Department in support of RAF Saxa Vord. [1189]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): As a result of the draw-down of RAF Saxa Vord, it is expected that 38 houses in the Setters Hill estate will be surplus to requirements and will therefore be passed to Defence Estates for disposal in the next few months.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the Minister recognise the very fragile state of the economy on Unst—Britain's most northerly community—since the draw-down of RAF Saxa Vord? Does he appreciate the central role that local management of the housing stock will have in providing a sustainable future for Unst? Will he give an assurance to the people of Unst that when the time comes for disposal, preference will be given to a local bid, and that they will not be left to the mercy of the property developers?

Dr. Moonie: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will be well aware that that is a difficult undertaking to give, but we are conducting a survey of public opinion among the islanders to find out what the general view of the sales is. We are discussing the issue closely with the local authority and the Highlands and Islands development board, and all their views will be carefully taken into account before we proceed with the sale. We are well aware of the sensitivities involved.

Porton Down

8. **Mr. David Atkinson** (Bournemouth, East): How many claims for compensation by service volunteers at Porton Down have been received by the War Pensions Agency. [1190]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Between 19 February and 31 May 2001, the War Pensions Agency received 31 claims from Porton Down service volunteers. Information prior to 19 February is not available as separate records of war pension claims from Porton Down volunteers were not identified before then.

Mr. Atkinson: Is that not a rather surprising and disappointing reply, in view of the recent investigation by Wiltshire police into hundreds of volunteers whose health was impaired at Porton Down and whose claims for compensation were turned down by the agency, including that of my constituent, Mr. Michael Painter? Now that the agency has been transferred from what was the Department of Social Security to his Department, will he ensure that an independent medical reassessment of all those claimants takes place, to ensure just compensation for them before they are all dead?

Dr. Moonie: We have found no evidence at present to support the contention that deaths and ill health are linked to the experiments that were carried out at Porton Down. That is why we are conducting a very careful epidemiological study of those who were involved to try to establish whether there really are any effects. It is important that we proceed on the basis of solid fact, rather than needless speculation.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): As in the case of the Porton Down volunteers, investigation and clear information are always vital, so does the Minister agree that workers at the nuclear refit facility at Chatham deserve accurate information from the MOD? In January this year the Minister advised me that two former workers and their families were due to receive an offer of compensation, but it is now July, and no offer has been forthcoming. I acknowledge the answer about interim payments that he gave me earlier last week, but does he understand the concern? Will he therefore order a review of the no-fault compensation scheme, so that former Chatham dockyard workers and their families can have some confidence in it?

Dr. Moonie: I am disappointed that it is taking so long to reach a conclusion in those cases. We have offered interim payments, and I am happy to consider the procedure to find out whether anything can be done to speed it up. However, it is very difficult, on occasion, to move the legal profession forward at the speed that we might like.

European Security and Defence Policy

9. **Dr. Robert Spink** (Castle Point): What representations he has received concerning the European security and defence policy. [1191]

11. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): When he last met the NATO Secretary-General to discuss European security. [1193]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others on European security and defence policy. I have also discussed the policy with Lord Robertson—most recently on 25 June. NATO members, including the United States, have recognised the importance of improving the defence capabilities of European partners, to allow Europe to act when NATO as a whole is not engaged and to contribute to the improvements identified in the European Union's headline goal and NATO's defence capabilities initiative.

Dr. Spink: How does the Secretary of State explain the crystal-clear contradiction that exists, given that the Prime Minister told the US President in February that planning for any EU military operation would take place in NATO, yet the EU military staffs have made it clear that high-level and operational planning will be undertaken by their organisation? Will the Secretary of State tell us which of those statements is true?

Mr. Hoon: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the House—although he could possibly have spent the interim period reading about the arrangements for the European Union and NATO more carefully. Had he done so, he would have identified the fact that operational planning will be a matter for NATO. *[Interruption.]* Operational planning will be a matter for NATO, I have said it twice so that the hon. Gentleman can get that point quite clearly into his mind.

Mr. Amess: Does the Secretary of State recall telling the House last year that defence spending among European nations was growing? In the light of that, will he explain whether he agrees with his former colleague Lord Robertson, the Secretary-General of NATO, who said that Europe's response to the defence capability initiative was totally inadequate?

Mr. Hoon: The two observations are not necessarily inconsistent, in the sense that what is important about the defence capabilities initiative is that European nations develop particular kinds of capabilities that are consistent with the aims of the Helsinki headline goal, and relate to the need to deal with modern issues. Instead of having large numbers of forces deployed on the west German plain to confront the threat from the Soviet Union, we now need rapidly deployable forces along the lines envisaged by the strategic defence review. Although we certainly urge our European partners to increase their defence spending, we also urge them to spend their defence money in a different way—on satisfying the Helsinki headline goal as well as on the defence capabilities initiative.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): As well as ensuring that European funds are spent more effectively in, for example, combat and peacekeeping areas such as the Balkans, is not one of the benefits to Britain of participating in the European defence initiative the fact that, over time, other European countries will spend more on their own and on European defence in general? Will my right hon. Friend use his contacts with our European partners to urge them to spend more, and to make sure that the money is spent more effectively?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations. He is right. It is important that European nations spend their defence money more effectively than they have in the past, and this country recognised that point before we conducted the strategic defence review.

The review was broadly supported by Members on both sides of the House, and it is important that the lesson is also learned elsewhere.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Secretary of State not agree that the Prime Minister is in danger of becoming habitually inexact about what he has arranged for the euro-army—or the European defence force, as he calls it? Did the Prime Minister not come to the House at one stage and say that any significant operation that the force carried out

"will require NATO assets and . . . will be planned at NATO"?—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 349.]

However, General Schuwirth, who is now a member of the military staff, has said:

"If necessary, we engage in high-level-planning."

Is not the reality that what the Prime Minister signed up to at Nice and what he tells the House and the country are two completely different things? Are the Prime Minister and his Government not becoming rather like the pushme-pullyou? When they go to Washington, they are against, when they go to Brussels, they are in favour, and when they come to Parliament, they are in denial.

Mr. Hoon: I should have thought that it was rather dangerous for the hon. Gentleman to refer to Dr. Dolittle—but as he hopes to be busy in due course, perhaps we can depend on him for further literary references in future.

I have made the position absolutely clear: operational planning will be conducted in NATO. That was agreed at Nice.

Mr. Duncan Smith *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hoon: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head to suggest that he knows best. If he examines the Nice agreement carefully, he will see that there was an acceptance right across the European Union that operational planning will be conducted through NATO.

Service Strengths

10. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): When he expects each of the three services to reach their full manning strength. [1192]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Royal Air Force is in broad manning balance. The aim of the naval service remains to achieve broad manning balance by 2002. The Army's aim is to achieve full manning by 2005. However, we recognise that there are shortages in particular skill areas in all three services, and those are being addressed by a range of measures, some of which have already produced positive results.

Mr. Boswell: Yes, but in April, did Ministers not concede within the space of 48 hours, first, that the Army was 8,000 under strength, and, secondly, that the other two services were short of nearly 200 operational pilots? Does the Minister remember that Catherine the Great's Minister Potemkin, who thoughtfully laid on a series of empty peasant villages for her, got a real battleship named after him? Is this Minister going to measure himself for the role of the empty vessel?

Mr. Ingram: As I come from Glasgow, I can take some satisfaction from the fact that the name of HMS Glasgow is a reflection of that city.

As for the relative strength of the armed forces, I have given the hon. Gentleman our objectives. I have also recognised the shortages in particular skills, which we have to address against strong competing demands in the wider economy. If there were easy solutions to those problems, they would be lifted off the shelf and implemented. If the hon. Gentleman has any good ideas that we have not thought of to bring the Army, the Air Force and the Navy up to strength, perhaps he will write to me.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Has my right hon. Friend given any thought to recruitment to the defence medical services? The Select Committee on Defence considered that closely, and there were many initiatives to encourage people to enter the service. I know that this is a vexed question, but has thought been given to holding further discussions with the national health service to explain how wonderful it is for people to join the medical services as volunteers?

Mr. Ingram: I can reassure my hon. Friend that much thought is being given to that. In my early rounds of meetings with senior commanders and others in the armed forces, the need to ensure that that medical support is available has been strongly put. We are considering ways in which that and other support services can be brought up to reasonable strength. There are significant career opportunities for people who want to join those wings of the armed services, and I am sure that the Select Committee's report will help to advance the campaign to attract more people to them.

Army Recruitment

12. **Patrick Mercer** (Newark): If he will make a statement on the number of Army recruits recruited *(a)* by the recruiting group and *(b)* by soldiers detached from battalions in the last five years. [1194]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Army recruiting is an integrated operation involving both the Army Training and Recruiting Agency and the field Army. All recruits are enlisted at an armed forces careers office, and no central record of the source of their interest is maintained.

Patrick Mercer: I thank the Minister for that clear response, but does he agree that soldiers detached from regiments contribute disproportionately to the number of civilians who come forward for enlistment? Is he aware that those soldiers come from established regiments that are on active service? Does he not agree that as we take them away from regiments—a form of "de-weaponising"—they should be properly established and properly funded, as a matter of some urgency?

Mr. Ingram: I had already intended to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House, and to pay tribute to his

important contribution to Army recruitment in his previous role in the Army Training and Recruiting Agency. I am sure he will recognise that many people make a considerable effort to recruit sufficient numbers of the right quality of people to the Army. As I said to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), if the hon. Gentleman has any good ideas, he should bring them to my attention. We all want the Army, Navy and Air Force brought up to strength, as set out in the targets. It is a collective effort, and it is right that different parts of the Army contribute to the important role of recruitment. It is also important that we retain that role in the Army.

Army Equipment

13. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What plans he has to improve front-line equipment for the Army. [1195]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Our equipment modernisation programme aims to ensure that the front-line capability of our land forces remains among the best in the world. We are investing heavily in programmes such as the Apache attack helicopter, which entered service earlier this year. In the longer term, we have plans to acquire artillery weapons with improved range and accuracy, a fully integrated fighting system for the infantry and a range of new armoured fighting vehicles.

We are also resolving two longer-term deficiencies in equipment that is fundamental to the Army's effectiveness. The SA80 rifle is due to be modified later this year. The trials conducted on the new weapons have gone extremely well. We also expect to select a preferred supplier for the Bowman communications system soon.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he tell the House exactly what modifications have been made to the SA80, and can he assure us that those modifications will make it more reliable?

Dr. Moonie: The pilot programme to modify the weapon has been taking place, and the Army has been testing it. I am happy to say that it appears to be very satisfied with the modifications, which seem to have remedied the weapon's faults, particularly its unreliability, in a very small number of cases, in extreme conditions. The work is proceeding well, and the weapon will come back into service, after modification, at the beginning of next year.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Minister mentioned the long-delayed acquisition of the Bowman communications system. I understand that a decision is to be made about that in the next few days. Is there any reason why the preferred bidder should not be the Thales consortium, given that, unlike the Canadian and American competitors for the contract, the firm employs more than 14,500 British people, and that the Thales bid, unlike the others, would mean that 88 per cent. of the work would be done in this country?

Dr. Moonie: I cannot give an opinion on any specific bid, because we are not in a position to announce our preferred supplier. The bids have been carefully evaluated, and are broadly comparable in the investment that they would make in this country and in the quantity and quality of jobs that they would supply. We are confident that, whoever we proceed with, we will have a solution to the problem within the time limits that we have set.

Peacekeeping

15. **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): What recent discussions he has had with the United Nations about the promotion of peacekeeping. [1197]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed peacekeeping issues with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 21 June during his visit to the UK. Discussion included implementation of the Brahimi report to improve UN peacekeeping, peacekeeping training and current UN operations.

Paul Goggins: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer, and welcome the action taken so far on the Brahimi report. Will he act to speed up the implementation of the report? What action is he taking to develop the capacity and commitment of our UN partners to play their full role in international peacekeeping?

Mr. Ingram: The British armed forces have particular experience and expertise in peacekeeping operations, and that is an example to others. We are already doing much to assist others through bilateral and regional programmes of training, seminars, workshops and exercises. We operate several military training teams that provide such support permanently. We are looking to do more in partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, through new initiatives funded by the global conflict prevention fund. I am sure that all those initiatives will allow us to make rapid progress on the Brahimi report.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Precisely what financial contribution does the Minister envisage Britain making this year, and how exactly does it compare with the figure for last year?

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with those details.

Trident

16. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What the basis is for holding the present number of Trident missiles. [1198]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): During the 1998 strategic defence review, we conducted a fundamental re-examination of the level of nuclear deterrence capability required, and concluded that one ballistic missile submarine on patrol at all times, with 48 nuclear warheads, would be sufficient to deter the threat from potential aggressors. That continues to be the case, although we keep the situation under constant review.

Dr. Cable: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. My colleagues and I welcome the reduction in the scale of the national minimum deterrent in the SDR, which

reflects the post-cold-war environment. What plans does the Secretary of State have to redefine the minimum deterrent, particularly the Moscow criterion, in the light of the emergence of national missile defence systems?

Mr. Hoon: As I said in answer to an earlier question, and in reply to a written question from the hon. Gentleman, we keep the situation under constant review, although we recognise that the United States of America is right to be concerned about the threat from states of concern—states that may not be deterred by a nuclear response. In those circumstances, we understand why the United States is seeking ways of developing missile defence.

Iraq

17. **Mr. George Galloway** (Glasgow, Kelvin): What military action Her Majesty's forces engaged in during June over Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [1199]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): During June, coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones came under attack from the Iraqi air defence system on more than 80 occasions. They responded in self-defence against elements of that system on six of those occasions. The House should note Iraqi claims that some 23 people lost their lives on 19 June during a football match in the town of Tal Afar. On that day, coalition aircraft were certainly fired on by a range of systems, including anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles, but there was no coalition self-defence response on that day. We believe that the incident was the result of an Iraqi missile falling back to the ground.

Mr. Galloway: Of course I accept my right hon. Friend's unequivocal and categoric assurance that the 23 young people who were killed on that killing field that had been a football field were not killed by British or American forces. However, they are dead, and their families are in mourning. Will my right hon. Friend not reflect with me—and, more importantly, with former supporters of the no-fly zone policy, such as Liberal Democrat Members and, even more significantly, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, from whose territory those missions were flown—that the no-fly zone operations are becoming part of the problem rather than the solution, and that those 23 victims have to be added to the long melancholy list of victims of war and sanctions in Iraq? Would it not be better to pause for reflection on whether the no-fly zones should be suspended?

Mr. Hoon: I might feel a little more confident about my hon. Friend's assertion if he had raised the matter directly with Saddam Hussein, who is responsible for those 23 deaths, and who has inflicted on his own people the horrors that we are seeking to prevent by patrolling in the no-fly zones. I commend my hon. Friend for his concern about those deaths, but that concern would have been much strengthened if he had raised the matter directly with Saddam Hussein.

Point of Order

3.33 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that, over the weekend, 164 police officers were injured in Bradford. You will also be aware that the Home Secretary said that he is actively considering the use of water cannon and tear gas. Have you received any indication as to whether he will make a statement in the House this week?

Mr. Speaker: I do know that the Home Secretary is very aware of the deep concern in the House.

Orders of the Day

Export Control Bill

[Relevant documents: The Seventh Report from the Defence Committee, the Seventh Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Sixth Report from the International Development Committee and the Eleventh Report from the Trade and Industry Committee, Session 2000–01, on the Draft Export Control and Non-Proliferation Bill, printed jointly as HC 445.]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As hon. Members will know, the Queen's Speech set out a programme of reform and renewal in this country: to extend opportunity for all to reach their full potential, and provide excellent schools and hospitals for all. As we build a future here for our people in Britain, we shall not ignore our international responsibilities: to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development and reduce conflict.

That is what the Export Control Bill is about. It is about people like Fatima, the young girl in Sierra Leone who saw her son shot dead in 1997, along with many others in her village. It is also about people such as Mute-garu-gori, who had to watch her mother and father being killed by soldiers in Rwanda, and three-year-old M'penzi, whose parents were killed in the dawn attack on her village in north-east Congo. She was shot in the shoulder and foot, but survived. Those are just a few examples of the people who suffer when guns get into the wrong hands. Illicit gun running and unregulated arms brokering contribute to the suffering and death of children, adult civilians and whole communities around the world. When we consider the Bill, therefore, let us remember what it will mean to people throughout the world.

The Bill introduces new powers to control the arms trade and also greater democratic accountability for the exercise of those powers. The defence industry here in the United Kingdom employs thousands of workers. It is an important part of our manufacturing base and exports are vital to it. Responsible and legitimate trade in arms, together with our own defence efforts, can ensure security and peace for people around the world. Our exports are other people's defence procurement. They help people to keep the peace by deterring aggression, and when that fails, they help them to defend themselves.

Of course, we also know that there is a dark and unacceptable side to the arms trade: the irresponsible—and indeed immoral—trafficking and brokering of arms to conflict zones and areas of instability. The Bill enables us to ensure that Britain cannot be used as a base for an illicit trade that causes so much suffering. It will ensure that Britain has one of the most effective and comprehensive export control regimes in the world.

The legislation that governs our exports is the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the Secretary of State give us some evidence to show that Britain is used as a base for such illegal weapons trafficking? On what evidence are her assertions based?

Ms Hewitt: I think that all hon. Members must be aware of the serious danger of weaponry that is made in

[Ms Hewitt]

Britain for legitimate purposes being used abroad for illegitimate ends, as has happened before. All hon. Members will be aware of the danger of equipment or arms that have been licensed for legitimate use none the less ending up in the hands of illegitimate arms traffickers and repressive regimes. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has read the very full report that the Government publish annually on our licensing decisions. It deals with the very tough controls that we have already imposed to ensure that the illicit use of weapons does not arise.

Mr. Howarth *rose—*

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) *rose—*

Ms Hewitt: I have given way on that point, and I should like to make a little more progress before I give way again.

The legislation that governs the export of weapons and related technology has not fundamentally changed since it was introduced at the start of the second world war. The report by Sir Richard Scott—or Lord Scott, as he is now—on defence-related exports to Iraq highlighted the faults of that legislation and called for change. The Bill is the result of the thorough and comprehensive review of legislation for which the Scott report called. The 1998 White Paper on strategic export controls invited views on proposals for a new, more accountable and more modern legislative framework. Earlier this year, we published a draft Bill for further consultation, so hon. Members, non-governmental organisations and business had the opportunity to comment on a draft version before the Bill was formally presented to the House.

We listened to what people had to say and have made a number of important changes. In particular, we decided in the light of responses to the White Paper to introduce a general licensing system for arms trafficking and brokering, as well as our original proposals for controls to allow us to prohibit trafficking and brokering both to embargoed destinations and in relation to torture equipment.

Hon. Members have made a valuable and expert contribution to the review process. We have been greatly helped by the work of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which published a report in December 1998 on the White Paper. We have also been helped by the Quadripartite Committee, which so helpfully reported on the draft Bill soon after it was published. Our response to the Quadripartite Committee's report was published this morning. We made some changes to the draft Bill in response to the report. As the Committee requested, the Bill makes it clear that licensing decisions should have regard to the purposes that are set out in the Bill. We have revised the schedule that outlines the purposes to make it absolutely clear that export controls can be imposed when there is a risk of internal conflict.

Mr. Bercow: I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on her appointment. Given that the Government are far short of achieving their objective of processing 70 per cent. of standard individual export licence applications in 20 working days—a matter of continuing and widespread anxiety to companies—will the right hon. Lady confirm that the Bill's honourable objectives will not be achieved at the cost of continuing delay and therefore expense to commercial enterprises?

Ms Hewitt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. Like him, I am worried about the delays and our failure to meet the target for dealing with all the applications on time. However, I am sure that he acknowledges that some of the applications raise complex and difficult issues on which a careful judgment must be made. On the one hand, we must not interfere with proper and legitimate business and thus impose unnecessary or unjustified costs on British business. On the other, we must not risk the prospect of arms and technology that have been developed and manufactured here ending up in the hands of repressive regimes, which will use them against their own people. The hon. Gentleman would want to ensure that those judgments were made properly. We shall do everything possible to speed up decision making, but we shall not risk making wrong decisions.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In the light of the Secretary of State's reply to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), will she outline the extent of the parliamentary scrutiny of individual licences that she envisages before they are granted?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises a matter that was of considerable concern to the Quadripartite Committee. It is important to draw a distinction between accountability to Parliament for the orders that will be made under the Bill—I shall revert to that later—and accountability for the individual decisions on export licences. As I suggested earlier, we have already prepared a much fuller report on the detail of the applications and the reasons for granting or refusing them. That allows for parliamentary scrutiny and accountability, which, as my hon. Friend would acknowledge, was never available under the Conservative Administration.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): We shall revert to the subject of parliamentary scrutiny during the debate. However, the scrutiny that my right hon. Friend is considering is retrospective, whereas the Committee proposed that scrutiny should take place before contentious licences are agreed.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I understand precisely the nature of the scrutiny for which she asks. Lord Scott made it clear in his evidence to the Committee that some serious constitutional issues—impropriety, even—were involved in confusing the proper roles of the Executive and the legislature and handing over decisions on individual applications, which should properly be made by Ministers, to a parliamentary Committee. I share my hon. Friend's view, however, that proper accountability is essential. Part of the purpose of the Bill and the detailed annual report, which we have already begun to publish, is to allow more effective parliamentary scrutiny and accountability.

The Bill responds to Lord Scott's key recommendations for new legislation by setting out in primary legislation the purposes for which orders imposing export controls can be made, and providing for effective parliamentary scrutiny of those orders. It will strengthen and improve the effectiveness of strategic export controls, introducing

new powers that will enable us to control electronic transfers of technology and technical assistance, and of course it will provide new powers to control illicit arms dealing.

The Bill does provide for wide powers on export controls, which will enable us to meet our international obligations on arms controls, and to respond to changing circumstances and new technology. At the same time, as I emphasised, the Bill gives Parliament more control, to protect against any possible abuse of these powers.

Jeremy Corbyn: Some of us are very concerned about the sale of arms and what happens to them. I ask my right hon. Friend to help me with an example. In the case of an unfortunate arms sale to Morocco that has been agreed by the Government, it is quite clear that the only reason Morocco would want any of those arms is to pursue a war against the Polisario, when one would hope that there is to be a United Nations-sponsored referendum to bring about peace in the western Sahara. I submit to my right hon. Friend that, had there been parliamentary scrutiny of that export licence before it was granted, it would never have been granted, because many people would have been able to make the perfectly legitimate point that we were in danger of arming one side in a conflict that we wished would not happen.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. I believe that we are all agreed on the purposes for which we want to license and, in appropriate cases, to limit and prevent the export of arms. We are bound to return to the specific example that my hon. Friend gives during the debate and in Committee. However, as I said, the annual report that we are publishing on these matters and all such applications gives Members of the House far more information on the basis of which to understand the system of export licensing that we are putting in place. Moreover, the system of purposes for export control enshrined in the Bill, and the consolidated national and European criteria, state the precise criteria that we shall continue to take into account when taking these individual decisions.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) *rose—*

Ms Hewitt: I should like to make progress before I give way again.

Perhaps I may say a little more about the specific provisions of the Bill. Under present legislative provision, individuals and companies need a licence to export arms, but they do not need a licence to broker and traffic in arms. That simply cannot be right, so clause 5 provides comprehensive new powers to introduce controls on United Kingdom involvement in trade between overseas countries in goods that are subject to export controls.

We shall use those powers, first, to introduce a new licensing requirement for trafficking and brokering in weapons and related equipment; and secondly, to control trafficking and brokering of arms to embargoed destinations. We shall also use those powers to ban the trafficking and brokering of torture equipment. These measures together will allow us to prohibit the supply of weapons to regions of conflict, while of course continuing to allow legitimate trade by British defence companies.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): It is obviously right to do what can be done to limit the trade in illegal arms, but can the Secretary of State give any assurance to legitimate engineering and military equipment manufacturers in this country that the current system of licences will be improved and expedited? A company in my constituency has just lost an order. It was an order for repeat business; there were no new or contentious circumstances. It applied for the licences in November and December last year. The goods were ready for delivery in January this year and the company still has not heard from the Department of Trade and Industry whether the licences will be issued.

Ms Hewitt: If the hon. Gentleman writes to me with the details of that case, I will of course look into it. I should say that on at least one previous occasion, when a problem of that kind was raised with me, I found that the company had not provided the necessary information in time for us to take a timely decision. That may or may not be the case in relation to the company that the hon. Gentleman mentions.

I stress that the Defence Manufacturers Association welcomed the draft Bill, and stated that it

"fully supports the Government's efforts to replace the existing legislation."

It said that it

"warmly welcomes the fact that the Government has sought in the new Export Control Bill . . . to introduce controls on the activities of brokers and traffickers."

I believe that the DMA, to its credit, recognises that what we are seeking to do here is absolutely essential, and does not compromise the legitimate activities of defence manufacturers and exporters in our country.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Can the Secretary of State reassure me that the new regulations will apply to brokers with UK passports operating abroad?

Ms Hewitt: We made clear in the White Paper, the draft Bill and the manifesto on which we have just been re-elected our determination to deal with the problem of illicit brokering and trafficking. The specific point that the hon. Lady raises involves complex enforcement issues, and we shall continue to consider the matter as we develop the secondary legislation that will be introduced under the Bill.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Ms Hewitt: Just once more, as I must make progress.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, but I must press her on that point. She owes it to Parliament and to the country at large and defence industries in particular—in spirit, they sympathise with the Government's objectives—to give examples of how British-manufactured equipment is getting into the hands of people who are using it unscrupulously; and to identify those British nationals who are engaged in that illegal and quite disgraceful traffic.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman repeats a point that he made earlier and which I have already answered.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Ms Hewitt: No, I want to make progress. I have already given way many times.

[Ms Hewitt]

Clause 2 will give us important powers to control the transfer of technology, including by electronic means. That will end the anomaly that has arisen whereby people need a licence to export paper instructions on how to make a weapon, but are entirely free to send the same information by e-mail. We shall use the powers in clauses 2 and 4 to introduce controls to prevent the transfer of technology or the provision of technical assistance that could help in the development of weapons of mass destruction.

Clause 7 provides for the introduction of tough penalties for export control offences by raising the maximum seven years' imprisonment to 10. Clause 6 will introduce a new power to require exporters to provide information on goods that are to be exported under licences. We need such powers to enable us effectively to fulfil international obligations, including our annual return to the United Nations register of conventional arms. The Bill will provide us with the powers that we need to meet our international obligations and our national commitments.

As I told my hon. Friends earlier, however, the Bill will also ensure that the Government are accountable to Parliament for the use of these new powers. First, in clause 3 we have established the purposes for which export control orders can be made, and they are set out in the schedule. Secondly, clause 12 provides for parliamentary scrutiny of secondary legislation to be made under the Bill. The purposes for which export controls can be imposed include, crucially, meeting our international obligations and our obligations to the EU.

The Bill will allow controls to be imposed to counter risks to national security, peace and stability anywhere in the world and the risk of goods being used for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, internal repression, and human rights abuses or serious crime and terrorism.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Ms Hewitt: One more time to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bercow: I am exceptionally grateful to the Secretary of State, because she has been extremely generous in giving way.

The Secretary of State talks about parliamentary scrutiny, but does she not accept that, on preliminary perusal, clause 12(4) appears to provide for the application of the affirmative procedure and thus to offer an entitlement to parliamentary debate in respect of orders made under clauses 6 and 11, although the negative procedure will apply in respect of no fewer than five other clauses? That means, in simple terms, that Members of Parliament will be denied the opportunity to debate those important matters. Does she sign up to that in every particular?

Ms Hewitt: As the hon. Gentleman himself says, the crucial measures in respect of which orders may be made will indeed be subject to the affirmative procedure, but I am sure that the point as to whether the affirmative or the negative procedure should apply to other measures will be dealt with in detail in Committee.

We make it clear in clause 8 that the consolidated national and European criteria announced to the House last October remain the basis for licensing decisions. In the Bill, we bind ourselves to abide by the guidance published by me, and by subsequent Secretaries of State, including those consolidated criteria. That is a crucial point when it comes to any possible judicial review, and also crucial to effective parliamentary accountability.

We have ensured, in clause 9, that the Government will publish an annual report on export controls. In its response to the White Paper, Oxfam suggested that publication of the annual report—which this Government introduced—should be enshrined in law. We agree, and the Bill therefore requires Government to submit a report to Parliament every year.

The Bill also provides for control of the export of objects of cultural interest, and replaces the current provisions on the subject contained in the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act. The proposals have rightly been welcomed by the art trade.

The Bill builds on a number of steps that we have already taken to develop a responsible, accountable framework for trade in arms. First, we have already presented the most open report on arms exports produced by any European nation. In 1997, we published the criteria against which licensing decisions are made. Since 1999, we have voluntarily laid orders under the 1939 Act before Parliament, and we have published increasingly full annual reports on strategic export controls. Secondly, we have taken action to ban the manufacture of and trade in land mines, and we have banned the export of torture equipment.

Thirdly, we have reached an unprecedented agreement in the European Union on a code of conduct enabling any member state to object if another member state takes up an arms order which has been rejected under the code. That is a crucial provision, ensuring that the approach we take here in Britain will be reinforced by other member states. For the first time, the countries of the European Union have all agreed to abide by similar standards when assessing licences for arms exports.

The Bill will help to ensure that the United Kingdom plays its part as effectively as it can in making the world a safer place. At the same time, it provides a clear, accountable framework for legitimate business, and for our defence industry. I commend it to the House.

3.57 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I start by declaring any relevant interests. I do not think I have any as such, but the Bill is drawn so widely that almost any commercial interest may be relevant, so for safety's sake I draw the House's attention to the Register of Members' Interests.

The House should welcome a Bill that defines the controls that should be placed on exports of defence equipment and related goods, and brings the whole subject within the scope of parliamentary scrutiny. The Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 on which successive Governments have relied since the second world war, is clearly inadequate and inappropriate, although it was confirmed and extended in 1990 with the agreement of the then Opposition.

Although the aims of the Bill in that respect are welcome, however, I must qualify the welcome heavily after reading it. In truth, it is little more than an enabling

Bill: most of the clauses simply give the Secretary of State power to bring in subsequent orders that will supply the actual substance of the legislation. It is difficult for us to form a definite judgment about a Bill the great bulk of which remains submerged.

The Quadripartite Committee, which brought together the Select Committees on Defence, on Foreign Affairs, on International Development and on Trade and Industry, recommended that the Government publish the secondary legislation, in draft form, before the House was asked to give the Bill a Second Reading. That is in the Committee's report published on 1 May this year. I very much regret—I expect that the Select Committee members share that regret—that the Government have refused to do that. In truth, therefore, we are being asked to consider a Bill that we have not really seen yet.

Much worse is the fact that the Government have responded to the report only today. Moreover, at a quick reading, they seem not to have satisfied the report's requirements and recommendations. It really is scandalous that, today, the Government have rushed out a very late response to a series of very good Select Committee reports. That is treating the House with considerable contempt. Hon. Members seeking to speak in this debate will not have had a real opportunity to examine the Government's views. It would also have been a courtesy if the Government had supplied an advance copy of the document to those who they knew would be speaking, such as me.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): My right hon. Friend's concerns about our inability to know what will be in the secondary legislation are shared by the Saferworld organisation, which is perhaps not usually associated with our part of the political spectrum. In its briefing document, it said:

> "In the absence of detailed mechanisms for putting the principles set out in the primary legislation into operation, parliamentarians, and also NGOs and the defence industry, will find it impossible to judge the overall impact of the new legislation."

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing the point that, on all sides of the debate, right across the spectrum, people are dismayed about the Government's failure to introduce the necessary draft secondary legislation and by their very late response to the Select Committee report.

It is not as though the Government have not had plenty of time. They published a White Paper on the subject in 1998, but then they did nothing. That omission, too, was critically reported on by the Select Committee to which I have referred, when it expressed its dismay at the Government's failure to introduce earlier legislation.

We all remember that, in 1996, the current Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) worked himself up into a lather of self-righteous indignation about the Scott report. However, when he was in office and able to do something about export controls, he simply sat on the subject. It is only now, in another Parliament, that the Government are introducing the necessary legislation. It is yet another example of all words and no delivery.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Before the right hon. Gentleman works himself up into a lather of self-righteous indignation over parliamentary courtesies, perhaps he will answer a question. Is he not rather ashamed to have been part of a Government who did nothing to introduce legislation to tighten up export control in the light of precisely the abuses that were highlighted in the Scott report?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman had been awake a few moments ago, he would have heard me say that Governments of all complexions relied on the 1939 legislation for too long. In the light of the Scott report, however, the previous Conservative Government immediately issued a consultation document and said that we would legislate to introduce the recommendations made by Sir Richard Scott, as he then was. Subsequently, however, we lost office. The incoming Labour Government could have introduced the necessary legislation, but they did absolutely nothing. It is only now that the Government are introducing a Bill to try to do the job.

I shall draw another item to the attention of the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale), as he is so interested in the matter. The Select Committee observed that the Government could have used non-legislative means to implement some of the Scott recommendations. They could, for instance, have laid voluntarily before the House the necessary export orders. Instead, they did absolutely nothing in that respect until December 1999. It is, I am afraid, a shameful story of drift and neglect by the previous Labour Government.

Without the substance of the legislation, it is very difficult to make a final judgment on whether the Government have achieved the right balance between the acknowledged need for control over the export of such goods and related technology and the need not to inhibit legitimate trade unnecessarily, by imposing unrealistic or burdensome regulations.

The Secretary of State gave some purported examples of the damage done by unauthorised weaponry, but under questioning she failed to substantiate whether British firms or British defence equipment could be held responsible. It is no good her making generalised allegations about the inadequacies of existing controls unless she is prepared to say which firms are involved and whether the problem originates from a failure of existing export controls.

Mr. Bercow: Did my right hon. Friend, with his customary powers of observation, note that the Secretary of State declined to reaffirm the Government's commitment to the target of processing 70 per cent. of standard individual export licence applications within 20 working days, in response to my challenge to her to assure the House that the Bill would not exacerbate the delays?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The existing licensing system is a scandal, and the Bill could easily make it worse. It was characteristic of the Government to start blaming industry for the delays. When my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) asked about a specific example, the Secretary of State suggested that the delay was caused by the failure of the firm to provide the right information, but the statistics that he cited exclude examples where the Government have to return to the company to get additional information, so the missing of the 20-day target

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

is purely down to the incompetence of the licensing authority—in this case, the Department of Trade and Industry.

Conservative Members know that the defence industry is important in a very wide sense. It employs about 350,000 people in the UK, and the export trade is vital to those people as well as being important in keeping down the cost of equipment for our own armed forces. Moreover, because defence firms are heavily weighted towards manufacturing, they provide about 10 per cent. of the output and the work force in manufacturing generally, and that sector is practically in recession. The sector was ignored and badly treated by the previous Labour Government and is now suffering grievously from excessive regulation and taxation.

We hope that the Bill will not be another opportunity for the Government to repeat all the mistakes that they made in the previous Parliament. We have often commented on their in-built tendency to interfere and over-regulate, to the detriment of the industries concerned.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that some of the most difficult decisions concern dual-use technology, with the terrible dangers brought by the proliferation of techniques of warfare that can rebound on our own forces and our own interests in the world? Does he also accept that that was precisely the area in which the Conservative Government failed so badly?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Of course I acknowledge the importance of the subject and the need for a workable and realistic system of export controls, and I have already said that we give our support to that endeavour. However, we are entitled to look carefully at the Bill and ask whether it will discharge that responsibility. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, in a non-partisan spirit, will help us in that endeavour. The issue does not necessarily split the parties, because the whole House wants a parliamentary system of scrutiny to ensure that the Government are performing that task.

I cannot overlook the Liberal Democrats' contribution to the debate. Their only real contribution to the debate last year on the subject of the defence industry and exports was to suggest that the Government should withdraw cover under the exports credits guarantee system from that industry. In other words, that sector of British industry uniquely should not be able to export with cover obtained from export credits. When it was pointed out that that would put British industry at a disadvantage compared to other competitor countries, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who is in her place, conceded that it would lead to job losses. She said, in a slightly unfortunate phrase, that

"we shall have to bite the bullet."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 2 February 2000; Vol. 343, c. 193WH.]

Of course, it would be those who work in that important industry who would have to do so, not the hon. Lady and her party.

Mr. Bercow: I know how committed my right hon. Friend is to the principle of freedom of information. In those circumstances, does he agree that it is important that the Liberal Democrat position on that subject—unprecedented and deeply injurious to legitimate defence commercial interests as it is—should be widely communicated in every constituency that has a substantial defence interest and the misfortune to be represented by a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I will join my hon. Friend in that endeavour, but he will know as well as I do that Liberal Democrats tell a different story when they are speaking in constituencies with important defence interests.

I welcome parts of the Bill and, in particular, the purposes contained in the schedule for which the Government can impose export controls. That is a definite advance on previous legislation. Rather less happy is the fact that the Government can change the schedule simply by order, and will not need primary legislation. Even worse, the Government can override the schedule and impose export controls that ignore the restrictions in the schedule simply by introducing such a control in secondary legislation. The Bill is a good example of restrictions and controls apparently being applied to the Government, but if they do not like them they can easily change them.

The Government's ability to introduce secondary legislation in that way was the subject of adverse comment by the Delegated Powers and Deregulation Committee of the other place. The Government may have set out with the laudable intention of establishing a system of parliamentary scrutiny of the issue, but they are retreating further towards a system of ministerial discretion. The same is true of the export control orders—in other words, the orders that will be brought forward to impose or change restrictions on exports of defence equipment to specific countries or parts of the world.

The Government say that there are about six such export control orders a year, and the Scott report recommended that they should be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has already observed, the Government have insisted on the use of the negative resolution procedure. In other words, they will pass unless they are voted down. The point about the negative resolution procedure is that whether there is a debate or a vote is entirely at the discretion of the Government, not the House.

The Government used weasel words in their consultation document on the Bill, saying:

"the negative procedure would provide Parliament with the opportunity to debate and vote on secondary legislation where appropriate."

I am afraid that that is not true. Parliament does not have control over that. If the Government do not want a debate, there will not be one. If this new Parliament wants to take seriously the issues of parliamentary scrutiny and the powers of the House, it should at the very least ensure that the House itself decides whether there is a debate and a vote on matters of this importance.

The Bill also extends the licensing system. We do not know how many people will be caught up in these controls. They refer to activities that facilitate the acquisition or disposal of certain goods. Presumably, the airlines and shipping companies that transport the goods as well as the banks and finance houses that provide the

credit all in some way facilitate the acquisition or disposal of such goods. All, therefore, will—at least in theory—be covered by the Bill. It could—and probably will—include British nationals who are working overseas, even if they are employed by foreign companies. All of them will be swept into the net. If that is not the case, we should be told early in the debate so that we do not unnecessarily suppose that the Bill's scope is as wide as it appears.

The Secretary of State alluded to the extension with regard to the transfer of technology where that is done by electronic means rather than by the physical export of equipment, tapes, plans or drawings. In other words, from now on electronic means will include the telephone, fax and e-mail. The Government's aim is understandable, but is it practical and enforceable?

The academic world is worried about being caught by oral transmission of information. For instance, giving a seminar or lecture on a scientific subject with possible defence implications to foreign students could be a licensable activity because it could mean that information was being transferred to people in another country.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): In the example that the right hon. Gentleman uses, is it not the case that people would fall foul of the legislation only if they knowingly divulged sensitive information?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman is right. That assurance has, I understand, been given to the academic world. My point is that it should be in the Bill. It is not good enough for the Government to give verbal assurances to universities and research institutions that are not encoded in legislation. That is my request to the Government.

The Defence Manufacturers Association has a related concern about telephone conversations being licensable. The Bill will require, one supposes, considerable monitoring of employees having such conversations. Monitoring e-mails and telephone calls is a contentious issue in firms, and some trade unions do not like the scrutiny and intrusiveness involved. The Bill and its related literature is silent on that point.

The Bill also extends controls to trafficking and brokering between overseas countries. That raises the separate and important issue of extra-territoriality. Is it realistic to try to control the activities of British citizens, or—as the Bill states—a person acting under the control of a British citizen, when such activities take place entirely abroad? For example, a British citizen might be employed by a foreign company which was ordering, selling or transferring equipment or technology between countries other than the UK—transactions that had nothing to do with this country or anyone in it. However, that person would come within the scope of the Bill.

The situation would be even more bizarre if such a person was a clerk working for a defence company based abroad who merely filled in export licence applications—perhaps for the export of equipment from the UK to another country. However, although the person was working abroad for a company based abroad, the company would still have to apply for a licence from the DTI. That is wholly unrealistic and certainly unenforceable.

Until now, the UK has been rather critical of the United States when it has tried to claim extra-territoriality over American companies based in this country, so it is odd that we are trying to claim such rights over British citizens and foreign firms based in other countries and trading in goods that have nothing to do with the UK. We all have good intentions, but the Government's good intentions could lead them into the most appalling muddle of unenforceable laws that might discredit the whole system.

Under the Bill, the Government plan to increase the penalties for export control offences—the term of imprisonment will be increased from seven to 10 years. That is somewhat odd because recently there has been only about one conviction a year for such offences, incurring an average prison sentence of 30 months.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the right hon. Gentleman endorse the extra-territorial provisions under legislation relating to land mines and sex offenders? Such provisions are considerably stronger than those proposed in the Bill.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am merely asking questions. It is not my Bill. We are entitled to ask whether its provisions are realistic and enforceable. In reply to the hon. Gentleman, I think that we should consider carefully whether the land mines legislation is being properly enforced and whether there are lessons to be learned from it; otherwise, Parliament could get into the habit of constantly increasing penalties, while the enforcement of legislation is poor and its applications are confused. Nothing in the Bill supplies an answer to my questions.

What we do know is that such measures have costs. Under the Bill, there will be costs to the Government: extra staff will be needed in Customs and Excise and other departments. There will also be hidden costs to business and industry in complying with the Bill.

Those costs will fall not only on the defence industries. Cultural goods—defined as being more than 50 years old—will be included. If the Government introduce provisions, again by secondary legislation, that require records to be kept of all such goods, the result might be that every antique shop—indeed, every junk shop—might have to keep records of all its goods and, if they found their way abroad, to whom they were sold. Those costs are hidden, but they are real. The Government must provide further information about them, if we are to take a mature view of the measure.

The licensing system for the export of defence equipment is already unsatisfactory—a point made in several interventions. The Government's aim is to deal with individual export licences within 20 working days. However, when I asked the previous Secretary of State whether that target was being met, it turned out that, last year, only 57 per cent. of such applications met the target. The longest time taken was 222 working days. That excludes complex cases in which additional information is required from the applicant firm. That recorded delay is purely one experienced in government and between Departments.

When asked about the issue, the previous Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Livingston, was almost completely dismissive. He said:

"I have limited sympathy with complaints we are not moving fast enough."

I am sure that he has limited sympathy with trade and industry, but that is not good enough for the House. No one doubts that we require a system that strikes the right

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

balance between the legitimate need to scrutinise such applications and the fact that the great delays caused by such scrutiny are costing jobs and causing orders to be lost to British industry. The worry is that the Bill could make matters worse.

The Defence Manufacturers Association says that the Government already underestimate the additional burden that will be imposed under the Bill. In opening the debate, the Secretary of State mentioned other member states and appeared confident that there would be one set of rules for all member states. I am sorry to disabuse her of that view, but that issue was tackled specifically by the Quadripartite Committee, which said:

"There is regrettably little sign that other Member States are taking very seriously the suggestion that they should be more transparent in their reporting of the operation of arms export controls."

Earlier, the Committee warned that

"none of our European competitors have achieved the UK's . . . level of transparency".

Indeed, the previous Foreign Secretary admitted to two examples where licences for export had been turned down by this country, but then agreed by other members states in the European Union. Again, we are in danger of putting our own industries at a disadvantage, and we are not creating the comparability of rules that the Secretary of State said was important.

My conclusion—it has to be an interim one—is that the Bill is necessary and that the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 needs to be replaced, but it is difficult to judge the Bill in the absence of secondary legislation. There has been an unnecessary delay in introducing the Bill, which seems as though it will be over-bureaucratic and highly regulatory. Although it will increase the penalties, we have severe doubts about its feasibility and enforceability. It is in that spirit that we shall continue to scrutinise the Bill in its remaining stages in the House.

4.28 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): When the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asked probing questions in Committee—the sort of questions that we would expect—he made some relevant points, but, if he does not mind my saying so, he has also indulged in yah-boo politics. First, that is uncharacteristic—it does not fit well with his personality at the Dispatch Box; and, secondly, the British people were not at all impressed by it, as they unfortunately showed in the low turnout at the election. I therefore hope that he will not mind if I pay a bit more attention to his probing questions and seek to emulate that attitude by making a speech along those lines, because this is a good Bill.

The Bill is welcome, and it says a lot for the Government that they have introduced it at this stage in this Parliament. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is associated with it and that she has made her own position clear—I thought it very farsighted indeed. I am also delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), will make the winding-up speech. I welcome both of them to their rightful positions on the Front Bench. I hope that they will not take it amiss if I, too, ask a few questions, some of which have been put to me by some of the aid agencies, non-governmental bodies and others who also welcome the spirit of the Bill and would like to suggest some improvements that can be made to it during its passage through this House and perhaps another place.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done, we can take a lead in being tougher on the international arms trade and in seeking relevant controls. We have two opportunities to do that. The first is provided by the Bill and by the chance that we have to tighten it up. The second results from the fact that the United Nations conference on all small arms starts today in New York. We therefore have an opportunity to send an important signal to the conference to show how seriously the British House of Commons takes such matters. I hope that other countries will seek to emulate us.

There has been a massive proliferation in the trade in small arms in the past decade. That has not been helpful for international development, for human rights or for seeking to improve the lives of millions of people in all parts of the world. Some say that 500 million people—one person in every 12 on the planet—have been victims of the arms trade in the past decade. Clearly, that is an issue that we should address.

As supplies increase, we know that prices fall. I am grateful to one aid agency for drawing my attention to the fact that, in north-east Kenya, the barter rate for an AK47 has dropped from 10 cows in 1986 to the present level of two cows. That might seem a trivial point, but it suggests that, if we are to tackle the problem of world poverty, we must control the terrible issue of the arms trade, which has an impact on poverty and on people's lives.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Can I tease from the right hon. Gentleman an answer that the Secretary of State was unable to give? He knows a great deal about such matters and he referred to the proliferation of AK47—Soviet—weapons, so can he shed any light on whether British nationals are involved in that trade? In addition, does he know of any similar British equipment that might form part of such an horrific trade?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman attributes to me expertise that I do not claim, but he makes an important point. I will touch on it later in my speech if he allows me to do so.

We are dealing with the reality of wars in the developing world. Only a decade ago, some people were using spears and bows and arrows, but we are now in a world of automatic and semi-automatic weapons. That is extremely worrying, so it is right that the trade in them should be controlled.

As we all recognise, the victims of the trade are civilians—ordinary men, women and children. On our travels, many us have seen orphans and orphanages in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. Much suffering is caused by this unnecessary arms trade, so I welcome the view of the right hon. Member for Wells that the Bill should receive the scrutiny that it requires. It is far too easy for people to get access to those weapons. If we can tighten the controls, so much the better. We have seen too much suffering in the past 10 years and we must stop it. If we make a start today—as I believe we can—consistent with discussions in New York, the international community can only welcome that.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, said that the death toll from small arms in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Nagasaki and Hiroshima. That is a compelling point. Even those who work in the industry are honest and decent enough to want to address that reality. I have no criticism of hon. Members on either side of the House who have to deal with problems in their constituencies. They should have the support of the whole House when they address the more sensitive issues, such as jobs that conflict with stopping the arms trade for humanitarian and other reasons, which we might consider a reasonable approach. It is not an easy issue.

Of course, there has been too much suffering and displacement and there have been too many deaths, injuries, human rights violations and obstructions of humanitarian aid. If the Bill helps to reduce that suffering, it must be welcome. We need to break the cycle of violence, or people will be reluctant to surrender their weapons, which we must encourage them to do in a practical way. There is a responsibility on nation states, which the Government are accepting, to ensure that weapons do not end up in the wrong hands, as they so often do. The Bill is a big step in the right direction.

My right hon. Friend the present Leader of the House made a major contribution as Foreign Secretary in what he said to the House about the Scott inquiry and the compelling conclusions that he reached. Given that he was dealing with problems that had arisen during the previous 18 years, his contribution in those four short years should be acknowledged rather than decried, and I am happy to do that in his absence.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said. Most voluntary organisations and non-governmental organisations share her view. However, they have probing questions for the Government, which I am sure she will want to address. I want to raise only two of the many points that concern Oxfam. The organisation says:

"If the secondary legislation includes a requirement for brokers to register and apply for a licence for each deal they arrange then these measures will make considerable progress towards preventing Britons from engaging in the brokering and trafficking of weapons into conflict and human rights crisis zones."

It goes on to say:

"However, Oxfam believes that there are still some significant absences from the bill which, if addressed during its passage through Parliament, would give the UK one of the best control regimes for strategic exports in the world."

I am sure that the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) will take that on board. Oxfam accepts that we can make the improvements and that the basis for that is right.

On sustainable development, to which we are all absolutely committed, the organisation says:

"Oxfam is concerned that the introduction of new clause 8 is actually a weaker mechanism for protection of sustainable development than if the issue was addressed in the main Schedule of the Bill, as was proposed in the original draft. "Guidance" is primarily aimed at licensing procedure and will not give the Secretary of State powers to impose controls to protect sustainable development. "Guidance" issued by the Secretary of State will not have full statutory weight, and while changes to the Purposes in the Schedule are subject to an affirmative resolution procedure, no such requirement exists for changes made to the "guidance" referred to in clause 8. It is therefore conceivable that within the lifetime of this primary legislation, reference to sustainable development could be removed without due consideration by Parliament. We therefore urge HMG to reconsider re-introducing such a reference into the Schedule."

I put that on the record so that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary can reply to it, if he feels so disposed. I want also to underline the fact that it is the view of an important organisation.

The right hon. Member for Wells referred to parliamentary scrutiny, which was dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The Bill takes us much closer to our goal, although I do not know whether such scrutiny can be conducted before decisions are made. Certainly, we all want to know as much as possible about exports, especially of arms. We want to know where they are going, how they will be received, who will receive them and how they will be used.

As I said, I have some probing questions. What will the Bill do to solve the problems faced by British shippers? Returning to the point made by the hon. Member for Aldershot, we all remember the delivery of arms to Saddam in 1998 by Occidental Airlines, which was co-owned by a UK citizen, and we want to deal with such problems.

There is also the issue of unlicensed production overseas. The Bill does not include powers to enable the Government to require companies to impose controls on their customers regarding the manufacture of arms overseas under UK licence. Many hope that in secondary legislation the Government will take full responsibility for extending licence production controls beyond embargoed destinations. Many end-users fail to observe international human rights and humanitarian law and operate in countries without arms embargoes. Oxfam has led the way in asking the Government to use the opportunity afforded by secondary legislation to tighten end-user controls. In Oxfam's view, the increased use of overseas posts in risk assessment does not go far enough, and results in end-users monitoring subject to ad hoc checks rather than to a proper regulatory system. What thoughts does my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary have on that matter?

Dr. Julian Lewis: I share the right hon. Gentleman's belief that there is not much point in restricting trafficking and brokering if weapons end up with people who we do not believe should have them. I, too, have been following the contributions of Oxfam and other groups, and it is not clear what effective sanctions could be recommended if that result were to be outlawed. In the groups' recommendations, I have seen only the suggestion that licences could be revoked. Surely by then, however, it would be too late?

Mr. Clarke: It may not be, but I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question, because that is what I want the debate to be about. If the Government take it on themselves to revoke licences which they consider to have been used inappropriately, I, for one, will support them. Indeed, I would have advocated that during my speech.

Ann Clwyd: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the situation in the United States, which has very clear guidelines indeed? Apart from prior scrutiny, which obviates some of the difficulties surrounding sending weapons to countries with dubious human rights records,

[Ann Clwyd]

all contracts exchanged between the United States and the countries to which it exports arms include an opportunity to revoke the agreement without penalty.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has done outstanding work on those matters. I very much value her experience and knowledge of the United States; the House has benefited from her contribution. Again, we must take that experience on board.

In response to my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), if the Government feel that it is necessary, they should unashamedly exercise their right as a Government to revoke export licences, as I have sought to advocate. If people are aware of that, we will make much more progress. I am therefore grateful for the interventions of my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman.

I shall end by referring to the role of the Department for International Development which, I am sure, is very much in the mind of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sure, too, that, during our discussion of the Bill, consultation will continue. I shall give a final quote from Oxfam which I am certain my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will find helpful. Oxfam encapsulates the role that I want for the Department for International Development and says:

"The Department for International Development is asked by the Department for Trade and Industry to comment on the impact of individual arms licences on sustainable development. Whilst we welcome this provision, we believe that it needs to be extended to cover the cumulative effect of arms exports as it is only when the broader picture is considered that the true impact of arms transfers on sustainable development is revealed. We would like the Bill to explicitly state that the Department for International Development has the power to monitor the cumulative effect of export licences."

That is an important point, and I look forward to the response of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. It is excellent that the DTI and the Department for International Development are working together because, in our desire to ensure that we continue to make the best contribution that we can as a trading nation, exercising our responsibilities to the developing world, sometimes we come into conflict.

Today, we are seeking to erase at least part of that dilemma and some of those difficulties; we are doing so at a time when international bodies, such as the conference in New York that I mentioned, are seeking to do precisely the same thing. For those practical reasons and because of the inspiration that the Bill is giving all those who deplore the arms trade, especially in developing countries, and all the damage that that trade has done, I welcome the Bill and wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary godspeed in getting it through its various stages.

4.49 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I, too, welcome the new Secretary of State. I also welcome the Bill which, although belated, completes the work on the implementation of the Scott report, following the European code of conduct and the new arms export criteria.

For those who were not in the House when the arms to Iraq scandal erupted, it is a salutary experience to look at some of the documents and remind ourselves how great the scandal was. The export control system had fallen into such disrepute that British companies could supply Saddam Hussein with the equipment and technology to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. That was the extent to which the system had become porous.

As the Conservative spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said, the Bill is essentially a framework measure. Like the right hon. Gentleman—although probably for the opposite reasons—we look forward to seeing as much as possible of the secondary legislation. The White Paper, the draft Bill and the consultations were detailed enough to give us a view on how the Bill should be strengthened. We support Second Reading, but like the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), we feel that some aspects of the Bill should be stiffened, including prior scrutiny. Lest we forget it, I remind hon. Members that, although such scrutiny has been presented by the Opposition as a slightly way-out proposal, it was recommended by the Quadripartite Committee, which comprised four Select Committees. We also want the Bill to be stiffened in respect of brokerage, extra-territorial application of control, overseas production and end use, and we want more explicit provisions relating to sustainable development—all points that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned.

I should like to put the Bill into a slightly wider context. It is essentially about strategic exports and big arms contracts, but as the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said, we know that many of the problems associated with the arms export trade now centre on small arms. Indeed, that is probably more clearly understood now than when the Scott report was published. British firms have been involved in such business. Several hon. Members asked for the names of those firms, but I remember at least two relevant debates in this House, concerning Sandline shipments from Bulgaria to Sierra Leone and the Miltec transactions in support of Rwandan Hutu rebels. There must be many other such examples.

Such trade is big business. I understand that there is a stock of about 500 million small arm units in circulation. As a successful manufacturer, Britain must have a substantial share of the originating materials. Why is that important? It has only just begun to be appreciated—

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman says that Britain must have a substantial share in the trade. That is a very serious accusation. Will he specify the nature of the small arms and tell us which British manufacturers he thinks are responsible for allowing this kit to get into the wrong hands?

Dr. Cable: I have just given two examples. Britain has roughly 25 per cent. of the world arms export trade, and simple logic suggests that we must have a substantial component of most segments within it. I am sure that we can discuss the matter in more detail in Committee, but I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman denies the facts.

The importance of the small arms business is that much of the material is highly persistent. Any country that purchases a sophisticated fighter such as the F16, which has about 60,000 moving parts, will be closely tied to the country of origin through maintenance, spares and control. However, even very unsophisticated military operations can keep small arms with few moving parts in circulation for a long time. That is why small arms are a problem and are so destructive.

My other general point was mentioned by the Conservative spokesman, who gave me a friendly trailer on the way in which the arms business functions in this country. It is tempting to say that such business is terribly important for the British economy. That is partly true, as we have a large share of world trade that is disproportionate to our role in manufacturing in general, and as many jobs are involved, but it must be stressed that this is not normal business. It is not based on free-market transactions between private businesses and private customers, as much of it involves the Government in a supporting and sometimes subsidising role. In the current argot, we could almost describe such business as a public-private partnership, even though, through the mediation of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, the private sector has offloaded many of the risks on to the Government. I introduced the debate to which the right hon. Member for Wells referred. So far from its being hidden, I got my party to endorse the policy at our party conference. The debate emphasised the volume of research that showed the extent to which the British taxpayer subsidises the arms export business.

Research showed that approximately £300 million a year was written off as a result of ECGD defaults on the arms trade alone. In the past few weeks, Saferworld has published some useful work, which was endorsed earlier by Conservative Members. Its thorough research shows that the British public subsidy to the arms export business is considerably greater than £300 million. It employed the simple method of ascertaining the cost of capital and the cost of providing for risk in the market, and comparing that with the cost of borrowing under the ECGD arrangement. On average, the cost to the British taxpayer is approximately £400 million a year, when all support costs are added. That is relevant to the debate because it is linked directly to scrutiny.

As the right hon. Member for Wells suggested, I would have reservations about the Government becoming heavily involved in second-guessing private transactions that risk no damage to humanity. However, the taxpayer is substantially involved in many cases, and it borders on impertinence for British companies to claim that scrutiny is no role for Parliament.

Before plunging into detail, I want to explain my position a little. I have no experience of the parliamentary review process; I did not serve on any of the four Select Committees. I served on the Select Committee on the Treasury, which should perhaps also be one of the main parties to the discussions. I therefore have no experience of the way in which Parliament has reviewed arms exports. However, I have some experience of operating the arms export control system from within Whitehall, albeit a long time ago, in the pre-Scott era.

I was a first secretary in the Foreign Office, and I looked after 15 Latin American countries, which at the time were flush with a lot of cash and regarded as one of the primary targets for the British arms export industry. It is probably fortunate for my subsequent career in politics that my signature does not appear on orders that went to General Pinochet—a different bit of the office was responsible for that—or, perhaps more important, on the papers from the Department that authorised the substantial exports of British hardware to General Videla and the junta in Argentina. That hardware was subsequently used to kill British service men.

Being part of that process provided me with considerable food for thought about the operation of the arms export control system. There were enormous institutional pressures to promote arms exports. They came from Ministry of Defence sales staff, who of course have a professional commitment to promoting British arms exports; from the then Department of Trade, which operated—perhaps its successor continues to do so—on the basis of the old-fashioned, 19th-century, French mercantilist view that exports are good and imports are bad, and any method of pushing exports must be good; and the Foreign Office, which had a strong belief in Great Britain Ltd., and that what was good for GE-Marconi or British Aerospace was good for Britain.

There were powerful pressures to sell more and get the deals, with British civil servants working behind them, as I did. I did my job, for which I was paid. There was little counter-pressure. The only source of resistance that I recall was the Treasury, which was always a bastion of economic sanity. It pointed out that our method of operation was not good economics and was costly to the British taxpayer.

Mr. George Howarth: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that what is good for British Aerospace is not good for Britain. As I have the headquarters of British Aerospace—as I continue to call it—in my constituency, I can assure him that British Aerospace is a fantastic force for good in this country.

Dr. Cable: I am saying, and have already said, that what is good for British Aerospace is not necessarily good for Britain. It might be, but it is not necessarily.

Mr. Cousins: Does the hon. Gentleman have very much in mind the sales that were made to Iraq—the British taxpayer is still owed upwards of £500 million in respect of export credit guarantees that were never fulfilled—and, with regard to the Conservative Administration, the fact that Saddam Hussein proved to be a very good liar and a very bad payer?

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and Iraq is one of the many reasons why the Export Credits Guarantee Department has ended up effectively having to be subsidised by the taxpayer in respect of those defaults. Often with much less publicity, every one of the 15 countries for which I was responsible in my job defaulted on its debt. They were flush with capital in the mid 1970s and they defaulted in the early 1980s. They could not sustain their payments on their export credit guarantees, which had to be rescheduled through the Paris Club. In such circumstances, the credit has an implicit cost.

Only once in my several years in that interesting job was I prevented by the system from approving an arms export. I will tell the story because it is quite instructive to the wider argument. The case was almost comical. We received an application from a small company in the west midlands that wanted to supply an armoured car to Fidel Castro, who had been the subject of several assassination attempts. In view of the other hardware that we were selling, I could see no reason why that sale should not take place, and I approved it and suggested that it was not worth referring to Ministers.

[Dr. Cable]

A few days later, the roof fell in. Minutes came from all over the Foreign Office, from people who had not shown a great deal of interest in our exports to the juntas in Brazil and Argentina, to say that this was outrageous, and that terrible human rights abuses were occurring in Havana; people were dying in dungeons and this really was not good enough. The matter was referred to the Foreign Secretary, who referred it back and said, "We must consult the Americans."

I was asked to draft a letter to the Secretary of State, who was then Dr. Henry Kissinger of all people. A few weeks later, an answering letter arrived. I am sure that it will appear in a few years' time under the 30-year rule. It was something to the following effect: "Dear Jim, Had you not informed me of this transaction, I am almost certain that I would never have become aware of it, but since you have asked my permission, the answer is no." That struck me as one of the most eloquent statements of the Anglo-American relationship that I have ever encountered, but it was also an eloquent description of the way in which the arms control system operated until very recently. If one wanted to export to the communist bloc, the answer was no, and there were COCOM rules to underline that; but it was good and desirable, and to be encouraged, to export elsewhere.

Enough of reminiscences. Let me return to the Bill, and to those bits of it that need to be strengthened. First, as the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said, there is the issue of development and the Bill's objectives. In the past few years, the Government have advanced in setting out more explicitly what the aims of arms exports should be and the criteria that should be employed, but they contain nothing that specifically relates to the issue of sustainability, especially where there are cumulatively large exports.

It may be one thing to supply a motor torpedo boat to Peru, but if everyone else is doing it and one's exporters are supplying large quantities of other armaments to Peru, it is likely that Peru will eventually default—as it did—so sustainability is very important. That aspect has been picked up by people such as Mr. Camdessus and the International Monetary Fund, who regard the arms export industry, and especially the subsidising of it, as wholly unacceptable, on the basis that the products exported do not generate income, have no asset value, depreciate very quickly and incur a debt. That is why the sustainability of arms exports, in context, must be part of the review process.

The second issue—again I return to what the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said—is the issue of end use and overseas manufacture. In yesterday's newspaper, there was a very good illustration of why end use is an important issue. There was a description, I believe in *The Sunday Times*, of a Ukrainian gentleman who was responsible for supplying most of the equipment that goes to President Taylor in Liberia and to his friends in the murderous Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone. That gentleman operated on the basis of supplying most of the arms to Burkina Faso, and one does not need to be Hercule Poirot to work out that a large quantity of arms going to Burkina Faso is not entirely kosher. Eventually, Interpol reached that conclusion, and it has intervened to stop the trade.

Unless explicit end-use provisions are in place, it is difficult to trace the paper and exercise the necessary discipline, and the position on overseas manufacture is similar. Unless we include a clause that specifically refers to it, there will be no provision whereby the Government could act in examples such as British armoured cars being manufactured in the Philippines and trans-shipped to Indonesia and Burma. I know that the Chairman of the International Development Committee has been involved with that case.

The third issue is brokerage and the requirement, which has already been set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), that British passport holders living and operating overseas need to be subject to extra-territorial control. Such controls already exist in British legislation, so they are not new.

If hon. Members want a good description of offshore brokerage, there is a fictional but near-real example in the recent Le Carré novel "The Night Manager", which describes a gentleman called Richard Roper who flits between the Caribbean and Switzerland. Of course, Le Carré's characters are based on reality. The novel describes how the brokerage system works and why there must be extra-territorial jurisdiction over those who operate almost entirely outside the UK but trade on British citizenship.

On prior scrutiny, the Government have been disappointing. The Quadripartite Committee strongly recommended that prior scrutiny should occur, but two arguments against it have been advanced. The first is delay, but there is a way to deal with that. The Committee clearly said that it is possible to introduce a two-stage process of rapid screening and more detailed scrutiny of the remainder. That is not an insuperable problem.

The second argument—concerning confidentiality—is more worrying. There is an implication that, somehow, Members of Parliament are not as trustworthy as officials. I find that uncomfortable. Why should not MPs observe confidentiality? Confidentiality is observed by Members in the United States, where such a system applies. One operates in Sweden as well, and those countries are important arms exporters. Why should we not operate such a system in the UK?

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the canard that MPs cannot be trusted with confidential information was laid to rest by the decision of the House to set up the Intelligence and Security Committee, which has shown itself over many years to be entirely capable of handling confidential information?

Dr. Cable: That excellent contribution reinforces the point.

Were the Government not involved in supporting arms exports in cash and in kind, through subsidy and political backing, there might be an argument for saying that business priorities should prevail. However, public support makes all Members of the House stakeholders in the arms export business. We therefore have every right to demand that such business decisions be subject to scrutiny, and prior scrutiny at that.

5.8 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech to the House.

We are debating a topic of considerable public interest. I say that in particular because the first parliamentary correspondence that I opened when I arrived here four weeks ago was a letter from the Redcar branch of Campaign Against Arms Trade bemoaning the failure to pass such a Bill in the previous Session and asking whether I would support its introduction.

The second letter that I opened four weeks ago was from the Redcar branch of Campaign Against Arms Trade bemoaning the fact that no such Bill had been passed in the previous Session and asking whether I would support its introduction.

The third letter that I opened as a new Member of Parliament was from the Redcar branch of Campaign Against Arms Trade. And so on. I replied to all 34 letters, saying that I would support the introduction of such a measure and that, furthermore, I would write to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to commend the Bill to her. So I sent the letters on to her. We are all very pleased to see the Bill, but I think this is an unpromising first step towards the eventual publication of my collected parliamentary correspondence.

My distinguished predecessor is said to be about to publish. As to that, I cannot say; but I do know that the right hon. Dr. Marjorie Mowlam—my distinguished predecessor—has earned, and will keep, what can only be described as the affectionate veneration of the people of Redcar. I suspect that she will also long retain the admiration of the House. In Redcar, she has helped countless people. On the doorstep, stories of Mo's good deeds were legion—and she did them, famously, always remembering an individual's name, and treating that individual as a friend.

Mo did so much for the place. Legendary is the occasion on which the biggest retailer for our new town centre might have pulled out. Mo left her Whitehall office. Mo strode down the street. Mo entered the developers' office and told them, in what I believe was a quite straightforward way, what they had better do. The supermarket, happily, was re-engaged.

Mo's well known warmth, her openness and her lack of pretension undoubtedly played a great part in all that she did, but, centrally, she was a great shadow Minister, a great Minister and a stateswoman, because she is a formidable intelligence. She will go on to a different career; I know that the whole House, together with the people of Redcar, will wish her good health, success and satisfaction in that new career.

Redcar was fortunate in having Mo as its Member of Parliament, and now I am its lucky representative. The constituency's western boundary is the River Tees, which, although it is an industrial artery for much of its old age, is pure enough at its mouth for seals to play around the lighthouse at the tip of the breakwater. There is usually a chain of massive ships anchored off, until the pilot cutter can come to guide them through the narrow channel into Teesmouth, the second busiest port in the United Kingdom.

I pause to indicate what a debt of gratitude hon. Members and the public owe to Customs officers who serve at Teesport, for it was they who, on 10 April 1990, detained eight large steel tubes which they believed might require an export licence and which were, in fact, the components of the Iraqi supergun. There can be no doubt that, but for their vigilance, serious military consequences could have followed. I believe that those diligent officers—who, in many senses, have brought about this Bill—will welcome its introduction.

A mile from the estuary where the officers work, down a duney coast, is the seaside town of Redcar itself, set on miles of golden sand. Fish and chips, amusements, buckets and spades and bracing walks along the esplanade summarise its principal attractions. Until 1872, the beach was used for horse racing; then they built our famous Redcar race course. It is in the middle of the town, and race days fill the streets with a carnival atmosphere.

Four miles away is Marske, an ancient fishing village, now a pleasant residential area. Inland lies the leafy Domesday book village of Kirkleatham, with its newly renovated Sir William Turner almshouses. Inland, also, is Dormanstown, built in 1917 as a garden city for the steelworkers of Dorman Long. It is green and it is spacious, but it now suffers from the inner-urban deprivation that is all too often the concomitant of a damaged industrial base, and to which I must later return.

Within a tiny distance of pretty Kirkleatham lies, rather less prettily, the Wilton International chemical site. It is a major manufacturing location for petrochemicals, polymers and fibre intermediaries, and is one of three complexes on Teesside that, together, make up the United Kingdom's largest cluster of chemical manufacturers. Currently, they directly employ 11,000 people; indirectly they employ 25,000 more; and they contribute an annual cash turnover that sustains many more thousands of jobs.

There is one matter about the complex that I hope to pursue with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—namely, that it is imperative to our Teesside economy that she support as actively as possible proposed new investment in the complex. That is particularly so since the complex is in cluster formation, with plant linked with plant, and some components of some chains are now approaching the end of their viable life.

The Tees has a proud history of shipbuilding and repair. In April, however, Cammell Laird went into receivership. The next day, 110 workers at the South Bank yard in my constituency were told, "Pack up and go." The yard, which used to be called Smiths dock, is a byword in the north-east for the highest skills and craftsmanship. It was a shattering blow, dealt in an unacceptable manner. The council, regional agencies and I are doing everything that we can to support the efforts of a respected local business man to restart the yard, to run it on its own as a viable local enterprise.

Between Redcar and the river is the mighty Corus Teesside steelworks. In the same week in April as the shipyard went down, the closure of the Lackenby coil plate mill was confirmed. In all, 1,100 jobs are to be lost in a work force who have improved productivity year after year. They, too, were treated with scandalous disregard. Both of those body blows to the traditions, morale and economy of my constituency have made it plain to me that it is unacceptable that such restructuring and cutting should be lawful without any reference to loyal employees. Those of my constituents who have suffered thus join me in giving a strong welcome to the directive on information and consultation rights for employees.

[Vera Baird]

Travelling west in the constituency, one comes to Eston, at the foot of the Eston hills, where the iron ore that gave Teesside that industry was found. The first blast furnace was built in 1851, after which the area produced one third of the country's output, with nearby South Bank and Grangetown two of its proud industrial producers.

Now, Grangetown has a 14.6 per cent. unemployment rate, which is about four and a half times the national average. With South Bank, it suffers according to every index from critical social deprivation. I need not list its characteristics, as they are all too familiar to hon. Members whose regional constituencies were, like mine, neglected to the point of abandonment by the previous, Conservative, Government. Those hard-hit communities house what that Government called an underclass, but what I see, and what I believe the Government recognise, are families who want nothing more than to work, earn a living, educate their children and live in dignity and safety.

Although the figures all remain high, critical ones such as youth unemployment, nursery provision and five A to C GCSE scores in schools are much improved in the past three years. Such communities welcome the Government's certainty that regional economies must be made to flourish if the national economy as a whole is to grow still stronger. We applaud the Government's resolution to apply substantial regeneration resources on a regional basis to poor areas such as these.

The constituency could therefore be described as going from Redcar rock to many a struggling industrial hard place. The Redcar people are positive, however. That can be seen by the fact that, despite a heavy industrial culture, which usually reinforces traditional polarised gender roles, they have elected two successive women Members of Parliament. I do not know what comment to make about the fact that they have now elected their first lawyer, but I do know a lot of jokes about lawyers.

My two roles merge when I welcome the Bill to encourage women further into democratic life. It is a far from straightforward legislative drafting task, and one that I urge be carried out in time to legislate this Session. Local authority elections for, among others, Redcar and Cleveland council, are but a short time away. We intend, in our new party women's forum, to set up a system of prospective councillor candidates, so that those who are selected to stand can get involved early in their wards' affairs. It is essential, if we are to build on the confidence that my electors have shown in women, quickly to have available to us weapons to use against any reactionary backlash.

As a criminal lawyer, I am interested in issues of crime control, access to justice, the courts and criminal sentencing. Sadly, the communities that I have described in my constituency have high crime rates and seemingly intractable drugs problems. This morning's bad news was that knife crime has soared on Teesside. In the past six months, there were 62 stabbings, three of them murders, one of which was in Grangetown.

The police see the problem as drugs related, with dealers mainly arming themselves in self-defence in this dangerous world. In that context, I welcome the Home Secretary's weekend announcement that he will hold an open-minded inquiry into the possibility of legalising cannabis. Unless it proves to be a gateway to hard drugs, it is an area of crime on which I suspect that police have to spend an amount of time disproportionate to its social mischief, leaving them less time for graver criminal matters.

I further welcome many of the proposals in "Making Punishment Work", the report on sentencing by Mr. Halliday, delivered last week—especially its emphasis on extended periods of post-prison supervision in the community for violent offenders, and its revelation that the social exclusion unit is already working with the Home Office on ways of cutting ex-prisoners' reoffending rates by boosting employment and lowering homelessness: joined-up government of the very best kind.

Our phrase, "A lot done, a lot still to do," applies to crime. I resort again to my dual role as a woman representative and a lawyer in mentioning that I hope to ask Ministers to examine again the question of rape and the use of women's previous sexual history in trials; to reassess the criminal defences to murder, which ill serve women victims of domestic violence who finally kill their batterers; and to implement straight away the gender impact assessment scheme for criminal justice measures, which was set up at the Home Office when my right hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio was Minister of State there, but which is not yet in operation.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on her appointment to high office, and seriously return to where I facetiously started in complementing her on the coincidence of her judgment with that of many of my constituents in the wisdom of the measure that she has introduced today.

5.24 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I am sure that the whole House will want me to offer warm congratulations to the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) on an admirable maiden speech. She spoke with deserved generosity about her predecessor, who, I can assure her, will be remembered with respect and admiration in all parts of the House. She spoke with fluency and humour, with already a deep knowledge of her constituency, and clearly with much to bring to the House by way of her legal background and knowledge of the criminal justice system. I am sure that the whole House will regard her as a worthy successor to her distinguished predecessor, and we look forward to hearing plenty more from her in the future.

I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on the Second Reading of a Bill that has been much delayed. That delay occasioned me to read the origins of the commitment to the Bill contained in the Labour manifesto in 1997. In pristine new Labour terminology, an unequivocal commitment was given, which stated:

> "Labour will not permit the sale of arms to regimes that might use them for internal repression or international aggression. We will increase the transparency and accountability of decisions on export licences for arms."

We confidently expected that the Bill would appear in the previous Parliament, but it is welcome now because the export licensing system is much in need of an overhaul. The current system dates back to 1939, as has been mentioned.

On the issue of delay, I echo the comments by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). The Bill is an important piece of legislation.

It has been preceded by some intensive work by four Select Committees of the House in the Quadripartite Committee and it was effectively published in draft in the White Paper. Despite that, the Government's response to the Quadripartite Committee's report on the Bill was published this morning—the very day of Second Reading. In a Session of more than usual length, in which the Government have many choices of date for the Bill's Second Reading, to publish a document as important as that response a matter of hours before the debate is a shameful way to treat Members of Parliament and the many outside bodies that have taken a great interest in the Bill, which would have wished to pass on comment to right hon. and hon. Members if they had had the opportunity to do so.

I give a broad welcome to the Bill, even though it is difficult to reach an overall judgment on it, given that it is enabling legislation. The guts of the Bill will depend on the nature of the secondary legislation, and it is again disappointing that the Government have not yet been able to give the House any sight of that key legislation in draft before Second Reading. The House is therefore unsighted on the real implications of the legislation.

I wish to highlight three areas in the Bill that give me some concern. The first is the Government's position on extending arms control procedures to licensed production overseas. It is not a viable basis for a credible arms control policy if it is possible for UK companies to circumvent UK export controls by the simple device of a licensed production agreement in a third country where export controls are limited or barely exist.

There was a glaring example of that in the previous Parliament. In 1999, the Turkish company MKEK exported Heckler and Koch sub-machine guns to the Indonesian police. That order, had it come before the British Government, would certainly not have been given an export licence. Those Heckler and Koch sub-machine guns were manufactured under licence in Turkey and, at the time, Heckler and Koch was owned by Royal Ordnance plc. That is a clear example of a British company being enabled to circumvent British arms export control policy by the expedient of licensed production.

In its report, the Quadripartite Committee recommended that controls were introduced for licensed production overseas. It said:

"We do however continue to believe that some statutory powers may be necessary to control licensed production overseas, and recommend that the Bill provide for such powers to be taken in the future under secondary legislation, to be used only if a non-statutory regime is shown to have failed."

The Government's response this morning reads as follows:

"The Government has decided, in the light of the results of the consultation, not to introduce specific powers in the Bill on licensed production overseas."

The Government give no reasons as to why they have reached that conclusion; I hope that the Minister will give us some indication. The Government's response is strange, given the obvious gaping hole that it opens up in arms export control arrangements if, by the simple expedient of entering into licensing agreements overseas, a British company is able to evade the export control policy that the Government have established.

In addition, I put this point to the Minister: if the Government are to continue to have the power to exempt licensing arrangements, there may be a significant danger that some British defence manufacturers will decide to move manufacturing capacity overseas by means of licensing arrangements to widen their export market potential. The Government's failure to deal with that loophole could have adverse implications for jobs in Britain in the defence manufacturing industry.

Secondly, I want to consider how the Government will deal with the key issue of trafficking and brokering. As with licensed production overseas, this is another area in which, unless the right legislation is brought forward, there is considerable capacity effectively to nullify the Government's arms control policy.

Trafficking and brokering require the introduction of a measure of extra-territoriality. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, that is not unprecedented in legislation. The Quadripartite Committee said, in paragraph 96:

"Whilst recognising the practical difficulties in policing activities outside the United Kingdom, we see compelling arguments in favour of extending controls on brokering and trafficking to activities outside the country and recommend that controls be introduced on the activities of UK citizens and companies wherever they take place."

The Government's response is somewhat mystifying. They simply say:

"The Government notes the Committee's views. This is a matter that will be set out in secondary legislation, which as noted in our response to recommendation (a) we aim to submit to Parliament in dummy form as soon as possible."

The Government propose the introduction of secondary legislation. For reasons best known to themselves, they do not tell us whether they accept the Quadripartite Committee's recommendation. Furthermore, we have no idea when that important secondary legislation will be introduced. I hope the Minister can assure the House that it will at least be available in dummy form before the Bill goes into Committee. That is a key point. I am sure that the right hon. and hon. Members who are asked to serve on the Standing Committee will want to see that and other dummy secondary legislation before the Committee's proceedings commence.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): The Committee stage will begin a week from tomorrow and, even though I shall be serving on the Committee, I have received no information as to when the details of the secondary legislation will be available.

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. I hope that the Minister has taken careful note of his and my remarks. Later in the debate, other hon. Members may also refer to the importance of the House having sight, before the Committee stage, of those key measures that the Government describe as dummy secondary legislation.

Transportation is another aspect of trafficking and brokering. In her opening remarks, the Secretary of State referred to the terrible tragedy of the Sierra Leone civil war. It was widely reported, and not denied by the company concerned, that a British-based company—based in Luton—was involved in the air freighting of arms to rebel forces in Sierra Leone. The weapons came from the Ukraine via Burkina Faso—the hon. Member for Twickenham will be interested to know that—and Liberia. There is strong circumstantial evidence for that report. Apart from the fact that a British company was involved

[Sir John Stanley]

in the transportation and brokering of arms in a civil war, British armed forces are currently deployed in Sierra Leone. A British company may thus unwittingly or not have been engaged in the transfer to rebel forces of arms that could be used against British forces.

The Government's response on the logistics of trafficking and brokering notes that

"Clause 5 of the Bill provides a broad power which does allow for the introduction of controls on the transport, or the arrangement of transport, of controlled goods."

However, notwithstanding that response, clause 5 does not include the words "transport" or "transportation". I assume that behind the Government's response is a reference to clause 5(5)(c). If it is the Government's intention to cover transportation, would not it be far better to make that word explicit in clause 5? The point may be implicit, but that gives rise to the possible danger of subsequent litigation as to whether transportation undertakings in relation to arms trafficking and brokering are included within the legal powers in the Bill.

Finally, I want to consider the key question of whether it is possible to introduce a degree of legal control in the sphere of the transfer of knowledge and technology relating to the construction of weapons of mass destruction. I certainly applaud the Government's intention to try to choke off a key route for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, it could well be argued that the greatest danger in the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons lies in the transfer of technical information and knowledge, rather than that of hardware and materials.

I strongly support the Government's policy aims, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells rightly said, unless the Government are extraordinarily careful, the Bill could affect wholly legitimate research and academic activities in higher education. In an example that the House will easily understand, at what point does knowledge gained in academic research into the toxicity of certain chemicals create a risk of proliferation of chemical weapons; or at what point does academic research and teaching into the microbiology of anthrax constitute a proliferation danger in the manufacture of biological weapons?

As I have said, the Government have to be extremely careful. For the benefit of the Minister and the House, I wish to put on record the wording of a fax that I received just before the debate from Universities UK.

"You will remember from our evidence to the Quadripartite Committee in April that we support controls on weapons of mass destruction. But Universities UK is concerned that new controls might have the unintended consequence of damaging higher education. We believe that the proposal in the Bill to extend licensing controls to include intangibles could have adverse effects on universities and the UK research base generally."

The Government have said that they will submit dummy legislation to Parliament as soon as possible. I trust that they will take very careful note of the views of the higher education establishment so that the proper teaching carried out in higher education in Britain and the proper work done in research establishments is in no way jeopardised by the certainly well intentioned and wholly laudable efforts that the Government are making to try to choke off such proliferation.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): What is the right hon. Gentleman's view of the fact that many of the most revolutionary technologies—whether nuclear power, computers or genetic engineering—can be used for good and for evil? Will he please tell us how he thinks the Government might differentiate between those technologies and know whether they are being used for good or evil?

Sir John Stanley: The hon. Gentleman is on to the key point—how the Bill is drafted. I should be happy to share with him the fax that I have received, and he may be interested to know that Universities UK has suggested an alternative way to define what should be outside the arms export licensing control regime from that which the Government appear to offer. That will be a matter for detailed consultation between the Government and the higher education establishment.

Prior parliamentary scrutiny has been mentioned by the Liberal Democrat spokesman and other hon. Members in interventions. I was disappointed by the Secretary of State's replies to interventions, because it is clear that she had not been adequately briefed or had not done sufficient reading on the Quadripartite Committee's proposals. She cited the criticism of prior parliamentary scrutiny that Lord Scott had made when he came before the Committee, but I am afraid that she quoted him very selectively.

Lord Scott made an initial—if I may presume to say so—knee-jerk response to a question about prior parliamentary scrutiny from another member of the Committee. However, when I pursued the matter further and asked Lord Scott whether he had read the Committee's detailed proposals, he replied; as paragraph 142 of the report of the proceedings of 25 April shows:

"I can confirm that I have not read that material and I reserve on this occasion, as most, the right to change my mind."

Lord Scott is not a good witness to call to defend the criticisms of prior parliamentary scrutiny that the Secretary of State may or may not have advanced.

The Secretary of State also said in response to interventions that prior parliamentary scrutiny might create a blurring of the responsibilities between the Executive and the legislature. I therefore draw the House's attention to the fact that the Quadripartite Committee is absolutely clear on this point. There is no blurring or removal of the Executive's responsibility for arms export policy. That is stated with total and unambiguous clarity in paragraph 88 of our report of July 2000, which says:

"We fully understand and accept that, even with a system of prior parliamentary scrutiny in place, responsibility for strategic export decisions will continue to lie wholly with the Government, who will be accountable to Parliament for those decisions."

Our proposal for prior parliamentary scrutiny would lead to no blurring whatever of responsibility between the Executive and the legislature.

I wish to return to the Government's failure to respond to our final proposals made, to the Government on 14 March. There has also been a sad delay in their previous response to the Quadripartite Committee's proposals on

prior parliamentary scrutiny. We made our initial proposal in July 2000, but it took the Government five months to respond even though they should respond within two months to the proposals of Select Committees. In our latest submission to the Government in March this year, we said:

"Our new proposals deserve proper scrutiny within Whitehall; but there is no reason to wait another five months for an answer. There is every good reason to have a system of prior parliamentary scrutiny ready to operate as soon as committees are set up in a new Parliament."

As the House knows, there is every sign that Select Committees will be set up before the House rises for the recess at the end of next week. We still await the Government's response to our final and refined proposals and we are wholly confident that the unanimous report of the four Select Committees concerned will in no way jeopardise or weaken the competitive position of British arms exporters, but that they will materially increase the Executive's accountability to Parliament in this key area. We earnestly hope that the Government will make their response on this key issue before the Committee stage of the Bill begins.

5.50 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). As someone who served on the Quadripartite Committee and who would like to do so again, may I say that he made a significant contribution to the Committee's work? In addition, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) on her maiden speech and welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Minister to their new positions on the Front Bench.

I warmly welcome the Bill. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) said, the opening session of the UN conference on the illicit trade in small arms takes place today in New York. Such sales are not the sole problem but make a significant contribution to the difficulties that arise from arms sales. In the past 11 years, illicit small arms sales have been blamed for 4 million deaths. Most of the victims have been civilians, 80 per cent. of them children and women. UNICEF UK is running a campaign on children who are alone because of war. Most of them are the victims of people who sell arms and who are interested only in the money that they make on a deal; they do not think about the consequences. It is a major problem in our society and the international community.

I recognise the right of countries to export and import weapons for their own defence. Indeed, the UN charter guarantees that. Many of my constituents work in the aerospace industry and I welcome the contribution that it and others make to legitimate arms sales. However, the Bill deals with the export of arms that may be used to violate human rights which, if we are not careful, will result in external aggression or internal repression. Its underlying principle is an attempt to control such exports.

Arms control is a major problem for the United Kingdom. We account for a quarter of arms exports, worth about $7 billion each year. Two issues need to be addressed: the first is what policy a Government should adopt towards arms exports; the second is what control regime should be put in place to enable that policy to be effective. I congratulate the Government on the progress that has been made on those. It was churlish for the Conservatives to make snide comments about why the Bill was not introduced earlier. I, too, should have liked that, but we have achieved many things that we did not obtain under the previous Conservative Government.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): Would my hon. Friend have liked the Bill to be introduced at least 15 years earlier?

Mr. Berry: I would indeed, but I should have also liked decent and sensible criteria to evaluate arms exports. It was not until July 1997—two months after the general election—that they made any sense. I wanted the Landmines Act 1998 to be introduced earlier—the Conservative Government refused to act on that— and a White Paper on arms export controls to be produced before 1998, when the Labour Government addressed the problem for the first time in that way.

I shall not detain the House by referring at length to other achievements except to mention our support for the European Union code of conduct on arms exports and the establishment of the Quadripartite Committee on strategic exports. The Committee might not have the most elegant title, but it deals with arms exports and considers important business. I am sure that other Committee members in the previous Parliament will agree that its Chairman, the former hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, Ted Rowlands, made a major contribution in ensuring that its work proceeded efficiently and effectively.

My first concern relates to brokering and trafficking. The Bill, which we also saw in draft form, has powers in clause 5 to impose controls on those activities, which I welcome. They go further than the proposals in the 1998 White Paper. It is unacceptable that if a UK company brokers a deal, no licence is required so long as the arms do not touch UK soil. A child of 10 knows that if he wants arms to go to country X, he can simply broker a deal to export from country Y without bringing them on to UK soil. There is nothing clever about avoiding export controls; it is dead simple. Unless we address brokering and trafficking, there is one obvious mechanism available for dodging arms export controls. Conservative Members might never have heard of the problem. Perhaps they have not read the Scott report and do not know how the UK company Miltec brokered arms to Rwanda in 1994 at the height of the genocide.

If I want to drive a car, get married, watch television or run a raffle for my local Labour party, I have to get a licence. If I want to sell alcohol or go fishing, I probably have to get a licence. However, if I want to broker arms deals with the most unscrupulous individuals and regimes, I do not have to obtain one. That is the absurdity of the current arrangements. A licence is required for many activities, but not to broker arms. I am delighted that clause 5 gives the Secretary of State powers to impose controls on brokering and trafficking.

Extra-territorial controls are the subject of clause 5(6). It is essential that we have those. The Labour manifesto made a clear commitment to introduce a licensing system

"to control the activities of arms brokers and traffickers wherever they are located".

People who draft manifestos tell me that they choose their words carefully. The phrase "wherever they are located" can have only one clear interpretation. Controls must

[Mr. Berry]

apply to UK passport holders who operate overseas, for the simple reason that if they do not, it is possible to evade controls simply by stepping out of the country. I cannot believe that anyone would want a system of arms export controls with such an obvious loophole. I welcome the Government's commitment.

There are countless examples of extra-territorial powers in our legislation. Reference was made to the Sex Offenders Act 1997, the Landmines Act and the Chemical Weapons Act 1996. There is nothing novel about the Bill. It would be extraordinary if anyone thought that we could have effective arms export controls without extra-territoriality—a terrible phrase, but I hope that the House knows what I mean. Interestingly, German controls on trafficking and brokering suffer from that weakness.

When the Defence Manufacturers Association gave evidence to the Quadripartite Committee, its exports director, Brinley Salzmann, said of the German system:

"It catches the good guys and the bad guys have moved to Cyprus."

I am sure that the House would not regard that solution as adequate. Comprehensive measures should be taken to control the activities of British arms brokers operating on foreign soil.

I turn now to another obvious way of circumventing existing controls which must be dealt with. I refer to the practice of allowing a second company in another country to produce the arms under licence, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling. He gave the example of the Turkish company MKEK, which in 1999 exported to the Indonesian police sub-machine guns manufactured under licence by Heckler and Koch, which was owned by Royal Ordnance. That incident was at the height of the East Timor conflict, and the shipment would not have been given an export licence by the UK. Indeed, an application for a licence from a British company for a similar transfer had already been rejected by the Government.

It is important that we deal with licensed production. It is unfortunate that the Bill contains no new statutory powers to control licensed production overseas. I believe that it should. I realise that the Government are considering non-legislative measures, but they will need to convince the Committee and the House that they will be effective. Without adequate control, the objectives of export control policy, and of the Bill, will be seriously undermined.

I turn now to end-use monitoring. The Scott report showed how easy it was for UK arms exports to be diverted. The subject of the report was arms that had been diverted to Iraq via Jordan. I served on the Trade and Industry Committee a couple of years later, and we considered the problem of large numbers of arms exports being diverted, via Singapore, to Iran. As I said, a child of 10 who wanted to get around the controls could find various ways of doing so, and one way of allowing people to get around them is to have inadequate monitoring of the end use of arms exports.

It is ironic that this country, which has led the way in tracing the movement of beef from producer to consumer, should still have so much to learn about tracing the full journey of arms exports. I am sorry that the Bill does not contain new measures for end-use monitoring. We need to strengthen end-use controls at the licensing stage, and we need follow-up checks when the equipment has been exported.

On parliamentary scrutiny, I cannot add much to the recommendations of the Quadripartite Committee and the comments of the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling. I warmly welcomed the publication of annual reports on arms exports, which never happened under the Conservative Government, and I welcome the proposal in the Bill to put them on a statutory footing. That is a major step forward. I recognise that the reports are the best in Europe, and possibly the world, but no matter how transparent and comprehensive they become, they will be no substitute for prior parliamentary scrutiny of sensitive licence applications.

The House will be aware that there has been an interesting dialogue between the Quadripartite Committee and the Government. The Committee submitted revised proposals in its report of 6 March which took account of the Government's earlier objections, and we eagerly await their response. Prior parliamentary scrutiny would enhance ministerial accountability, and such a system could operate without damaging our defence industries or bilateral relations, as is the case in Sweden and the United States, among other countries.

The Bill is a breath of fresh air. Who would have thought, six years ago, that we would eventually have a Bill that took the Scott report seriously? It is a great improvement on the White Paper, and it gets better with each drafting. I hope that we can continue gradually to improve it as it proceeds through its parliamentary stages. I warmly welcome the fact that the Bill makes a clean break with the past, and the Government have every reason to be proud of it. Nevertheless, it has several significant weaknesses, which, I hope, can be dealt with in Committee. I hope that the Bill achieves an unopposed Second Reading.

6.6 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): As you can see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the number of Conservative Members present is somewhat depleted because there are five reasons for not being here.

The hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) spoke most eloquently about her predecessor. I do not think that anyone will forget the time that Mo Mowlam spent in Northern Ireland or the work that she did to try to resolve the problems in that troubled Province.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, who was also very involved in Northern Ireland. He was the Member of Parliament for Bridgwater for 31 years, and in that time he worked tirelessly for his constituency. He was also involved in the environment and in transport, Northern Ireland and defence. I am, of course, talking about Tom King. Tom said recently that he felt that the problems in Northern Ireland were a great shame because, when he was there, he felt that great progress was being made to resolve them. That was nearly 15 years ago. What is the position today? We must continue to work as hard as we can to solve the problems in the Province.

Much of Tom's time in the Ministry of Defence was taken up with the Gulf war. At the same time, he was responsible for the leadership election, so he had not only to strive to ensure that Saddam Hussein was put firmly back in his box, but to look after what was happening in this country.

As a Member of Parliament, Tom strived always to give Bridgwater the representation that it deserved. It is a very diverse constituency, running from Exmoor down to the Levels. It is very large, and resembles, if anything, a banana. It is also unusual in that it is a high constituency—it contains the highest peak in Somerset—which extends to land below sea level. In Bridgwater itself, the constituency has the most westerly industrial town in the United Kingdom.

We are discussing export controls, and Bridgwater has many companies that send huge amounts of goods across the world. They include Gerbers, which is now the largest supplier of soft drinks in Europe, and British Cellophane. The constituency also produces pistons of the highest grade made in this country, and they are sent all over the world. Bridgwater has many other companies that have transformed it from the second largest port in the 15th century to what is now not a high-tech but a medium-tech industrial town.

Bridgwater has a long history. It is the home of the tile and brick industry, which, I am afraid, is long gone, owing to exports and imports. The last battle on English soil was fought in Bridgwater—that was the last time, I am glad to say, that republicanism reared its ugly head, and it was beaten fairly soundly on the Levels outside Sedgemoor.

In the past few weeks we have had our first case of foot and mouth. I was told about it on the night of the election. As a farmer, I had wondered what it would be like to be told that there was foot and mouth in the area, and I found out that night. I can assure the House that everyone was extremely concerned to be told that we had to start slaughtering cattle and sheep. I am glad to say that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has made great strides, and we hope to have the exclusion zone lifted in three weeks so that normal trade can be resumed.

Bridgwater has a large tourism industry. We have one of the largest Butlins—there are only three. Butlins attracts 13,000 people a week, and has made an enormous contribution to local industry. Without a shadow of a doubt, west Somerset would not have been sustained without that extremely large employer; indeed, without Butlins, west Somerset would have been like a transposed part of rural Scotland.

There has also been another menace—flooding—which has got worse in the past few years. In west Somerset, we used to expect flooding once every 60 years; we have now experienced it in three of the past five. In the past two years, it has been so bad that not only has the town represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) nearly gone under water, but so has Bridgwater. The Environment Agency is based in Bridgwater, and its total budget this year for capital works to maintain defences and make sure that we do not have a disaster is £3.7 million. I am afraid that that sum is woefully inadequate when one takes into account the fact that we have a coastline which, in the past two years, has suffered two major breaches that could have been catastrophic and put under water a major proportion of industry and farming.

Our rivers have given rise to a moral dilemma that the House may, in future, have to debate. Our rivers silt easily; we have one of the highest tidal ranges in the world—22 ft—and, as hon. Members can imagine, our rivers go up and down like a yo-yo. In the past few years, they have silted badly, but they are not being dredged because people wish to maintain them as habitats for wild birds and mammals. However, if we do not dredge, we create a bottleneck of water. As that bottleneck gets tighter and tighter, there is bound to be a breach somewhere. When it comes, it could be disastrous.

The Environment Agency has pleaded the case for Somerset with this Government and the previous one. The Levels cover thousands of acres and include the island of Avalon in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory); all hon. Members know that after the battle there, King Arthur was laid to rest. We do not want serious flooding there again, as it will cause untold damage.

The House must address the issue of building houses on flood plains, not just in Somerset but throughout the country. If we continue as we are doing under present planning laws, ultimately we shall have to build on flood plains. In my constituency, if we do not build on Exmoor, the Quantocks and the flood plains, we have very little space to build on. If we do not sort that out in the near future, we may be in situation where, because of the policies decided by the House, we cannot avoid having to build in those areas.

Looking further ahead, the problem must be resolved either by the House passing legislation or by local councils being given the capability, with the Environment Agency, to sort it out. The longer we leave it, the more likely we are to have a disaster. Last year, in Malton in Yorkshire, the town centre went under water; the Environment Agency calculated that had that happened to Bridgwater, it would have been under 18 inches of water—think of the exports that would have been wiped out, to put it crudely. We do not want that to happen; I am sure that no Member does.

To give a council or the Environment Agency the capability to sort out the problem, we must look at the issue of money; that is what it boils down to. We cannot get money from Europe; we must get it from taxpayers. The longer we put things off, and the more we push the problem away, the more likely we are to have a disaster.

I was left in no doubt about the importance of flooding, when, in this august building, I was allowed to have an office in the yellow submarine. Since then, I have felt that I need a submarine to deal with the problem, unless we can sort it out soon.

6.14 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on his excellent and interesting maiden speech. I am sure that he will be a major asset to the House. It is a measure of his worth that, having been allocated an office in the yellow submarine and finding out that I, a fellow new Member, had not been allocated an office, he immediately and kindly offered to lend it to me if I needed it to meet constituents. I salute him for his generosity and look forward to his future contributions.

I am the newly elected Member for Wolverhampton, South-West in the industrial heartland of the west midlands. I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate. Before the House is a Bill radically to reform the United Kingdom's export control regime, principally in relation to defence and

[Rob Marris]

military matters but also in relation to objects of cultural interest. I propose to make some remarks about the former. I am delighted that the Bill will implement the recommendations of the Scott inquiry; no doubt Lord Scott of Foscote, as he now is, will follow its passage with interest. I am only sorry that, next month, it will be three years since the original White Paper was published.

The indiscriminate peddling of weaponry around the world is a major evil. There must be strict controls on the export of military equipment and know-how; there must be no export of items for torture nor of instruments of repression. Until now, our controls have been based on legislation dating back as far as 1939. It is a tribute to our predecessors that the old legislation continued to have relevance for as long as it did. However, the Bill brings us into the modern age, as it encompasses the computer revolution and new technology which even one of my heroes, Alan Turing, could barely have envisaged in 1939.

I commend the Government for introducing the Bill. I am particularly pleased that there will be annual reports to Parliament on its operation. However, I hope that clause 9 can be tightened further and that the provisions on the negative resolution procedure can be revisited.

In making my first speech about defence-related matters, I am following something of a local tradition. One of my predecessors, Herbert "Billy" Hughes, who represented what was then Wolverhampton, West, made his maiden speech on defence matters. He represented the seat from 1945 until 1950, then became the distinguished principal of Ruskin College for almost 30 years. In the House in 1945, he was presciently concerned about a possible atomic arms race.

Herbert Hughes's erudite successor also made his maiden speech on defence matters. Enoch Powell represented Wolverhampton, South-West from 1950 until February 1974, and subsequently returned to the House in October 1974 as the Ulster Unionist Member for Down, South. In 1950, Mr. Powell was concerned about the size and ethnic composition of our armed forces.

Many Members will recall Mr. Powell's successor, Nick Budgen, who represented the constituency from 1974 until 1997. For benefit of the curious, I might say that his maiden speech concentrated on inflation. Mr. Budgen was a colourful character of the old school—mostly a Conservative, except at the odd time when the Whip was withdrawn. His manifest contributions to the workings of the House earned him the accolade of "Back Bencher of the Year" on one occasion.

Like me, Mr. Budgen was a lawyer; like me, he opposed the death penalty, as Mr. Powell interestingly did before him and as Jenny Jones did after him. Jenny Jones represented the constituency ably in the last previous Parliament. Through her work in the House and the Council of Europe, she, with others, persuaded hon. Members to vote to restrict further the rare circumstances in which that ultimate sanction, death, might possibly still be allowed.

It was as a delegate to the Council of Europe that she really made her mark, bravely upholding the cause of human rights and democracy; she continues that struggle while her term of office there lasts for a few more months. She was in Albania last weekend, monitoring the second round of elections. I pay tribute to her hard work in the Council of Europe, in the House and on behalf of her constituency.

The constituency is wholly urban, and lacks the golden beaches of Redcar, which were mentioned earlier, and the Butlins of Bridgwater. Wolverhampton was proud to become a city last year. It took us only slightly more than *1,000* years to get there after our founding by Lady Wulfruna. The city is perhaps unique in terms of its representation in Parliament. It has three hon. Members who are sometimes styled as the three musketeers. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), who is sitting beside me, was born and raised in his constituency and still lives there. The same is true of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase). I complete the set, as I was born and raised in the constituency that I am now proud to represent, and I still live there.

My constituency is home to the venerable Wolverhampton Wanderers football club—the Wolves—which is currently in the first division. Although the Molineux stadium is one of the finest in the country, the team, alas, is not. After 40 years, we are still waiting for renewed success. It took us more than 1,000 years to achieve city status, but I hope that we will not spend so long outside the premier division.

Soccer is by no means the only sport in Wolverhampton. We have cricket on the green at Tettenhall, one of the oldest swimming clubs in the country, and lots of field hockey and rugby. At Aldersley stadium, we have cyclo-cross, shooting and, above all, athletics. The freedom of the borough was recently awarded to Olympic champion Denise Lewis, who was raised and went to school in the constituency, which also boasts Dunstall park, the only floodlit, all-weather race course in the country. I confess that I was there last week, but only to use its excellent conference facilities.

There is not only sport; we are also a literate lot in Wolverhampton. Headquartered in my constituency is the United Kingdom's largest regional newspaper, the *Express and Star*, which has the largest circulation of any newspaper in the country and is a local institution that sells almost 300,000 copies a night, six nights a week. Like many midlanders, it has a fine tradition of embracing new technology. For example, it was the first daily newspaper in the country to publish colour pictures.

We are also a centre of learning, as we are home to the university of Wolverhampton, which has an admirable record of tackling social exclusion. Less than a quarter of its students are admitted through the traditional means of entry and it is now the sixth largest university in the country.

Perhaps student numbers are so high because we are such a friendly city. Northerners feel comfortable coming that far south, and southerners are happy to venture that far north, as hon. Members will doubtless discover when they flock to Wolverhampton on their summer holidays in a few weeks' time.

Of course, student numbers might be high because of the fine local ales. The constituency is the home of Banks's, the largest independent brewer in the country, which is sadly now facing a most unwelcome takeover

bid. Many hon. Members will know its excellent beer. For those who do not, I suggest a short trip downstairs to the Strangers' Bar, where it is on sale.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Hear, hear.

Rob Marris: I thank my hon. Friend.

I am delighted that Wolverhampton, South-West is a multicultural and multi-faith community. It is well served by the Inter-Faith Group and by Wolverhampton Race Equality Council. As well as many Christian churches, we have four Sikh gurdwaras, five mosques, a Hindu temple, and a large Buddhist temple. Long may our communities continue to live in harmony. That harmony has come about only because of the hard work of many people from all the communities and from many spheres, who have worked hard for years. In Wolverhampton, we celebrate our diversity, because it enriches us all.

6.23 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): It is a great pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris). Although I represent Richmond Park, I was born, bred and educated in the black country and am a black country woman. The hon. Gentleman's speech was a trip down memory lane, although I am not a supporter of Wolverhampton Wanderers; I am a Baggies supporter—for me, it is West Bromwich Albion to the death. None the less, I congratulate him and welcome him to the House.

Today is a great moment for me in my time as a Member of Parliament. I am pleased to be here as we discuss this Bill, which is long awaited—indeed, I have asked for it on many occasions during my four years in Parliament. I congratulate the Government on publishing the draft Bill, which allowed time for scrutiny and for valuable comments to be made by non-governmental organisations before the final Bill was published.

I make many speeches against arms brokers and the arms industry but I am not a pacifist and I have no hang-ups about the industry, which, sadly, has to exist. It employs thousands of people—the United Kingdom has the second largest share of the world's defence industry—and is worth $10 billion every year. Clearly, about 18.7 per cent. of the world's defence industry is not to be sneered at. All countries have legitimate defence needs and the Government have already gone some way to making the industry more transparent by introducing their annual reports, however incomprehensible they are—and I at least find them incomprehensible when they are first published; it is pretty difficult to wade through them before the NGOs have had a go and have explained what all the codes mean. The Quadripartite Committee has also been introduced to scrutinise exports.

Great strides have been made in that direction, but I support my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on the idea that we should not have export credits for arms. There seems to be no reason why the defence industry should be picked out for subsidy by the taxpayer. It cannot be right. I shall stick to my support of measures against that practice and I hope that the Government will consider the matter seriously. As I said in another debate, I realise that dropping export credits may lead to job losses, and I remember saying that we had to bite the bullet. I am usually telling people to swallow the pill, but I thought on that occasion that the other suggestion was more appropriate.

There is still a huge need for prior scrutiny, for which issues of sustainability are the main reason. Let us consider a few brief statistics. Of the 40 poorest countries in the world, 24 are engaged in conflict or have just emerged from it, as we were told in the Department for International Development White Paper. Some 20 per cent. of the population of Africa is currently affected by war and civil war. Military expenditure in Africa in 1999 amounted to $11 billion. Interestingly, Oxfam says that universal primary education could be provided for $8 billion—$3 billion less than the cost of the wars.

The Bill must take account of the consequences of arms exports for sustainable development. The draft Bill dealt with those issues, but they have been dropped in the Bill that is before us. I do not understand why the Government have dropped them. I know that the Secretary of State for International Development can issue guidance on the issues during the licensing process and can take into consideration the EU code of conduct on arms, but how much notice do the Government take of what she says? If past experience is anything to go by, the guidance will not have much impact. The Secretary of State signs only a small percentage of current export licences. She has raised objections in the past, but licences have still been granted. For example, she was not listened to in 1992 with regard to the export of arms to Ethiopia and Eritrea. She chooses not to sign the annual report on strategic export controls. I understand from a letter that I received from her Minister in April last year that it was Clare Short's decision not to sign off that annual report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady must remember to refer to hon. Members by their correct titles.

Dr. Tonge: I apologise and accept your correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

No licence has been refused under criterion 8 of the European code of conduct because it is impossible to prove that any single licence will damage development. However, what about the cumulative effect of many export licences? That has already been mentioned, and we should take it into account in prior scrutiny, before we let arms go to a developing country.

My four years in international development, two of them as a member of the Select Committee on International Development, have left me in no doubt that arms brokers and trafficking cause some of the greatest evil and suffering in the world today. In a brilliant and interesting speech, the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) mentioned 4 million deaths in 46 conflicts since 1990. Trafficking is such a scourge.

I have visited areas of the world where the illegal arms trade has fuelled conflict and destroyed lives. This country abandoned southern Sudan more than 40 years ago; a civil war continues there.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. Lady probably anticipates my question. She refers to conflicts around the world, which are a source of great anxiety to all hon. Members. But how will the Bill make a substantial,

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

tangible difference? No evidence has been forthcoming to show that British weapons are involved in that ghastly business.

Dr. Tonge: I expected the hon. Gentleman's intervention. If the claims for the secondary legislation are to be believed—I hope that they are—we shall have a register of arms brokers. We can thus identify people in this country who traffic. On several occasions, the hon. Gentleman has asked about the identity of those people. The examples of Sandline and Miltec have already been cited; there could be many more. We must not assume that all Brits are honourable and would not dream of becoming arms brokers, because the opposite is true. The Bill will make a difference; a similar measure has made a difference to practices in the United States of America.

I have visited the civil war area Bahr-el-Ghazal in southern Sudan. I have seen rebel commanders, who, faced with villagers who have come to hear their words, brandish a kalashnikov and say, "This is strength. This will save you. If you follow the gun, you will be all right." That gun was supplied by an arms broker. Who are we to say that it was not a British arms broker?

Mr. Howarth: We do not make kalashnikovs.

Dr. Tonge: One does not have to make guns to traffic them. Surely the hon. Gentleman understands that an arms broker needs no more than a mobile phone to contact an eastern European country and get the guns to wherever they are wanted in Africa.

Colombia is racked by drugs and arms dealers; the two often go together. We spend much time, money and effort on the illicit drugs trade; why do not we spend as much on the illicit arms trade? People have been raped, tortured and mutilated for refusing to grow coca on their land. All those actions are backed by illegal arms, which are supplied through trafficking.

In Rwanda and the great lakes, the genocide is supported by the illegal arms trade. Before the hon. Member for Aldershot leaps up to tell me that genocide in Rwanda was committed with machetes, I emphasise that they were backed by men wielding guns. Guns multiply violence. Women in southern Sudan are used to Arab raiders from the north attacking their cattle and villages. In the old days, they had spears; now they have guns, and they do far more damage.

All those conflicts were backed by arms from eastern Europe. Bulgaria is currently the largest supplier, and Makarov pistols sell for £80. It was said earlier that an AK47 costs two cows in African markets; a non-governmental organisation claims that it now costs a chicken. Those weapons are getting cheaper by the minute.

European enlargement offers an opportunity to control the trade and strengthen the Bill. That also applies to the United Nations conference on small arms, which starts today in the United States. The Secretary of State for International Development will be there, but the Foreign Secretary will not. The previous Foreign Secretary—I am pleased that he has just appeared in the Chamber—was interested in the conference and intended to attend it. What an insult that neither the new Foreign Secretary nor any representative of the Department of Trade and Industry there. The Department for International Development has to cope with the consequences of arms trafficking, but other Departments are responsible for the practice. Why do not their representatives attend? There is still a lack of joined-up government.

I was appalled to read in newspapers today that the President of the US has ordered his delegation to block the main proposals for a legally binding United Nations resolution to control the flow of small arms because he fears the gun lobby, which is led by the National Rifle Association. Until now, the US has had a good record on this issue. Perhaps the Under-Secretary will explain later what the Government intend to do about that. Are they going to continue to be a lapdog of the US, as they were on national missile defence, or are we going to join our European partners and protest?

The proposals on brokering are welcome, but I am worried about the application of controls to United Kingdom passport holders who operate overseas. Clause 2, which deals with transfer control, is almost a Gilbert and Sullivan patter-song of legal language about UK passport holders operating here, there and everywhere. Sadly, the clause does not apply to the brokers who traffic in arms. The Minister must tell us whether the secondary legislation will contain such measures. We must ensure that UK nationals, wherever they are in the world, are prevented from trafficking. It is easy for an arms broker simply to pick up a mobile phone and do a deal from beside his pool in the Bahamas.

It is sad that we shall not be debating programming. We have been told that the Committee stage will start next week and be completed by 23 October. We hoped that secondary legislation would be available for scrutiny at the same time. I am worried at the fact that only 10 days of parliamentary time has been allocated to the Committee. It is simply not enough.

A lot of persuasion is required about aspects of the Bill, but I am pleased that the Government have introduced it at last. I thank them on behalf of many women in the countries that I have visited who begged me to try to stop the flow of arms into their towns and villages. It is those women and their children who suffer most.

6.39 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) on his first contribution to the House. I had to confess to him that, until the other week, I had never been to Wolverhampton, but I feel that I have learned a lot about it in the past few weeks and as a result of hearing that speech. I am sorry to say, though, that I do not think that I will be giving up my summer holidays to visit my hon. Friend's home town.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on his speech. I know that he has very strong ties with the north-east of England. I am glad that he has finally found a berth in Somerset, having unsuccessfully fought several election campaigns in the north-east.

Standing for election and being elected to the House is both humbling and a proud moment in one's life. I should like to thank the people of North Durham for giving me

the opportunity to represent them in the House, and I give today a clear commitment to repay the trust that they have put in me.

I follow into the House Giles Radice, a man of great courage and integrity who, in the 28 years that he served here, was respected by all in the House. When my party was facing its darkest days, in the early 1980s, Giles was one those few who fought for the survival of our party, not because—as he will admit—he was born into it, but because he passionately believed in it. He saw it as the only political party that could give a voice to those who had no voice, and right the wrongs that he saw in society. Like me, before entering the House he worked for the GMB—in his days, the GMW—an organisation with which he maintained close links, acting as chair of the parliamentary GMB group. He was proud of that association, a pride which I share.

Giles Radice was never one to say something just because it was the right thing to say. I am confident that, over the coming years, we shall be hearing much from him from the Benches in the other place. Giles is a passionate European, and I share some of that passion, but a few weeks ago I had the nerve to tell him that he was taking his support for the single European currency a little far by naming his new dog Euro. It conjures up some great images. I can see it now—my right hon. and noble Friend, in carpet slippers and dressing gown late at night at home in Grantham, shouting, "Come in, Euro! Come in Euro! That's a good boy," obviously to the great distress of his Conservative neighbours. I trust that he and his wife, Lisanne, will enjoy a long, happy and active retirement. On a personal note, I look forward to his continued counsel for many years to come.

The Chester-Le-Street part of my constituency holds a unique place in the history of my party, having returned a Labour Member to the House continually since 1906. Even at the disastrous election of 1931, when Labour returned fewer than 50 Members nationally, Chester-Le-Street remained loyal to the Labour party.

Chester-Le-Street is only one part of North Durham, the other major town being Stanley. My constituency is rural. The two major centres of population that I have mentioned are supplemented by numerous villages: Sacriston, Tantobie, Tanfield, Beamish, Bournmour, Lumley, Pelton, Craghead and Ouston, all former mining communities.

I noted from Giles Radice's maiden speech to the House in 1973 that there were five pits in the constituency then. Alas, today there is only one, at the Beamish open air industrial museum, to remind people of the days when my constituency formed part of the mighty Durham coalfield. The mines may have gone, but there is still a proud sense of tradition across the constituency and, sadly, a legacy of those who still suffer from crippling industrial diseases, which blight their old age.

My constituency must also be unique in having a place—a village, in fact—called No Place. It is located on the road between Chester-Le-Street and Stanley. I have asked numerous times how it got its name—or did not get its name—but alas, nobody has yet come up with a good explanation. Likewise, between Tantobie and Stanley is the charmingly named community of Sleepy Valley.

On being elected, I was asked how I would sum up my constituency in social and economic terms. The phrase that I used then, and will use now, is that it is a rural constituency with urban problems. I have described my constituency's mining tradition. Its decline was long; it began in the 1960s and was brought to an abrupt end in the 1980s by the action of the Conservative party. That decline, with the closure of the Consett iron works and the downsizing of the Royal Ordnance plant at Birtley, brought about a community where hope on the jobs front had disappeared and young men and women had no sense of their place in the world.

I have spoken about the traditions of my constituency and the hard times that it has been through, but there are signs of recovery and the rebuilding of communities, and unemployment is falling for the first time in a generation.

In Craghead, a community that lost its pit in the 1960s and its clothing factory in the 1980s, is leading the way in community regeneration. The Craghead partnership, formed in 1996 by local people, is making a real difference. With the support of funding from the lottery, Europe and the single regeneration budget, Craghead has a new village hall. Modern, with internet access, it is becoming a focal point for young and old in the village. The project, along with countless others, aims to involve everyone. Tribute must be paid to the energy of local people and their local councillors, Janice Docherty and Garry Reed, and to former county councillor Lennie James, for their hard work and commitment to their community. I know that such commitment, and the measures in the Gracious Speech, will make a real difference to constituencies like mine.

I speak today in a debate on the control of arms. I come from a region whose wealth at the beginning of the last century was founded on the production of arms and armaments. There was a time when the mighty Armstrong works on the Scotswood road and the yards of the Tyne supplied the world's arms. Today, the industry is smaller and more diverse but remains important to the economy of the north-east. The northern defence initiative alone has 80 companies in the region, and estimates that 250 other companies in the region depend on defence-related work, adding about £500 million a year to the regional economy.

The industry has also become more diverse. The best example in the region must be the House of Hardy in Alnwick, Northumberland, producer of fine fishing rods but now also producing aerials for military radio equipment. Many of these companies rely on exports. SAFT, in South Shields, which employs constituents of mine, produces batteries, 15 per cent. of which are exported for military use.

The measures in the Bill set out clearly a framework for the regulation of arms and defence-related exports. Many, rightly, like me, call for regulation but recognise the importance of the defence industry to regions such as the north-east. The Bill, long awaited, gets the balance right. It is about setting out the ground rules for the first time, thereby enabling companies in the north-east and elsewhere to tender for overseas contracts while meeting the high ethical standards that the public of today demand.

I thank the House for listening to me tonight. I look forward in the coming years to contributing to the work and debates of the House and championing the cause of my constituency and that of the north-east.

6.49 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) and I congratulate him most warmly on an excellent

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

maiden speech—I am sure that the whole House will echo that view. He follows a distinguished and hugely civilised predecessor; it will be no easy act to follow. His predecessor is a splendid chap, although of course hopelessly Euro-fanatical. I am not at all surprised that he called his dog Euro. Of course, the difficulty may be that the Prime Minister has aspirations to kick the issue into the long grass. I hope that the same fate does not befall Lord Radice's dog.

The hon. Gentleman not only paid tribute to his distinguished predecessor and his long and distinguished service to the House, but made interesting comments about his constituency. I can tell him that I experienced the same difficulties with coal mine closures when I served as Member for Cannock and Burntwood. I do not want to make a partisan point, but the previous Government in particular and no doubt this Government also have sought to ease the transition from coal mining to other activities in such constituencies.

Hon. Members will be interested to know that so much defence activity goes on in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. We have regular defence debates in the House, and I see the Leader of the House in his place. I can tell him that even though we had many defence debates in the last Session of the previous Parliament, we have not exhausted the matter, so we look forward to another debate in due course. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will contribute to it.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I, too, have constituency defence interests. Indeed, they very much dominate. BAE Systems, which was formerly known as British Aerospace, has its headquarters in my constituency. It is the world's third largest defence contractor and is a massive, hugely successful organisation that employs people of great skill throughout the United Kingdom. BAE is represented in many constituencies, so many Members are keen both to know what it is up to and to represent the concerns of their constituents who work for the company. Indeed, 80 per cent. of its production goes to export. Of course, Airbus accounts for a large part of that, although its defence activities are also extremely important.

What was known as the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency has its headquarters in my constituency, although it has assumed a new name—QinetiQ, which carries no "u"—as it is about to be privatised. It has been at the forefront not only of developing defence equipment for the United Kingdom and undertaking splendid research but of applying defence equipment to civilian uses. We were all interested to hear that Hardy fishing rods are finding a military use as aerials. That is an example of civilian industry spilling over into the defence industry, and I am sure that Sir John Chisholm of QinetiQ will take note.

The Bill will replace the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act but I am bound to say that the latter does not seem to have done too badly over 62 years, given that it was introduced as an emergency measure and that large chunks of it are to remain on the statute book. In addressing the issue, we must acknowledge not only that there has been a defence export licensing system in this country—listening to some commentators, one gets the impression that no such system was available at all—but that, overall, it has worked pretty well.

I criticise those who suggest that previous Governments, particularly the Conservative Government, were cavalier in approving export licences for defence equipment. Successive Governments have always taken a keen interest in ensuring that we have a proper licensing system and it is clearly not in the interest of any Government for equipment manufactured in the UK to end up in the hands of our enemies and be turned on our own forces wherever in the world they are called to serve their country. Clearly, that would be monstrous, and successive Governments have always tried to prevent it from happening.

After the Scott report and the Matrix Churchill scandal, however, it seems that everybody is agreed that we need to update the 1939 legislation. I understand that, but it is important to recognise that the Bill contains draconian powers. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said, it is an enabling measure and we do not have the secondary legislation before us. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) rightly pointed out, it appears that it will not be available for scrutiny by the House until half way through consideration of the Bill in Committee. That is a scandal, and I hope that the Leader of the House will take note of my remarks.

Conservative Members often complain that we are unable properly to scrutinise legislation, but as the Leader of the House is new to his post, I hope that he will take on board the criticisms made not only from these Benches, but from the Liberal Benches. Given that the Bill is so dependent on the detail of the secondary legislation, it is unacceptable that it is to be made available to the Committee only half way through its deliberations, following the summer recess. Perhaps the Leader of the House will bear those points in mind, as he will be asked about them at business questions.

We are debating Second Reading, but the Secretary of State herself and other hon. Members have failed adequately to answer the concern that I have raised throughout the debate—namely, that no evidence appears to have been produced that British citizens are acting irresponsibly in promoting illegal trafficking in weapons, thereby adding to the human misery in domestic conflicts around the world.

The Liberals have referred to a couple of companies in the debate, but everybody else has been talking about the AK47 Kalashnikov and similar small arms, which are not manufactured in the United Kingdom. I am not aware that great supplies of the SA80 or other British equipment are ending up in the appalling conflicts that are taking place around the world, so it is important to produce evidence of abuse by British companies or British individuals to justify the acquisition of the extensive powers proposed in the Bill.

The Secretary of State referred to tragic examples of children caught up in horrific conflicts, citing Sierra Leone, the Balkans, Rwanda and a host of places around the world where atrocities are taking place, but no one has suggested that weapons produced in the UK have fallen into the hands of those terrorists.

I want to make it clear that I support the concept of licensing. However, although I am not enough of a libertarian to believe that there is no need for licensing, there is also a moral case for defence exports. It is easy to be pejorative about the arms trade, and newspaper

headlines about people engaged in nefarious activity often refer to arms dealers, thereby implying that there is something disreputable about that activity. I refer generally to the defence industries, because it is important to recognise the contribution that our defence industry makes to the United Kingdom.

I shall set out five key points as to why I believe that defence exports are morally sound. I have called them the Masefield five, as a tribute to Sir Charles Masefield. After a distinguished career with British Aerospace, he served with even more distinction as head of defence export sales. He has now returned to BAE.

The first key point is that article 51 of the UN charter upholds the right of every nation to acquire defence equipment to protect itself. That is the most fundamental of human rights. I believe that, in pursuance of article 51, it is entirely right and proper that we should assist those nations around the world that we consider to be our friends, because that helps them to defend themselves against invasion. It also helps us to cement relationships with countries with which we want to do business.

Let me cite an example: Saudi Arabia. The biggest defence contract ever signed in the United Kingdom was the Al Yamamah contract, signed by the British and Saudi Governments. That contract helped to bring the United Kingdom and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia together, and as a result of the relationship we were able to rely on an Arab state to support our endeavours to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi invasion. Who knows? If we had not had that relationship with Saudi Arabia, those land bases might have been denied us and we might have been unable to liberate Kuwait.

Clearly, there are risks. Governments can change, and the assessment of the stability of the Government of a country to which we export defence equipment is a key consideration. Nevertheless, we will not always get it right; inevitably, on occasion we will get it wrong. The argument in favour of British military exports to Iraq was based on a wish to overcome an imbalance whereby Iran seemed more threatening than Iraq—but I will not go into that history, especially as the Father of the House is not present. Mine would probably not be a very fruitful argument.

As I think was mentioned earlier, the Argentines deployed Exocets against us, which were supplied by the French.

My second key point in favour of defence exports is that exporting defence equipment is the best guarantee of peace and stability. That follows from my first point. Being weak, Kuwait could not defend itself, and became vulnerable to attack from Iraq. If it had had a stronger defence of its own, it would have been able to deter Iraq.

There are some safeguards. We sold Hawk aircraft to Zimbabwe. We control the supply of spares for those aircraft. I do not think there are 60,000 parts in a Hawk aircraft, as there are in the F16, but there may well be: it certainly contains thousands of parts. Anyway, we are able to exert some influence over Zimbabwe, if only a modicum. In the case of other countries engaged in exporting their particular brand of tyranny, I think that the ability to withhold the supply of spares is advantageous.

My third point is a particularly important one, which I think we must all bear in mind. Defence exports enable us to produce economies of scale in the production of our own equipment for our own services. If we did not have longer production runs, we would not be able to buy British for our armed forces. The idea that the United Kingdom should not supply its own equipment—tanks, aircraft or warships—to its own services would land us in very hot water with the British people. I think that they expect us, especially as a nation that has this ability, to manufacture equipment for our own purposes, and for our own forces. Unless we can secure longer production runs, however, we shall not be able to afford to buy that equipment from our own factories, because the unit costs will be prohibitive. There will be pressure on us to buy off the shelf, from overseas.

Moreover, by buying equipment in the United Kingdom and maintaining economies of scale, we maintain our ability to compete technologically, to keep up our scientific advances, and not to become dependent on other nations. That in itself helps to secure the defence of the United Kingdom.

Fourthly, as has been mentioned, jobs are involved. There are some 400,000 jobs in the defence industries, which sustain families throughout the United Kingdom. I believe those who work in the defence industries to be honourable. We have noted the implicit criticism that they do not care what they do, and are impervious to some of the atrocities being perpetrated around the world. That is an outrageous suggestion: they are honourable and decent people. They not only provide the United Kingdom with its defence, but enable us to help the defence of our allies.

Manufacturing industry faces a severe difficulty. It is already in recession, and I think that we have now seen two successive quarters of falling output, which is the official definition of a recession. We should avoid landing them with further burdens at this time. The Defence Manufacturers Association has already expressed concern about the additional burdens that the Bill threatens to impose on it. It is incumbent on the Government to make it clear that they do not intend to impose intolerable burdens on business.

Fifthly, we have competitors. Although, as has been pointed out, Britain is the world's second largest defence exporter, there are those competitors, and I suspect that they are infinitely less scrupulous than we are. We must not lose sight of the need to protect our own industry, and ensure that comparable actions are taken in other countries engaged in defence exports.

BAE Systems has written to a number of us. Its representative wrote to me:

> "it is . . . our hope that the Bill wil not have the effect of adversely affecting either the competitiveness of UK companies or their ability to collaborate effectively with EU and/or US partners."

That is an extremely important point which the Government must take on board.

I suspect that industry is, to an extent, inhibited in respect of whatever criticisms it wants to make of the Bill, given that so many defence companies rely on the British Government as their principal customer. I suspect that the criticisms, or concerns, that we may have heard are of a muted nature.

Let me conclude my five key points by drawing attention to what the Ministry of Defence has said. According to the MOD, it is estimated that, without export markets, the British defence industrial base would be less than half its current size, with a loss not only of jobs but technological capability.

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

Mention has been made of the role of the Liberal party. The hon. Members for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) were candid enough to say that they were in favour of scrapping Export Credits Guarantee Department support for defence exports. I hope that all Conservative candidates and Conservative MPs in the country—and, indeed, Labour MPs and Labour candidates—whose constituencies contain substantial military facilities, including manufacturing plants, will note the Liberal policy, which is to cut the ground from under their feet. If the Liberals had their way, when those businesses were competing against the French, the Americans or others, they would not benefit from British Government support, and would be seriously disadvantaged in a highly competitive world. We would thus lose the value of defence exports, and all the benefits that I have described.

Dr. Tonge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: Of course I will give way to the hon. Lady, having provoked her.

Dr. Tonge: Another feature of Liberal policy is our suggestion that we should join the single currency. That would counterbalance the possibility of a loss of exports, because exporting would be so much easier if the exchange rate were different.

Mr. Howarth: I am not sure that that is entirely relevant to my argument, but I note the hon. Lady's point. We would then have a uniform interest rate across Europe. We know how difficult it is to achieve a uniform interest rate across the United Kingdom that matches the requirements of its component parts; it would be even more difficult across Europe, and I suspect that ultimately that would damage manufacturing industry.

I am not sure that the Bill will do anything to help civilians who are caught up in the horror of domestic conflict. I have been to Peshawar in Pakistan, at the base of the Khyber pass. In the market, it is possible to get any weapon of any kind made—and it does not take long: I think it takes about a week to have the most sophisticated weapon made, while others can be knocked up in a matter of hours. The idea that the Bill will eliminate that type of trade is simply wishful thinking on the part of some hon. Members. They need to be absolutely clear about that.

I am clear that the Bill could seriously disadvantage one of the United Kingdom's most responsible and successful industries. The devil will be in the secondary legislation. When we are able to see that, we shall be able to judge whether the Bill will seriously undermine one of Britain's great success stories.

7.10 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): This has been an interesting debate particularly for those of us who were members of the Quadripartite Committee on arms exports because we have been able to hear the views of colleagues who were not members of it. The Committee was an exceptional experiment in combining four Select Committees, composed of hon. Members from all the main parties in the House, to discuss an issue on which we had very divergent views. Initially, I was almost afraid to speak because I did not want to upset the apple-cart. However, after several sittings, a consensus seemed to emerge. Considering some of the hon. Members on the Committee, I was very surprised to see it coming together on the issue.

I come from a very particular standpoint on the issue. I am very concerned about human rights and have been very active in that sphere for many years. I have also been critical of the arms export industry, particularly its effect on developing countries and on human rights in some of the countries where our arms have gone. I am not proud that we are the world's second biggest arms manufacturer—it is not a matter of pride, because arms kill. I do not particularly want to be involved with an industry that kills people.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ann Clwyd: I shall in a moment. I have listened for many months to the hon. Gentleman's attacks in the Chamber on members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and on the women of Greenham common, but I remind him that the Greenham common march started in Cardiff and that I was the only politician present. I am exceptionally proud of that fact, and it should be quite clear where I am coming from in this debate.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the hon. Lady, whom I much admire, for her sincerity in giving way and for that little trip down memory lane. I take issue only with her statement that arms kill. Is it not also true that, sometimes, arms prevent killing, deter killing or even stop killing?

Ann Clwyd: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for that observation, which is patently true. It is also patently clear that arms kill.

I am sorry that the Leader of the House has left the Chamber and is not participating in this debate. He has been so heavily involved in the issue since the then Conservative Government exported arms to Iraq and he responded to the Scott report after having seen it for only about half a day. It was an occasion that anyone who was in the House will never forget.

I do not believe that hon. Members would ever have allowed arms to be exported to Iraq if they had been asked. Anyone who knew about events such as Halabja and the chemical gassing of the Kurds would never have agreed to export arms to Iraq, unless they thought that those considerations were of no importance. When he was Foreign Secretary, the Leader of the House was deeply involved in those issues and attempted to introduce an ethical foreign policy. He also knew that Scott had criticised the fact that the House was not involved in that type of decision making. As the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) said, some of Richard Scott's comments on that issue have been quoted out of context.

We could not believe that those who were making the decisions on exports to Iraq were not aware of the type of regime that existed in that country. We were aware of the nature of the regime; so why were those making the export decisions not aware that the Iraqi regime would eventually use those arms against us? Although that may

be water under the bridge in some respects, Iraq still owes us at least £500 million in export credit guarantees. That is a loss to the British taxpayer.

The confessions of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) about his days as a civil servant at the Foreign Office and elsewhere were very interesting. He described some of the considerations in decisions that he had to make, and he made it clear that he had doubts about some things. When 30 years have elapsed, perhaps we shall even see whether his signature was on those documents. The point is that, occasionally, some hon. Members are more aware than Ministers or civil servants about the situation in some of the countries that the hon. Gentleman listed.

The Select Committee had an exchange with the former Foreign Secretary on arms to Indonesia. As we all know, in 1997, while attempting to introduce an ethical foreign policy, one of his first major speeches at the Foreign Office was on that very subject. Those of us who had been campaigning since 1987 for human rights in Indonesia were very much hoping that that speech would influence the ultimate decision on whether to continue exporting Hawk aircraft and spare parts to Indonesia.

It was at that time that the former Foreign Secretary and I first fell out. He argued that legal considerations required him to continue those exports. As I said in an earlier intervention, we should not be in such a position. There may be an agreement with a country, but we should be able to review that agreement when circumstances change in that country.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling, some other Select Committee members and I visited the United States. People there expressed astonishment that the United Kingdom Government were bound by legal considerations in determining whether to continue sending arms to Indonesia. They said that that would never happen in the United States, and that they could cancel exports to a country if the circumstances in that country changed. They said that their contracts contained a provision enabling them to do that without any obligation at all, including financial obligation.

In the past few years, and even in the past few months, there have been some interesting developments in the United States in relation to arms exports to Indonesia. Although we continue to export to Indonesia, the United States has stopped not only its arms exports but its military training there. I believe that that change is due primarily to the prior scrutiny exercised by members of the United States Congress.

Despite prior scrutiny, the United States is still the world's biggest arms manufacturer. Such scrutiny simply spares United States Ministers and congressional members the embarrassment that was felt all too often by Ministers in the previous Government and in the current one when they discovered that arms were being exported to a country that was committing human rights abuses.

I cannot see any objection to our having a similar system of prior scrutiny. I would have thought that the Government would welcome it. In his last session of giving evidence to our Committee, the then Foreign Secretary seemed to be coming round to our point of view. He saw that our arguments were consistent, and we came up with a compromise that would probably have been acceptable to him.

I ask the Department to think again about this important aspect of arms exports. The Government have done good work in producing the annual report, which I welcome. It was a considerable stride forward, as was producing a common European Union code of conduct. However, to fail on prior scrutiny would be a major failure and would not bring the transparency that Labour Members have been calling for since Scott.

Licensed production deals are increasingly supplementing or even replacing direct strategic exports. The number of licensed production facilities worldwide has grown dramatically in recent decades and continues to grow year by year. It is vital to introduce strict controls to ensure that such arms production is not allowed where there is a likelihood of use for human rights violation in the country of manufacture or subsequent transfer to other destinations or end users of concern.

One example of a licensed production deal of concern is the agreement between GKN Defence Ltd. and Asian Armoured Vehicle Technologies in the Philippines to produce Simba vehicles. It was reported in 1994 that the first seven Simba armoured personnel carriers had been delivered to the Philippine armed forces. A total of 150 vehicles had been ordered and fitted with a 12.7 mm Browning machine gun turret. Eight vehicles were to be supplied from the UK, several as kits, and the rest to be assembled at the plant operated by Asian Armoured Vehicle Technologies.

I asked the President of the Board of Trade

"what control she has over the transfer of (a) armoured vehicles and (b) armoured personnel carriers to (i) Indonesia and (ii) other countries from the GKN Defence licensed production facility in the Philippines."

The answer was:

"The control of exports from the Philippines is a matter for the Philippine Government. Any export of licensable goods from the UK to the Philippines would be subject to UK export controls."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 134W.]

That answer illustrates the fact that the inadequacy of UK licensed production agreements leads to the establishment of new centres of production of military/security equipment over which the UK Government have little or no control. We must introduce statutory powers to control licensed production overseas.

I am concerned about end-use monitoring. Those of us who have spent many years asking questions about arms exports have found it very difficult to get answers. I could paper many walls with the questions that I have asked about exports to Indonesia, for example. We are told that we cannot get answers because of "disproportionate cost", meaning that no one plans to answer the questions at all. We have yet to get to the bottom of what "disproportionate cost" means. At a conference in Ireland to discuss East Timor, an Irish senator handed me an Irish £10 note, which I still have, and said, "This is to help the UK Government answer your questions on arms to Indonesia."

Fortunately, things have changed a bit since then. In her international development role some time ago, Lynda Chalker admitted that end-use monitoring was practically impossible. When he was a Foreign Office Minister, Derek Fatchett said that no formal mechanisms existed to monitor the end use of British defence equipment once it had been exported. It is true that it is almost impossible to monitor the end use of arms that we send to some dodgy countries.

Campaigners on Indonesia and East Timor have told me that British-supplied armoured cars, fitted with water cannons, were used by the Indonesians to spray protesters

[Ann Clwyd]

with coloured water, enabling them to be identified, arrested and probably tortured. Hawk aircraft were spotted flying over East Timor just before the referendum. When asked about that, Ministers said that embassy staff were monitoring the situation. Given that East Timor is a long way from Jakarta and that people from our embassy did not go there all that often, the reality is probably that people did not know.

I welcome the Government's steps to improve risk assessment at the licensing stage and the strengthened pre-sales checks on exports, but there are no specific measures in the Bill for monitoring goods once they have been exported. With the best will in the world, all Governments make mistakes, and it is quite possible that some of the countries that are not currently considered dodgy may become dodgy in the future. All export licences should have end-use certificates, and minimum requirements should be specified. It would be fairly easy to do that. Monitoring by embassy staff is not a sufficient answer.

Those of us on the International Development Committee know the consequences of selling arms to countries that simply cannot afford them. The world is littered with developing countries that bought arms under previous rulers, sometimes spending 50 per cent. or more of their budget, leaving the poor people there with the bill after the regime had changed. It is important that the schedule of purposes for export controls should contain specific reference to the need to ensure that arms transfers do not have an adverse effect on the economy of any country or the sustainable development of the country to which the goods are exported or the technology transferred.

It is a matter of concern that so many developing countries are in debt, and our Government have led the way in addressing that problem. The Chancellor has done everything in his power to try to get help for those countries that are bogged down by past bills for arms that they did not need. Without those arms, they would have had the scope to spend more on education and health.

The Quadripartite Committee was a particular experience. It showed that Members of Parliament can come together, even on a contentious subject, to test the arguments on representatives of, for example, the Defence Manufacturers Association. By the way, the association's point of view was heard, in spite of what the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said.

We are convinced that prior scrutiny will not affect the arms trade, if that is what people are worried about. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) mentioned the amount of money that is spent propping up the defence export industry by the Defence Export Services Organisation, which has a considerable budget, and we need to ask whether that is good value for money or whether it would be better to prop up other industries, such as the pharmaceutical industry. I personally think that that would be much more worth while, and that is the sort of debate that we should have in the House. Samuel Brittan, one of the leader writers for the *Financial Times*, has made the argument several times that if we were looking for value for money, we would not spend money propping up the defence industry, because we could use that money for other reasons and on better causes.

7.33 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I am most grateful for the opportunity to make my first contribution in the House. I preface my remarks by congratulating the hon. Members for Redcar (Vera Baird), for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), for North Durham (Mr. Jones) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on excellent maiden speeches. My only regret is that they chose today to make them before me, but excellent they were in their entirety.

I wish to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Bowen Wells. Bowen served his constituents for 22 years, first as the Member for Hertford and Stevenage, and after 1983 for the redrawn division of Hertford and Stortford. In addition to his roles in the Government, Bowen played an active part on various Committees of the House, culminating in the previous Parliament with his chairmanship of the International Development Committee. Members on both sides of the House have told me of his extensive knowledge of the problems of the third world and of his dedication in seeking their solution. I am pleased to report that Bowen remains as committed to that cause now as he was when he first entered the House and that he is continuing his work to help the poorest nations of the world.

In the constituency, Bowen's dedication to service was just as strong. He believed, as I do, that Members of Parliament have a duty to serve every constituent, no matter how they may have voted. Indeed, many people in Hertford and Stortford have told me that they felt lucky to have Bowen as their Member of Parliament; they described him as one of the last gentlemen in politics. I am not sure whether they will say the same of me. At school, I played rugby in the front row, as hon. Members can probably guess from my shape, where we do not take a genteel, subtle approach. Indeed, some would say that we take no prisoners. I therefore suspect that people will regard me as less of a gentleman and more of a player.

Hertford and Stortford is a wonderful constituency to represent. Situated in the south-east corner of Hertfordshire, it is in many ways the epitome of shire England. It has a combination of attractive market towns, historic villages and that soft, gentle rolling countryside that could only be England. I live in Much Hadham, in the heart of the constituency, and I know how lucky I am, as are many of my constituents, to live in such a beautiful part of England. However, in both the towns and villages, we are having to face up to new pressures and challenges.

Our towns are struggling to compete for shoppers and some local family firms such as Gravesons in Hertford have had to close. Our roads cannot cope with the traffic, but for many people their car is not a luxury but a necessity. Our public services are unable to recruit and retain the staff they need. Our health service is in debt, school class sizes have risen, and by Christmas our county could be short of 250 police officers.

Equally importantly, development at the edge of towns such as Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware is draining the life away from the town centres, while putting a great strain on essential services. Without concerted and co-ordinated investment in our roads, our public services and our local amenities, our town centres, and those mentioned by the hon. Member for North Durham, could face a future of decline.

At the same time, our rural communities face the greatest agricultural crisis in a generation. Sadly, Whitehall seems to have other priorities. It seems determined to force us to build thousands of extra houses, many of them on our green belt. Those problems of town and country are interwoven, and I for one will fight and fight again to ensure that we breathe life back into our towns and that we defend our green belt from excessive development.

The Bill before the House today seeks to strengthen the controls on the export of defence equipment. No one doubts the need to improve the accountability and transparency of decision making in Whitehall, by Ministers and officials alike, and I take a direct interest in that issue, for two reasons.

First, the economy of Hertfordshire has a long and respected tradition in the defence and aviation sectors, and many of my constituents work for leading names in those industries. Secondly, I have a long-held interest in matters of defence and international security. Indeed, I believe that the first duty of Governments is to ensure the security of their people.

While it is right to try to keep military hardware out of the hands of tyrants and terrorists, it is also essential, as several hon. Members have pointed out, that we recognise the right of every nation, large and small, to defend itself. As the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) pointed out, that right is upheld in the United Nations charter. Without the means to deter and repel aggression, that right is worthless. Many small nations today—the names of which are familiar to us all—would not be enjoying their independence had they not had the means to defend their freedom.

It is freedom that has brought me to this House. I believe that personal freedom—freedom of speech, the freedom to be oneself, free choice, free enterprise, or simply the freedom from constant intrusion and interference in our daily lives—lies at the heart of a civilised society, but throughout my lifetime each of those liberties has been steadily eroded. There is always a plausible reason—always a good excuse—but every intrusion, ban and restriction tilts the balance away from us as individuals and local communities and towards the large lobby groups, multinationals or big business. Indeed, the Government are perhaps the largest lobby group of all.

Only an effective Parliament can restore that balance. Throughout this country's history, this House, more than any other institution, has been the champion of our liberty. We, as Members of this House, are privileged, for we are free to speak without fear or favour. We also have the opportunity to provide a voice for those who are rarely heard. That is why I say that we all have a duty to challenge Government—every Government—and to question and hold to account those in authority, not for ourselves but for those whom we seek to represent.

In recent years, I have been saddened to watch the status of this House diminish in our nation's affairs. The impact of the European Union, a burgeoning media and the development of semi-detached Government agencies have all served to undermine the role of this place; yet I still believe that this House can and should remain at the heart of our national debate. That is why, even though I am a new boy, I passionately believe that we must strengthen the House's Committees, extend the scope and powers of scrutiny and ensure that the career of a parliamentarian is as respected as that of a Minister: after all, it is likely to last somewhat longer. The recent Hansard Society report is an excellent manifesto for restoring the House as our national forum, and I strongly support its aims and conclusions.

To be elected to this House is an honour. I will do my best to serve my constituents as well as I can. I know that I will make mistakes along that path and probably upset some people in the process, but none of that will matter if I can make a small difference to the lives of some of my constituents.

To be a member of this House is also a privilege because it affords each of us the chance to speak freely and hold authority to account. It gives us the opportunity to provide a clear, distinctive voice for those values that we each hold dear to our hearts. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to make my first contribution, and to right hon. and hon. Members for listening to me with such patience.

7.43 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): It is a new experience for me to congratulate an hon. Member on a maiden speech. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on a thoughtful and well-judged speech. He rightly paid tribute to his predecessor, who was renowned in the House for his work with the third world. I am sure that the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford will continue in the same vein.

The hon. Gentleman said that he lives in a lovely part of the country. I hope that if I holiday down there, I will be able to experience his delight in that part of the country. He gave notice that he will be a champion for his constituents. I wish him well in this House over the next few years.

I congratulate my hon. Friends for North Durham (Mr. Jones), for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), for Redcar (Vera Baird) and the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on their excellent speeches. The talent that has been displayed today demonstrates that the House is in very good hands for the future.

I wish, in welcoming the Bill, to show my support for the opportunity that it provides. We can rightly be proud of the fact that we are overhauling export control powers for the first time in 60 years. The Bill clearly responds to the increasingly complex and volatile world in which we live, and I believe that it will bolster and enhance the vital and significant role that we can play in making the world a safer place now and in the future.

I welcome the action that the Government have already taken on export controls, including the adoption of a European Union code of conduct on arms exports and the publication of comprehensive annual reports on strategic export controls. The fourth report is currently being prepared, and I believe that it will be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In addition, the Government have strengthened and improved the effectiveness of export controls. A key measure that comes to mind is the Landmines Act 1998, which has been referred to today. The Act gave effect to the Ottawa convention banning the import, export and manufacture of all forms of anti-personnel land mines.

We have sought to minimise the risk of United Kingdom defence exports being diverted to undesirable end-users by putting in place procedures to strengthen the

[Mr. Bill Tynan]

process of risk assessment at the export licensing stage. We have played a leading role in contributing to the work of international bodies, which has resulted in the UN conference taking place in New York today on illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. More clearly needs to be done in this area, and I welcome the further advances that the Bill will make possible.

I should like to focus on two specific areas addressed by the Bill—the trafficking and brokering of weapons and related equipment and the transfer of technology by intangible means. It is important to recognise that the UK arms industry employs thousands of workers. I declare an interest as a former official of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, which covered the defence industry. The arms industry is a vital component of an already declining manufacturing base, and I believe that it deserves support. We must also recognise, however, the distasteful and dangerous side to the arms trade through the trafficking and brokering of arms to areas of instability and conflict.

At present, a licence to broker in arms is not required. As the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) have pointed out, in a country where one needs a licence to marry, go fishing and drive a car, that is clearly absurd and must be addressed. The benefits of a system of licensing have been articulated succinctly. As the director of Oxfam, David Bryer, has said, tougher licensing will make a real difference to countless people in developing countries whose lives are wrecked by bullets and guns sold by British arms brokers.

In an increasingly volatile world, with the worrying proliferation of rogue states, the balance of world power will in large part be decided by the military hardware and destructive capability of individual nation states. There is increasing evidence that significant amounts of arms flowing into regions of conflict are being transferred there by arms brokers. For example, in 1995 a company based in the Isle of Man was involved in supplying arms to Rwandan rebels based in Zaire.

I therefore welcome the new powers that the Bill will provide to enable a licensing regime to regulate the trafficking and brokering of arms. Among other things, it will cover all major weapons and weapons platforms, light weapons and small arms, ammunition and key items of military equipment. I particularly welcome the fact that details of those applying for licences will be placed on a register, which will make the process more transparent and open, and it would be further enhanced if such a system were made available on an international basis.

A key area of concern remains, however. Although the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 allows the Government to regulate exports from and imports to the UK, it does not allow them to impose controls on UK persons overseas trafficking in goods between overseas countries or brokering such deals. Although I welcome the Government's intention to tackle the issue through secondary legislation under the Bill, it is essential that such legislation effectively addresses that serious omission by controlling the activities of UK citizens and companies wherever they are conducted.

Concern was recently articulated by Dr. Ian Davis of Saferworld. He said that if full extra-territorial measures are not taken, the danger is that British citizens will simply evade controls by operating from another country. A recent case provides a perfect example. In 1997, Sandline was involved in supplying Sierra Leone with military hardware from Bulgaria. It is vital that the measure covers such cases.

It has been argued that legislation would be difficult to implement and police, but there is increasing international co-operation to deal with trafficking in other goods, such as humans and drugs, and to combat organised crime through organisations such as Interpol and the use of joint intelligence operations. Surely such international co-operation could be used to combat and police the international arms trade.

Previous legislation was compromised by the fact that extra-territorial questions were not dealt with adequately. I am sure that the House will welcome and appreciate the Government's intention to introduce secondary legislation that will allow powers to tackle such questions.

My second focus is on the transfer of technology by intangible means. At present, a licence is needed to export certain technologies. Controls on technology and software exports derive mainly from various international export control regimes. However, for technologies and software—mainly military—to be subject to national control, export licences are currently needed only when technology or software is exported in a physical form, such as a disk. Crucially, that does not include export by electronic or other intangible means.

That provision does not dovetail with the European Council regulation in respect of dual-use technology and, furthermore, it clearly highlights the inadequacy of the 1939 Act, which gives the Government power to control only tangible exports. The Act falls short of the provisions required in the age of e-mail, fax, telephone and sophisticated computer technology. Indeed, when the 1939 Act was passed, the bright age of the computer had yet to dawn.

In the 21st century, it is plain that the central means of communication—especially over considerable distances—will be electronic. It is thus vital that we recognise that advance and the potential and power that it provides. The current loophole under the 1939 Act will obviously be effectively and systematically exploited unless we close it.

For that reason, I welcome the new powers that the Bill provides to allow the Government to control transfers of technology by intangible means. The measure will allow for the establishment of controls on military technology exports, in line with those that already exist for dual-use technology. Those controls will, rightly, include the export of documents, blueprints, manuals, diagrams and so forth by both tangible and electronic means. I also welcome the provisions made for the introduction of controls on the transfer of technology by non-electronic tangible means, together with controls on the provision of technical services where they would assist in the development of weapons of mass destruction or related missile programmes.

I welcome the Bill. It provides the UK with a more adequate legislative framework and will promote global peace. I welcome powers to prohibit the supply of weapons to regions of conflict, while allowing legitimate trade by British defence companies. I welcome powers to

introduce a licensing requirement on the export of military technology by electronic means as well as in tangible form. At the same time, the Bill responds to the Scott report by ensuring that the Government are accountable to Parliament for the use of those new powers by providing for parliamentary scrutiny of the secondary legislation introduced under them. In the main, the Bill meets the rightful criticisms made in the Scott report about the lack of such provisions in the 1939 Act. It will undoubtedly contribute to meeting our global obligations and in making the world a safer place.

7.55 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I add my sincere congratulations to those already offered to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on a thoughtful and confident maiden speech. I wish him well for the future.

The debate has been most interesting. It takes place on the first day of the UN conference in New York on the reduction of global trade in small arms. I share the dismay expressed by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) that the American delegation will scupper any decision on that trade—mainly owing to the influence and pressure exerted by the National Rifle Association in the US in upholding the principle of the right to bear arms and so on. That casts a dark shadow over that important conference.

Understandably, much of our debate has been about small arms. However, after the Dunblane massacre, when we in this place rightly and swiftly brought in strict controls, it is distasteful that the UK remains happy to be a major manufacturer and exporter of those items that were so urgently and correctly banned.

I welcome the Bill. It will tighten the UK's export control system, although perhaps not enough. In that respect, the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) made a thoughtful and thought-provoking speech from the standpoint of considerable experience. We all know the consequences of the indiscriminate use of weapons: we see refugees displaced by civil war and genocide, and we see the peril that our relief personnel experience daily. In today's wars, most of the people killed are civilians and almost half of those casualties are children. Directly or indirectly, conflict causes and aggravates poverty.

Given the importance of the Bill, it is surprising that it has taken more than five years, since the publication of the Scott inquiry into the arms to Iraq scandal, for the measure to come before the House. I am pleased that the Bill has been introduced, but it has taken a long time. As other speakers have noted, primary legislation on the subject has not been introduced since 1939, and the Scott inquiry amply showed the shortcomings of current legislation.

In the meantime, the Government have—to their credit—introduced more stringent controls. The export of land mines and torture equipment has been banned. We talk about end-use certificates—was there ever a moral justification for the production and export of torture equipment? Could there ever be such a justification? The answer is no. That is only common sense. It is disgusting to think that the UK was involved in such trade. However, the Government have introduced a ban on such exports and also on the granting of export licences when there is patent evidence of human rights abuses. Of course that, too, is welcome—as is the fact that the UK has signed up to the European Union code of conduct.

However, we have seen many disgraceful examples of the misuse of the arms control system in the UK since Labour came to power. That shows that much more must be done, not only by strengthening the system through this Bill but by further intervention. In the first eight months of the Labour Government, 31 per cent. of UK arms export licences were issued to conflict-vulnerable societies. In January 2000, it was revealed that spare parts for Hawk fighter jets were being sold to Zimbabwe. Those planes were being used by that country in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In her opening remarks, the Secretary of State referred to the injuries of people in the Congo. The Zimbabwean presence there is playing a major part in keeping the conflict alive—and, of course, Zimbabwe is not known for its human rights record, even within its own borders. At about the same time, the premature lifting of the arms embargo on Indonesia led to Hawk aircraft being sold to Indonesia when armed militias were still hounding the East Timorese. All that took place while a purported ethical foreign policy was being followed. Those examples show that the current system of scrutiny is not adequate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned the need for pre-scrutiny by Parliament, and I add my voice to theirs.

It was reported in the *Official Report* of 23 January 1997, that an export licence granted for six water cannon to Indonesia included "associated equipment". Parliamentary questioning eventually revealed that the "associated equipment" was 310 armoured personnel carriers. That is rather disturbing, and those answers would obviously not have been given if those questions had not been asked, so there is a need for better scrutiny and far better transparency.

Plaid Cymru has long sought to draw attention to the ethnic cleansing of Tamils and the many stories of extra-judicial killings by the police and armed forces in Sri Lanka. During 1997 alone, 67 export licences were granted for the sale of military equipment to Sri Lanka, rendering it the fourth most popular destination for UK arms that year. Yes, Britain is one of the top exporters of military equipment in the world. That gives me no pleasure, any more than it does the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). Britain has between 20 and 25 per cent. of the world market. That trade contributes £203 million a year to the United Kingdom economy. However, the industry receives Government subsidies worth £431 million. According to my mathematical interpretation, it makes no economic or ethical sense to pursue such an agenda.

The Export Credits Guarantee Department guarantees that moneys are paid in respect of such exports. The aim is to break even, but any shortfall comes from taxpayers' pockets. The arms companies need export credit guarantees—without them, many arms deals would be too risky for the companies concerned and would not happen. In 1999, the then Foreign Secretary instigated a review of the ECGD to find out how it could better contribute to sustainable development. The review concluded that cover for military projects in the 63 poorest countries would not be extended. That was a step in the right direction but it did not go far enough. I should like the ECGD to withdraw its support from all military exports, as Liberal Democrat Members have suggested. It is also something about which some Labour Members are concerned.

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

The problem is that those exports are often to the very poorest of countries, which can least afford them and which, in effect, least need them. No one would argue with the right to bear arms in self-defence, nor with the right to provide arms where they are strictly necessary to defend countries that come under seige. Only an idiot would say that that is not right, but far too many of those arms are being supplied to countries in which civil wars are being fought. That is unjustified. Arms are going in by the back door as well, and Britain is contributing by producing those arms.

Early-day motion 191 was tabled during the 1999–2000 Session, and I am proud to say that a Plaid Cymru Member and Scottish National party Member were two of the six sponsors. It was signed by 120 Members, some of whom are in the Chamber this evening. That shows that the view it expressed had considerable support.

The sale of arms often diverts money from much-needed civil projects, which takes money away from funds that could contribute to sustainable development. The schedule to the draft Bill detailed the purposes for which export controls can be imposed and included a section referring to sustainable development. That provision has been removed, seemingly without explanation. That is surprising, bearing in mind the fact that the Secretary of State referred to sustainable development when she opened the debate. It is unfortunate that those words have disappeared from the schedule, and I hope that, in winding-up the debate, the Minister will explain why that very important principle disappeared from the Bill. I also hope that those important words will be reintroduced in Committee.

I should also like to refer briefly to tied aid. I welcome the fact that the Government have committed themselves to getting rid of that practice. Many of the recommendations of the Scott inquiry have been incorporated into the Bill, but several hon. Members have voiced the genuine concern that too much is being left to secondary legislation. The Quadripartite Committee has called this a mainly enabling Bill, as much of the substance will be in the secondary legislation. Of course, the devil will be in the detail, making it hard to judge the real impact that the Bill will have. No doubt things will become a little clearer in Committee, but it is difficult to have as full a debate as we would like on Second Reading. I am very disappointed that the Government's response to the Quadripartite Committee report was not published until today. Surely parliamentary business should not be conducted in that way on such an important issue.

One of the loopholes in the Bill is that it does not seem as though end-use controls will be tightened. I know that there is a substantial problem, but if we do not attempt to solve it, we shall do nothing at all. That is patently obvious. It is also obvious that the current system of end-use certificates is easily abused. To get a licence to export from the United Kingdom, a company must give the Government an end-use certificate, naming the importer of the weapons and the uses to which they will be put. In theory, that sounds good; in practice, it has proved utterly worthless. Apparently, it is easy to get an end-use certificate, and no one checks how the arms are used when they leave the United Kingdom. We need a follow-up monitoring and inspection system. I hope that that important issue will be tackled in Committee.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Will he share with the House his thoughts on what sort of sanctions he would recommend if such an abuse occurs? Revoking licences has been mentioned, but could penalties be imposed that would continue when the company wanted a future application to be approved?

Mr. Llwyd: Indeed; I am sure that that is right, and both those points are valid. We are currently talking about developing the international courts, and I wonder whether they will be able to impose sanctions—I know not, but I hope that the important points that the hon. Gentleman makes will be discussed in Committee.

I welcome moves to regulate arms traffickers. In September 1998, Kofi Annan spoke about making arms brokering to embargoed countries a punishable crime and said:

> "Possibly no other single initiative would do more to help combat the flow of illicit arms to Africa."

That important principle should be considered very carefully. The Bill will impose trade controls on goods passing through the United Kingdom, or if the transaction involves a UK national. Again, it is worth noting that that will be done through secondary legislation. The Bill simply states that the Secretary of State may make provisions by order, and so on. We need to extend regulation to British nationals based abroad, not just to those operating in this country. Without that safeguard, it will be all too easy for brokers or for traffickers simply to move their operations to another country. The Bill refers to that problem, but it says only that the Secretary of State "may" do something about it. Again, many important provisions in the Bill will be left to secondary or subordinate legislation.

I also seek clarification of how British companies can license foreign arms manufacturers. There is another potential loophole, because the growth of such licensed production effectively allows companies to circumvent regulations. In the United States, if a company producing arms overseas under a US licence wants to export goods, it must obtain a further licence from the US Government before that export can take place. I hope that this issue will also be discussed in Committee and that the Government will consider an equally stringent system.

One advance in the Bill is the extension of parliamentary scrutiny, but I and many other Members have argued that that might not have gone far enough. I have no doubt that this issue will be discussed in Committee.

The Government have published three annual reports on strategic export controls, and I am pleased that the publication of the annual report on this subject has now been given a statutory basis. In the past, Plaid Cymru has been concerned that this report has not included full information on the number and type of weapons exported. In its report of 2 February 2001, the Quadripartite Committee made several recommendations on expanding the level of detail in the annual reports to include the quantities of equipment supplied and end-user information. The Government promised more detail but, so far as I know, it has not yet appeared.

The Bill does not allow for prior parliamentary scrutiny of applications for licences. The issue has been debated today, so I shall not go over that ground again but I believe that parliamentary Committees are made up of responsible people who are there to do a job and I see no reason why prior parliamentary scrutiny should not occur even though issues such as commercial confidentiality mean that it is not a simple matter. I hope that before we dismiss the possibility of such scrutiny out of hand, we will consider it further in Committee.

Such scrutiny takes place in the United States and Sweden, and the Quadripartite Committee suggested a wholly workable two-stage process whereby only the licences that could cause concern need be examined in detail. The Government refused the Committee's first suggestion, but I believe that the Committee has come back with a modified model, which the Government are still considering. I hope that this important issue will be considered in Committee and that the Bill will be amended accordingly.

The problem of misuse of the arms exports systems is a global one, but the Bill is a very welcome step forward. We in Plaid Cymru—I also speak for the Scottish National party—argue that, once the UK has put its own house in order in relation to arms controls, it will be in a better position to influence the development of arms controls elsewhere. The ultimate goal should and must be the development of truly international safe- and-sound controls.

8.13 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Although the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) is no longer in the Chamber, I congratulate him on his excellent speech. I have been sitting here rubbing my neck—very stupidly, I once agreed to play a season as tight-head in the front row and he has brought all those memories flooding back. I have had a sore neck ever since.

I was also refreshed to hear the speech of—I shall try to pronounce this correctly—the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). It was refreshing to hear a nationalist speak about foreign affairs. However, saying that one has obtained the agreement of the Scottish National party does not necessarily commend one's policies. The SNP policies that I have seen often form the weakest foreign policy that I can imagine.

I welcome the Bill, which follows a number of improvements made to the arms control export regime since 1997 that have not required legislation, including the introduction of tough new arms export licensing criteria and a unilateral ban on the export of equipment used for torture. Other improvements have been this country's role in securing a European Union code of conduct on arms exports and the Government's widely welcomed ban on the import, export, manufacture and transfer of anti-personnel land mines.

Peace and security across the world require sovereign states to be able to ensure the security of their citizens. Ultimately, from time to time that will require that those states have the ability to use, or threaten to use, force on actual or potential aggressors. That, of course, requires weaponry. However, as all states are not capable of manufacturing their own weaponry, it is important that they should be able to import such equipment as can reasonably be demonstrated as a necessity for legitimate security and defence purposes. A legitimate arms trade therefore has a role to play in intelligent world governance. However, there is a flip-side to the arms trade and it takes the form of a dangerous underbelly where immoral trafficking can blight the lives of many of the world's most vulnerable people.

The defence industry in this country is an essential part of our manufacturing base, and exports are a fundamental part of that industry's future. That is why it is important that the UK maintains the most transparent and accountable arms export system in the world. I understand that the Defence Manufacturers Association has said that it fully supports the Government's efforts to replace the existing legislation and welcomes the Bill's aims to introduce controls on the activities of brokers and traffickers.

Non-governmental organisations with interests in this subject have welcomed the Bill. They include the Red Cross, which believes that the Bill will contribute to the reduction in global levels of armed conflict and the attendant human suffering. Oxfam, too, has noted that the Bill is an important step towards closing the loopholes in existing legislation.

I welcome the Bill's emphasis on controlling the brokering of weapons and related equipment. I also suspect that many unscrupulous people at the margins will seek to exploit any loopholes that it might inadvertently leave. I hope that there will be none, but it is worth raising two or three potential hazards.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) asked for specific examples. Although he is not here at the moment, I hope that he will appreciate that I have attempted to respond to his request. In April this year, *The Guardian* uncovered evidence revealing that British pilots and air cargo companies had been involved in supplying weapons on both sides of the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A British pilot, Brian Martin, told Oxfam that he had flown planes registered in Swaziland for two Congolese carriers from Entebbe in Uganda and Kigali in Rwanda. Meanwhile, the UK company Air Charter Services was found to have leased a Boeing 707 to a Dutch company that flew arms from Bulgaria to Slovakia to Harare for transit to the Zimbabwean forces in the Congo. In both cases, it seems that the Government were powerless to intervene.

The Guardian today points out that such unscrupulous arms dealers are past masters at creating confusing paper trails that go across the world and into areas that are the responsibility of different sovereign states so that they avoid proper oversight of their work. That is why it is so important that the Bill covers UK dealers who operate overseas. A private company called Avient Aviation is a good example of that practice. It is based in Harare and run by a British citizen, Andrew Smith. The *Financial Times* has obtained a contract signed in December 1999 by Mr. Smith and the Congolese Government. It says that Avient would provide a crew of Ukrainian pilots to fly Antinov 12 aircraft to operate along and behind enemy lines to support ground troops and to work against invading forces in the Congo. Avient is understood to have received about £20,000 a month for that. It is highly desirable that the activities of companies like Avient be brought within the influence of the UK Government.

[Mr. Eric Joyce]

It is important to mention the significance of end-user controls, which was most notably referred to by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). The Bill will improve the checks and risk assessment at the licensing stage, which is welcome, but unless a system exists to monitor the end use of weapons that are sold from the UK, there is a significant risk that British arms might continue to be used in unacceptable conflicts and repression, which is always unacceptable. However, I appreciate that that is difficult to do, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) said.

In 1994, the UK company Miltec supplied more than £5 million of small arms and ammunition to the then Rwandan army from Albania and Israel. The end-use certificate said that the cargo was destined for the Ministry of Defence in Goma in the former Zaire. However, on arrival in Goma, the merchandise was loaded on to trucks and moved into neighbouring Rwanda. In 1997, the Ugandan Government bought four helicopter gunships supplied by the UK-based Consolidated Sales Corporation, registered in the Virgin Islands. Later reports in a Kampala newspaper quoted a Rwandan official as saying that two of the gunships ended up in Rwanda. He said:

"This country has to turn to its friends in neighbouring countries as it is difficult for us to acquire items directly on the international arms market."

Rwanda might find it difficult, but the examples that I have given of people circumventing the rules hardly sit at the apex of logistical sophistication.

The Bill represents a significant step forward and will make a considerable contribution to peace and security in troubled parts of the world. However, there remains cause for concern on some issues, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure us about UK traders who are based abroad, shipping agents and end-user controls.

8.22 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) has obviously studied the subject and feels keenly about it. The House listened to his speech with interest.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) is closely associated with arms control. She regretted the absence of the Leader of the House who took a keen interest in arms control when he was shadow Foreign Secretary and Foreign Secretary. May I echo her concern at his absence? Of all the ways in which the Government have treated the House with contempt, the one which I regret the most and which would be the most easily remedied is in relation to the presence of senior Ministers during important debates. The right hon. Gentleman was very concerned about arms control and argued vociferously in discussions on the Scott report that the then Conservative Government were to blame for their lack of legislation. The fact that he has made only one transit through the House in this debate is regrettable. I shall never fail to notice the absence of senior Ministers. It would be easy for them to encourage their supporters and the House by being present. Their absence is unfortunate.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member. Did he give my right hon. Friend notice that he was going to refer to him?

Mr. Viggers: I did not. I have regretted only his absence, not his conduct, which I have not criticised. I may be reprimanded by Madam Deputy Speaker, but I would not normally regard an expression of regret at a Minister's absence as requiring the courtesy of a letter. Of course, I respect the fact that, as the right hon. Gentleman points out, if one is to make a personal attack, one usually makes it known to the Member concerned.

Dr. Julian Lewis: In support of my hon. Friend, I must point out that it would surely have been difficult for him to give notice of that reference because he did not know, before today, whether the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) would be present.

Mr. Viggers: During another debate, a Cabinet Minister was present on the Front Bench for a few moments. I saw him later in the day, and expressed my regret at his absence from the Chamber, and he replied, "I can't sit in there. I've got a country to run." That is regrettable. The House deserves the presence of senior Ministers.

The right hon. Member for Livingston was very vociferous during the discussions of the Scott report in 1996. He demanded legislation of the Conservative Government, who set up an inquiry to consider that. This Government came to power in 1997 and were greatly criticised for their inactivity in that respect. In the previous Parliament, the Quadripartite Committee—the meeting of the Defence Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Trade and Industry Committee and the International Development Committee—of which I am a member, criticised the Government for failing to introduce legislation as they had said they would. In February this year, the Committee said that it was dismayed by the lack of movement.

Finally, in March, a draft Bill was published, and then there was a reference to legislation in the Queen's Speech. Now the Bill is being introduced quickly but without much detail. That presents a conundrum—why inactivity, then sudden activity but little detail in the Bill? I have become very cynical in the past four years, and I suspect that there is a broader reason behind the timing and the strategy, because the Government are masters of timing and strategy.

Let us consider the broad political framework within which we must set the Bill. I will stay in order, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the background is very relevant. Let us look at the Government's position: the railways will stay privatised; air traffic control will be privatised despite everything; there has been no move on proportional representation; private medicine will contribute to the national health service; there are no concessions to the trade union movement; there has been a crackdown on habitual offenders rather than

the adoption of liberal attitudes towards them; the Government are forcing single mothers to work; they are taking incapacity benefit away from many people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman some licence, but he is now wandering rather wide of the subject under discussion.

Mr. Viggers: I have finished sketching the background, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Looking at the glum faces behind the Prime Minister when incapacity benefit was being discussed, I realised that something needed to be done. How on earth could the Government cheer up this large influx of Labour Members? What could they do to make them feel that it was all worth while? What could they do that would cost nothing? The answer was to legislate on arms control, which will damage the defence industry, cost the Treasury nothing and cheer up Members such as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley. This is a framework Bill with no detail but it has cheered hon. Members up, and we have heard them saying how pleased they are to see it. The Government thought, "Let's throw the left wing a bone—one without much meat on it, of course."

Mr. Berry: If this Bill is only a bone being thrown to Members, why did every Conservative member of the Quadripartite Committee urge the Government to act on the matter even more quickly than they did?

Mr. Viggers: We were very happy to encourage the left wing in their hunt.

I welcome the Bill because the Scott report recommended a review of the primary legislation on weapons exports. It was unsatisfactory for that matter to be dealt with by an Act that was passed by the House of Commons in one day in 1939, in the run-up to war. That Act obviously had defects, but there are two major defects in the present Bill. The first is that we have had no sight of the proposed related orders and secondary legislation, so it is impossible for the House to judge the impact of the Bill. Secondly, the Bill is clearly defective because it continues the power of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 to control imports. Surely, after four years, the Government should be capable of remedying, updating and modernising that Act; they should deal not just with exports, but with imports as well. The Bill is defective in those two major areas.

The Government's handling of existing legislation is certainly defective and is failing exporters; we should not play down the importance of exports of defence equipment. The defence industry employs 350,000 people in this country; it has been calculated that 90,000 of those jobs relate directly to the export of arms equipment. The Government are letting down those people because they are failing to meet their 20-day target for consent for an arms export licence. They aim to give such consent within 20 days in 70 per cent. of cases, but they have done so for only 57 per cent. of applications. Their handling of appeals is worse; the Quadripartite Committee was told by members of the Defence Manufacturers Association that some applications for arms exports are so old, fusty and dusty that they think of sending them birthday cards every year; year after year, the Government have not done anything to deal with them.

The Leader of the House of Commons said:

"I have limited sympathy with complaints we are not moving fast enough."

The House should not be satisfied with a Foreign Secretary—as the Leader of the House then was—saying that he has limited sympathy for a major British industry; the Government should do better.

There is no doubt that the Bill, which will be imposed on the industry, will put a heavy burden on business. Looking at it clause by clause—which, of course, will be done not here but in Committee—one can see that sweeping powers are taken for the Secretary of State to control the transfer of any kind of technology and technical assistance, of which a wide definition is given. Clause 2 governs the provision of information inside the United Kingdom, if it is transferred

"by a person or from a place outside the United Kingdom to . . . a place . . . also outside the United Kingdom (but only where the transfer is by, or within the control of, a United Kingdom person)".

That seems like a legal nightmare. Of course, it would make sense if we had secondary legislation and orders. However, we do not; the Bill is effectively a framework measure and I am not surprised that defence manufacturers have expressed serious concern about its effect on their industry.

I shall give another example of the imposition of control. Although details are not yet available, controls will be imposed on transfers between subsidiaries of companies and transfers of the control of technology by intangible means, including telephone and e-mail. That would mean that an employee using an e-mail or a telephone to talk to another employee of another subsidiary could be transferring technology and committing an offence under the Bill. There is therefore a sweeping power, which is worrying.

Finally, as I have said, control over extra-territorial activity may be impracticable. If it is followed through in all possible severity, it sounds like a job creation scheme for MI6. My conclusions to my brief contribution are: I am suspicious of the timing of the Bill; I am not reassured by the absence of detail; I am worried about the burdens on business; I am concerned that the Government are seeking to impose sanctions on citizens working outside UK territory; and I am worried about whether the measure is practicable. Is there a better way ahead? I think that our defence manufacturers and arms exporters are extremely responsible; almost without exception, those companies take their public responsibilities and world responsibilities very seriously indeed. Looking around the world, we see that it is not the United Kingdom that is responsible for the vast proliferation of arms in third-world countries, but other nations. The United States is a very large arms exporter and I believe that it is a responsible one, but I cannot say the same of Russia, China, India, South Africa and Israel, which are less responsible in this field.

The best route ahead is for us to work with our European Union and American allies, as well as our allies around the world. I think that we have leverage with countries such as Russia and India that will enable us to exert pressure on them, but I accept that the 1939 legislation needs upgrading and uprating. I therefore support the Bill, which will improve the moral climate and the stance with which the United Kingdom Government can negotiate further improvements from other countries, where the main blame for arms exports lies.

8.36 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate, which has been absolutely fascinating. I have tried to sit through most of it—unfortunately, I had to leave briefly—and the contributions that I have heard were sincere and covered a range of issues. Indeed, this has been one of the better debates that I have heard in the House. I should like to congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), on his appointment; I am delighted to see him back on the Front Bench. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on her well-deserved promotion.

I do not want to repeat the arguments that have already been advanced. Instead, I should like to develop a slightly different theme and approach the Bill from a different perspective. I do not claim to be an arms control or arms reduction expert, but I take an interest in defence matters and have the honour and privilege, as you once did, Madam Deputy Speaker, of representing this Parliament on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Hon. Members from all parties might be surprised to hear that issues such as arms control and reduction probably play a greater part in debate in such international arenas than ever before, certainly since the second world war. I also want to comment briefly on the contribution made by the Bill to a much wider debate in international defence forums, and to explain my conclusion that, far from damaging British defence interests, the Bill enhances them.

Defence manufacturers have welcomed this well-balanced Bill. We must remember that they are commercial organisations that exist not out of worldwide altruistic concern but to make money. They recognise that the Bill provides an opportunity to do just that, as it allows them to operate in a framework that will help them to continue as world leaders not only in the production and distribution of arms, but in anticipating the changes that are occurring in the defence world and in being ahead of the game.

Before I develop those arguments, I should comment on some of the spurious criticisms that have been made of the Government's record on arms control. It is outrageous for the Government to be criticised for delay by a party that had almost 20 years to do something about the control of arms exports. Not only did the Conservatives fail to act, but in 1990, they strengthened the powers under the 1939 Act, an emergency measure that was introduced under the immediate threat of war to conceal arms production and exports. That was right at the time. However, it is outrageous that all Governments let that position continue for so long. It is especially outrageous that the last Government allowed it to go on for 18 years and strengthened the legislation by ensuring that it could not be challenged by the European courts.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My hon. Friend mentioned 1990. In the 1980s, the Conservative Government breached the regulations on aid and arms sales. We should also remind hon. Members of the Pergau dam scandal.

Mr. Smith: Exactly. It does not stop there. Great play has been made of the Conservative Government's White Paper. Why did they produce it? Because of the scandal of the sale of arms to Iraq. They were caught conniving with business and trying to persecute business people when they were found out. They were therefore obliged to make it appear as if they were doing something. I shall not develop that argument too far, but it is a damn cheek for Conservative Members to criticise the Government's record, which is a good record and one of which we can be proud.

It has already been said that, immediately after taking office in 1997, the Government took steps to strengthen our control over arms exports. They signed the European code on arms sales without hesitation, and played an important part in abolishing land mines—a leading role in the Ottawa summit, which has effectively removed land mines from the major arenas of war. It would be inconceivable for NATO to consider using land mines in an operation, especially one that involved European forces, even though the Americans have not signed the relevant treaty.

The Bill is ground-breaking because it will set standards for defence manufacturers and for exporting weapons that will be recognised throughout the world. It will put our defence manufacturers in a stronger position. I envisage that they will expect to support regimes and controls that do not allow them to abuse arms exports and that prevent arms from getting into the hands of children—something that has led to so much slaughter, particularly in third-world countries.

The security environment has changed fundamentally, and it continues to change. The threat is not from the former Soviet bloc or a clearly identifiable enemy. The current fear and great insecurity is caused by rogue, destabilised nations, which can threaten the first world with weapons of mass destruction. The great fear is of weapons delivered not on the end of a ballistic missile, but in suitcases or through the actions of terrorists and extremists. Where do they come from? Not from the obvious candidates of the past but from some of those smaller nations that are fundamentally destabilised by civil war and internal warfare, supported by the sale of illegal arms, and especially small arms.

There is a defence interest in this country, and throughout NATO and the United Nations, in removing that destabilising factor. That means that the future of the arms industry will change dramatically and fundamentally. The Bill will help us lead that change. The defence industry plays a role as vital as our military forces—and I need not tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hope I need not tell other hon. Members, that although our military forces may be among the smaller forces in the world, they are undoubtedly the best, leading standards of military practice and military conduct throughout the world. In almost every recent conflict, including those in the Balkans, our forces have played a tremendous role. Our defence industries are right behind them, and I believe that they will be the industries of Europe tomorrow. This Bill will facilitate that development by introducing standards now that may seem by some to put us at a disadvantage, but which will undoubtedly put us in the forefront in years to come.

8.46 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I hope that I shall be forgiven if, in congratulating all those on both sides of the House who have made their maiden speeches today, I single out that of my hon. Friend the Member for

Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), who spoke with great commitment, conviction and clarity. He was a credit to the people who selected him to be the Conservative candidate, and to the people who elected him to be their Conservative Member of Parliament, and I am sure that he will go on to be a great credit to all those he serves in his constituency.

I can make that prediction with some authority, because I first met my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford, as he now is, in 1982 when he was an undergraduate student at Reading university, where he had set up a society—a multilateral society—that was campaigning to keep Britain's strategic defences strong at a time when my good friend the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), whom I really do greatly admire, was proudly proclaiming her conscience at Greenham Common with her sisterly friends. I believe that my hon. Friend has been vindicated by time and I know that, in future, he will go on to show that he still possesses the good judgment that he showed in abundance in those fraught and controversial debates.

I also give the warmest possible welcome to the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths). He may not be as senior a Minister as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) would have liked to be present, but I am particularly glad to see that the hon. Gentleman has demonstrated that there is, in new Labour politics, such a thing as life after ministerial death. I congratulate him on his return to the Front Bench. I thought that he was a jolly chap, with a cheerful disposition, and a good Minister, and I was at a loss to know why he lost his job in the first place.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: That has finished him off.

Dr. Lewis: I certainly hope that I have not finished the Minister's prospects for the future. I would point out that he is not the first person to make a return from the living dead. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) did that once before, but I am sure that many hon. Members on both sides of the House are particularly anxious that he should not do so again.

The problem that we must deal with in addressing the Bill is that the questions that we would like to ask are not really susceptible to being answered at this stage. We would like to ask how practical it is. We would like to ask whether the measures that it proposes can be monitored and enforced abroad. We would like to ask whether it will be an effective measure or merely a unilateral gesture.

As has been pointed out time and again, all that depends on the specific secondary legislation, which we have not yet had a chance to read. Much has been made of the work of the Quadripartite Committee, and the first recommendation in the summary of conclusions and recommendations in its 1 May report states:

"The Bill itself is largely an enabling Bill. The meat of the proposals being made will be in the secondary legislation to be made under the Bill. We recommend that every effort is made to ensure that a draft consultative version of the relevant secondary legislation is published before the House is asked to give the Bill a Second Reading."

I am sure that the Committee had good grounds for making that recommendation. Sadly, it has not been heeded.

Similarly, in an intervention on the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who opened for the Conservatives, I quoted the view of Saferworld, which is remarkably similar to the points that were made from the Conservative Front Bench. Saferworld said:

"The key challenge ahead is to ensure that the controls introduced are as comprehensive as possible; the devil will be in the detail of the secondary legislation proposed in the DTI consultation paper which accompanied the draft Bill. In the absence of detailed mechanisms for putting the principles set out in the primary legislation into operation, parliamentarians, and also NGOs and the defence industry, will find it impossible to judge the overall impact of the new legislation."

Indeed. I shall say more about non-governmental organisations later, but our problem is that, because we are unable to have much of a debate about what is in the Bill, we are reduced to debating what is not in it and what may appear in the secondary legislation.

I want to discuss contributions from NGOs which, greatly to their credit, have taken a close interest in the subject over many years. I can sum up their concerns as five, which I have drawn from a compilation of what Oxfam and Amnesty International in particular have described in briefings to parliamentarians on both sides of the House.

The NGOs want licensed production controls that can be applied when goods of strategic and potentially lethal significance are made under licence overseas. We would therefore be unable to ban a product from being exported from this country to a certain destination while allowing the very same product to be made overseas and sent to the very same destination. They also want reference to be made to the effect on sustainable development. That point has been mentioned a number of times in the debate, but I must take issue with it.

Mr. Berry: It would help the House if the hon. Gentleman gave his personal opinion on each issue. Does he endorse the views of the NGOs or is he simply reading out their brief?

Dr. Lewis: I am happy to give my view; that is precisely my intention. I urge the hon. Gentleman to contain his impatience. He may be pleasantly surprised to find that I have more sympathy with some proposals than he would perhaps expect, having heard the reference to me by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley.

The NGOs say that they are concerned about the effect on sustainable development, but I have less sympathy with that than with the first point to which I referred. If a country has a fundamentally democratic regime, it should have the right to make what decisions it thinks best regarding its own priorities. If a fundamentally democratic regime in a poor country fears that it is in danger of being overthrown and that the regime that will replace it will be massively detrimental to the country's future, I would argue that that Government should have the right to decide whether to spend a proportion of the national wealth on importing weapons to defend itself against subversion or incursion. It is up to such a democratic Government to decide; it is not for us to make the decision for them, on the grounds that we know better than a democratic Government in a poor country what they should be doing to safeguard their country's future.

That proposition is very different from the common ground that I suspect exists between the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and me on the question of not

[Dr. Lewis]

allowing arms sales to undesirable regimes. Such regimes are covered by other aspects of what is proposed. I do not consider it right for a western Government such as ours to second-guess the priorities of a respectable Government in a struggling country that is trying to develop, but also trying to protect itself.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Lewis: I will, but then I must make some progress.

Mike Gapes: Let us suppose that two countries have elected Governments, but are also engaged in a long-standing territorial dispute. Exporting weapons into the area could inflame the regional conflict and lead to its continuation, and that might fuel an arms race in the region.

Dr. Lewis: I do not accept the premise. I was talking about countries with representative democratic Governments, albeit perhaps rudimentary ones. I believe that we learn this lesson from history: when two countries have Governments of that sort, such circumstances seldom arise in the first place.

Mike Gapes *rose—*

Dr. Lewis: I must make some progress. I realise that the hon. Gentleman does not accept my point, but we must leave it at that for the moment. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will make a speech of his own later.

We do not usually find Governments who are broadly representative and broadly democratic racing to war with one another. That is certainly true of developed societies, and I would also argue that it is more likely than not to apply in developing countries as well.

The NGOs' third concern is the one that I mentioned briefly in an intervention. It relates to end-use certificates, and whether they can be followed up through monitoring. On the whole, I agree with recommendations suggesting that more needs to be done. It will probably not be possible ever to follow up more than a tiny fraction of these abuses, but I do not accept the argument that just because the whole problem cannot be solved, a sanction should not be provided to make an example of those who can be caught abusing the system. I note that the hon. Member for Kingswood indicates assent. I am delighted to have reached across the divide in the House on this issue.

The NGOs also have a strong case in regard to something that I have not heard mentioned in the parts of the debate that I have been privileged to attend. I am sorry that mine has not been a continuous presence. I refer to the question of whether British airlines that transport goods that we would ban, and that would be covered by the legislation, will have any responsibility for the transport of illicit goods and strategic weapon exports, or whether they will be able to say, "What goes into the packing cases in our cargo holds is not a matter for us." I should be grateful if the Minister would tell us whether those who transport the weapons will be affected by the secondary legislation.

As for prior parliamentary scrutiny of specific licence applications, I must say that I am inclined to sympathise with the Government. They have stated at various stages of the process that it would involve such difficult questions of commercial confidentiality and competitive disadvantage that it is probably impracticable—but I am happy to leave them to fight that out with their own Back Benchers.

Are these measures enforceable? We have seen from what little legislation has been placed before the House that, if someone can be caught in breach of the law as it will be in the future, that person will now face a maximum of 10 rather than seven years in jail. However, I should like to know who will enforce the electronic interception provisions, for example. Indeed, who will address the oral communications issue, which is mentioned in the legislation itself?

Although the controls provided in the Bill are massively lacking in detail and substance, they are enormously wide-ranging in scope. I shall briefly survey a few of them. Clause 1(1) deals with

"export controls in relation to goods of any description."

Clause 2(1) deals with

"transfer controls in relation to technology of any description."

Clause 2(5) states:

"In this Act—

'transfer', in relation to any technology, means a transfer by any means (or combination of means), including oral communication and the transfer of goods on which the technology is recorded or from which it can be derived".

Although it is easy to conceive of such an offence being committed, it is enormously difficult to conceive of such an offence being prevented or detected and punished.

Clause 4(1) deals with

"controls prohibiting or regulating participation in the provision outside the United Kingdom of technical assistance of any description."

Clause 5(1) deals with

"trade controls in relation to controlled goods of any description."

That is what we are talking about in relation to trafficking and brokering overseas.

As I said, those are fascinating goals and worthy ideals. However, we want to know whether they will make good legislation. To make it good legislation, what precisely do the Government propose to do about all those matters that they wish to control? I ask the Minister what opportunities we shall have to examine in detail the specific provisions being proposed to make those mostly worthy aims into practicable realities.

I believe that a few little nuggets in the legislation are sufficiently specific to be worth singling out for praise. Clause 6(1), on information, is well worth while in requiring anyone involved in activities potentially subject to control to keep records as specified in the order, to produce them when demanded, and to give such other information as required.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am becoming increasingly alarmed as my hon. Friend reads out the litany of draconian powers that the Bill confers on Ministers. What provisions does he think the secondary legislation might contain to flesh out some of those quite fearsome powers? They make me feel that I should be voting against the Bill.

Dr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is making my point for me. It is possible for us to look at the Bill and for me to take

one interpretation that encourages me to support it and for him to take another that encourages him to oppose it. As I said, none of us will be in a position to know what to say about the legislation until we see what the Government are proposing to do.

I doubt that it could be argued that many of the proposals are more draconian in principle than the 1939 legislation which they supersede. After all, that was emergency legislation introduced on the eve of war. The question is how the overarching new structure will be applied in practice. Will it be applied too tightly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) fears, or will it be applied so loosely that it will be subject to the very criticisms that the 1939 legislation attracted when the Scott report was published?

There are essential problems of practicality and gaps in our knowledge. There is a bit of a hidden agenda among some Labour Back Benchers who seem more concerned with getting at the arms industry as a whole than with achieving anything very effective for the countries concerned. Sometimes the export of arms is a necessary development to allow countries to preserve their emerging democratic systems.

With the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes), I had the sobering experience of visiting Sierra Leone and seeing at first hand the effects of atrocities carried out not with high-tech weapons but with machetes. Only last week, I was reminded of that visit by a radio programme recorded in Sierra Leone that talked about the irony of the fact that in one part of the country large dumps of small arms that had been captured or handed in were being destroyed, while Britain was sending new small arms to the Sierra Leone army precisely in order to reinforce stability and underpin the democracy that we hope will be permanently restored.

We need to think not only about arms but about the people who have them. Weapons are not in themselves bad: what matters is the use to which they are put. I do not believe that it is right for a poor, struggling democratic system to be denied the arms that it needs to defend itself against insurgents, just because it is poor.

I was ashamed of my own party's conduct in the early 1990s, because when moderate Bosnian Muslims were suffering so greatly and the Governments of western Europe and NATO were not prepared to do anything about it, we also refused to allow arms to go to those people to allow them to protect themselves and their families. The then Conservative Foreign Secretary—to whom we are always supposed to genuflect and who is often quoted by Ministers as though every word that he ever says, especially on Europe, should be carved in stone—said that we did not want to arm or to allow to be armed the Bosnian Muslims because we did not want to create "a level killing field".

If there is not a level killing field, there is an uneven killing field, where those who are doing the killing can do it with impunity. That is why, when making decisions about arms sales, it is not enough to say that arms going to a certain destination are automatically a bad thing. Sometimes, arms are necessary to deter, to defend or to liberate. We know a lot about that, because this country made mistakes in the past, disarming when we should not have done so.

I welcome the Bill's broad principles, but I do not want it to become a cudgel with which those who always hate anything to do with armaments, defence or force, even in the cause of democracy, can belabour those of us who believe in their necessity.

9.9 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I wish to begin by welcoming my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths) back to the Front Bench. His return illustrates the sound principle, which should have wide application, that one cannot keep a good man down for long. Although I was unable to be in my place for some of the maiden speeches, which—as we have heard—were excellent, I congratulate my hon. Friends and other hon. Members who made their maiden speeches today on choosing this debate in which to do so.

I am in favour of the Bill for three main reasons. The first is that there is an obvious, urgent and practical need for tighter arms control measures. Secondly, I want to see Britain leading the way on arms exports, as the Bill demonstrates that we are doing. Thirdly, the Bill is built on recommendations in the Scott report and, ever since that report was published, there has been a political imperative to introduce such measures.

On the practical need for reform, we must recognise that the legitimate arms trade can ensure security and peace in certain areas, but we must also recognise that the unscrupulous trafficking of arms to conflict zones in areas of instability contributes to the terrible account of human suffering and the destruction of communities and lives that occurs especially when conflicts are fuelled by the presence of small arms. The Government recognise that and the Opposition seemed to recognise it during the debate. The non-governmental organisations recognise it and have pushed for reform. Even the Defence Manufacturers Association seems to recognise that, but it is only now that the Bill will introduce the practical measures of control that we need on the types of equipment, their destinations and modes of transfer. It will also introduce much stiffer penalties for export control offenders. Let us hope that the measures will see more of those offenders brought to book.

The Bill is overdue in an increasingly unstable and dangerous world. It has taken time to act, but we have been engaged in detailed and comprehensive reviews of the existing system. In the meantime, we have introduced several other important measures, including the EU code of conduct on arms exports, in which we had a leading role.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I agree with my hon. Friend about the terrible toll from small arms. The United Nations' estimate is that some 4 million people—80 per cent. of them women and children—have died because of illegal small arms just since 1990. Does my hon. Friend agree that that requires not only our national action but international action, and is he concerned at reports that the Bush regime may block the UN agreement on small arms?

Roger Casale: I am extremely concerned about what might happen to the initiative that Kofi Annan has taken and what may happen at the conference starting today in New York. The Secretary-General said that small arms

[Roger Casale]

have been responsible for 4 million deaths in 46 different countries since 1990 and it is worrying that initiatives to control small arms may be blocked because of the US Government's threatened failure to co-operate. That is why it is so important that Britain is seen to be leading the way on arms exports.

We have some remarkable NGOs in this country. Some were mentioned by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and I would mention organisations such as Oxfam and Amnesty International, which have campaigned for arms reduction. We can represent their views in the House and Members from both sides can say they agree with those views, but the Bill is proof that a Labour Government are able to act on those views and introduce new export control measures. The values that underpin the passion for change in those NGOs are deeply felt by many decent people who understand the case for arms reform and want that pressure for reform translated into practical action. That is why it is so important to have the commitment from the Government to make those reforms and to push to see them replicated by other countries.

The Bill is also important because of the legacy of the Scott report. The former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), is not in his place, but I read the report of proceedings on the Scott report in preparation for my speech. After an investigation lasting three years, my right hon. Friend was given three hours to prepare what was a searing attack on the whole decrepit system. Although my right hon. Friend made attacks on individual Ministers—especially those who ordered civil servants not to blame them, so that they could blame the civil servants—he also made attacks that went to the heart of a system of government that was decrepit, failing and embedded in the culture of secrecy. That is what the Bill is seeking to tear away. No longer are we plagued with the central charges of the Scott report—that the Government of the day had changed the rules on arms exports and repeatedly failed to admit that to Parliament and to the courts. Let us hope that such behaviour will no longer be possible under the Bill.

We ask why people feel disengaged from politics and do not trust their political leaders. Perhaps we should go back to the days of the Scott report and see what happened then.

I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) that we need to set the debate in a wider context. Broad and important questions need to be answered—they are beginning to be addressed by measures such as this—about who should adjudicate between human rights considerations and matters of trade and foreign policy; who can best decide whether the nation's defence interests will be served or whether an unstable situation in a given conflict area will be made worse by allowing a particular export of arms to go ahead. It remains for the Government to decide on those important issues, but they must be held to account for their decisions. That is the purpose of the Bill.

This measure, and others like it, must work to make the Government more accountable in the difficult balance that must be struck between competing considerations and concerns. Let us build on the principles of openness and transparency that are anchored in the Bill. Let us not hesitate in redoubling our resolve to see this measure replicated in other countries around the world. Let us not be deterred for one moment by the lukewarm, rather grudging, acceptance by the Opposition, who seem to understand the practical need for the Bill without conceding the principle. Let us resolve to implement the measure quickly, because I want to see more convictions, and because to hesitate will cost lives and weaken international resolve.

This is a good Bill which helps this country take a further step in seeking to tame, in part, the worst excesses of a world in which too many lives are still cut short needlessly by weapons made, brokered and/or trafficked by citizens of the United Kingdom. I commend the measure to the House.

9.17 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), to the Front Bench and wish him success. I also warmly welcome the Bill, which I do not believe will place needless regulation on business. Indeed, I have been thoroughly disappointed and disheartened by the way in which Opposition Members have stressed how those in the defence industry object to the Bill or believe that it could undermine them. I have not received such a postbag, and have noticed in the press that the Defence Manufacturers Association fully supports the Government's efforts to replace the existing legislation. It warmly welcomes the fact that the Government are introducing controls to reduce, if not eliminate, the activities of brokers and traffickers. So I wish to start my remarks on that positive note.

I see the Bill as an important step, as many right hon. and hon. Members have stated, towards closing the loopholes in the arms trade. I am delighted that Oxfam and the Red Cross have made similar statements. In fact, with other NGOs, they have stated that they are particularly pleased with the Government's determination to control the activities of brokers and traffickers.

The detail of the Bill makes a commitment to overhaul and modernise the legislative framework governing strategic export controls. That is long overdue. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said in her impassioned speech, women and children throughout the world who have spoken to her have asked for one thing only—for controls that will give them the opportunity to live in their lands in peace. The Bill is one small but significant step along that road.

I am delighted that the Bill incorporates so many of the recommendations of the Scott report. Again and again, the report emphasised the need for increased transparency and accountability in export controls. That is clearly provided in the Bill.

Furthermore, the Bill introduces new powers to control arms trafficking and brokering. Clause 5 is most important because it introduces powers to control intangible technology transfers and the provision of technical assistance overseas. We are beginning to take measures that will persuasively lead other Governments along the road that they should travel to achieve control over the illegal trafficking of guns.

When we pick up our newspapers, we read again and again of the stark and unappetising results of gun trafficking. Today, a report in *The Guardian* described the

aplomb of Leonid Minin who is reputed to be a millionaire gunrunner and has, apparently, recently delivered 113 tonnes of small arms from his native Ukraine to west Africa. We know exactly what will result. Although everyone in the House would say, "But we're British, we wouldn't do that", we know that if there are profits to be made, there will always be someone unscrupulous enough to make them.

Leonid Minin is being prosecuted by an Italian court and may be convicted. However, what is not reported is the straight fact that the trade in small arms is the scourge of sub-Saharan Africa. That trade entrenches unscrupulous regimes in power. It arms legions of child soldiers—at present, it is believed that there are 120,000 such young soldiers. The trade fuels insurrection and civil war. It is high time that we realised what those unscrupulous gunrunners are doing.

Africa-watchers say that gun running could rank with the AIDS epidemic or debt as one of the most debilitating factors hampering Africa's development. This measure is one small step. It begins to give us the belief that we can ensure security and peace for some people—hopefully all people—across the world. A responsible and legitimate arms trade is the crucial key to ensuring security and peace.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the current United Nations conference on the illicit trade in small arms. Many have referred to the fact that the President of the United States is evidently persuading his delegation to block the main proposal. It is extremely disheartening that the gun lobby in such a large country—one of our partners, which I cherish as part of NATO—should want to take that stand. It is an outrage and I hope that we are all prepared to make it clear to our American friends that it is wholly unacceptable. Of course, the reports may be wrong. Perhaps the conference will not end up with an empty statement of intent, but with something that is more legally binding.

In this place, we shall end up with something that is legally binding. We shall take positive action because we shall ensure that the Bill receives its Second Reading and that it is successful. We shall start to establish a responsible, transparent and accountable system of export controls—a regime that the world will applaud. I hope that it will achieve the peace that many, many of us dearly seek. I warmly welcome the Bill.

9.24 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I agree with all the earlier remarks about the Bill being overdue but very welcome. The Select Committee on Defence and the Quadripartite Committee called for such a Bill, but clearly legislation has to be drafted carefully, and we look forward to finding out how it will develop beyond Second Reading. It is crucial to recognise that the Bill brings together various different aspects, some of which are complicated and many of which have been mentioned.

Not only did the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and I go to Sierra Leone together, but we have a history of competitiveness in such issues that goes back 20 years or more. I agree with him about the right of countries to national defence. I also agree that it would not be helpful to state that no arms sales should take place anywhere and thus that every state, whatever its size, should be encouraged to develop its own indigenous armaments industry. Small countries, those threatened by big neighbours and those outside alliances have a right to import weapons to preserve their territorial integrity and their national self-defence, but we cannot and should not have a policy of allowing arms sales to project power, or to try to change the nature of regimes or the balance of power in regions. That is why we need to be cautious.

The terrible situation in Afghanistan today is a direct result of the misguided policies pursued by the Conservative party in this country and the Reagan Administration in the 1980s. Those policies have led to an absolute surfeit of armaments in that region and terrible death and destruction, as well as the imperialist policies pursued by—

Dr. Julian Lewis: Brezhnev.

Mike Gapes: I was getting there—just wait. Those policies were also pursued by the misguided, pre-Gorbachev regime in the Soviet Union.

We need international measures, and clause 4 includes provisions that will take account of the joint action agreed by the European Union. That inestimable organisation has played an important role in co-ordinating European attitudes. Collective European action is important because we shall then perhaps have more weight in international councils when talking to the United States and in trying to persuade the US that it should also co-operate in such issues. It is a bit ironic that the Bush Administration talks about unilateral reductions in its nuclear weapons programme while not being in favour of entering into multilateral international agreements to limit weapons. That is a contradiction, and we must continue to pursue such matters with the American Administration.

My final point is that it is important that the Bill will make provision for extra-territoriality. Without such provisions, we shall not be effective. Reference has been made to Ukrainian arms smuggling, and to the fact that those arms go to the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone through Burkina Faso, and there are similar examples in other parts of the world. If we do not have effective extra-territorial provisions that apply to European Union countries and others, we shall never get to the essence of the problem: the brokers, the dealers and their criminal activities. International action is needed, but we must start with what we can do in this country to strengthen that policy. That is why I very much welcome the Bill.

9.28 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I congratulate the Minister on his re-emergence. It is not often that an hon. Member comes from the Back Benches to the Dispatch Box, goes back to Back Benches and then returns to the Dispatch Box, and only time will prove whether that happened by luck or skill, or whether the hon. Gentleman's ability was recognised again. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) that the phrase "back from the dead" was a little unkind, and the parallel with the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) is hardly one that I should wish to develop.

I had better play safe by declaring an interest, even though I do not think that I have one. As I do not know what the secondary legislation will be, I should declare an interest because I know how paranoid the House is about the issue of interests.

[Mr. Richard Page]

We have heard a clutch of very good maiden speeches that augur well for the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) rightly warmly praised his predecessor, Tom King, for his long and distinguished service to the House. My hon. Friend also rightly spoke about the importance of local industry and touched on the dangers of building on flood plains. That problem is not exclusive to his constituency and it is one that we should adequately and urgently address.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) took the high-risk strategy of praising his football club. That normally produces howls of derision, and it nearly did so in this case, but his remarks fell into place when he mentioned his predecessors, Enoch Powell and Nick Budgen. His speech bodes well for the future and I look forward to his carrying forward the Wolverhampton, South-West policy of individualism. That will regularly get him into hot water, but it will be entertaining for everyone else.

The hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) is unfortunately not present, but I am glad that she was generous to her predecessor, Mo Mowlam. We all had affection for Mo when she was in the House and we still do. The hon. Lady made a positive speech. Although I did not sign up to everything in it, that is the privilege of an uninterrupted maiden speech. I am sure that there will be more to come from that source in the fullness of time.

The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) spoke affectionately of Giles Radice—a Wykehamist, if I remember rightly—and his struggles to try to keep the Labour party away from extremism in the past. We welcome that contribution, too.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) to the band of Conservative Members in Hertfordshire of whom I am a humble and insignificant member. I welcome his powerful speech and the tribute that he paid to his predecessor, Bowen Wells—a true friend of mine—and to the work that he did. My hon. Friend's speech led on to the importance of freedom, and that point should be stressed in Committee when the time comes.

Like other Conservative Members, I offer the Bill a warm welcome. The Conservative Government established the Scott inquiry, which, almost five years ago, concluded that our system of controls over defence equipment exports was inefficient and, out of date and should be replaced by modern procedures appropriate to the post cold war era. We accepted that view in July 1996 and welcome the Government's decision to follow that advice. The Bill is necessary.

As Ministers will appreciate, however, we have some specific concerns about the Bill, and I shall mention some today and some in Committee. It is serious and an abuse of parliamentary democracy that we do not have secondary legislation before us while the Bill is being discussed. It is amazing that we shall go into Committee in a mad rush a week tomorrow and the chances are that we shall not have the secondary legislation before us then.

Secondary legislation will make up the teeth of the Bill. We will not know how it will work or what it will do until we see it. We are signing up blind and that is a serious error and a slap in the face for the Quadripartite Committee, which strongly recommended that the details of the secondary legislation should be in place even before the Bill was debated on Second Reading.

The Minister may argue that the rush to Second Reading and into Committee is the result of the Government's wish to show good intent to the United States Government in line with the memorandum of understanding that was signed by the Secretary of State for Defence. However, if that argument is used, I merely point out to the Government that the past four years would have been better spent working out the secondary legislation than worrying about other "vital" matters such as the future of hunting. I wish that we had the secondary legislation so that we could discuss it.

The Secretary of State came to the House with many warm words, but it was a lot of spin and not much substance. She produced distressing examples of what weaponry can do, and the House sympathises with those cases. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) agreed that they were serious and sad, but when he asked about British involvement, an answer was not forthcoming. The right hon. Lady made a virtue of the fact that the response to the Quadripartite Committee's report was announced this morning, but it is not good enough to produce it just before a Second Reading debate on the subject. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) made that point effectively and forcefully.

The Secretary of State told us how clause 5 will bring controls to brokering and trafficking. I hope that it does, but she was a tad short of the details on how it will work. No doubt it would be embarrassing to give those without referring to the secondary legislation. The right hon. Lady mentioned that the Defence Manufacturers Association welcomes the Bill, but she omitted to follow up its concerns and those of other organisations about the bureaucracy, increased costs and practical operation of the Bill. I hate to support the Liberal Democrats, but the Secretary of State definitely dodged the question that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) asked about how brokers with a UK passport who operate abroad might be tackled. We heard nothing on that. The right hon. Lady also said that clauses 2 and 4 will stop electronic transmissions, but again she was short on the detail of how they will do so.

I am not able to address all the points that were made—they were, in the main, pertinent and relevant—but if I had to sum up the debate I would say that it was sincere. There was not too much political posturing and the views were genuinely held. I pay tribute to the House for that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) referred to the importance of industry. That has even wider implications because we might be facing a manufacturing recession. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling made the broader point that, unless we are careful, our actions could have an impact on university research programmes, on whose intellectual information we rely to drive the nation forward. He also gave a powerful example to drive home the difficulties of forcing aspects of the Bill on overseas companies. The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (M Clarke) raised Oxfam's concerns, which I hope the Minister will address.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot rightly said that the 1939 Act has not done too badly for the past 61 or 62 years, but that it is in need of modernisation. He

also spoke of the importance of defence in creating a country that is secure from external attack. If one accepts that that is the first duty of any Administration in any country, then it is a powerful argument in defence of our defence industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) correctly emphasised the delay in the delivery of the Bill. The remark,

"If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

was apposite at that time with regard to Labour Members. I support what he said about enforcement. I hope that the Committee will have a short time to discuss that.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East rightly drew attention to the lack of secondary legislation to guide our affairs and reinforced the Oxfam and NGO arguments that were introduced by the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston.

It is difficult in a short time accurately to set out the Opposition's view and our concerns. We share the Secretary of State's view that the existing controls on the physical export of defence equipment are no longer appropriate, but I do not subscribe to the view that the Government have a good record of operating those controls. They have failed to meet their targets for processing 70 per cent. of standard individual export licence applications within 20 days: last year, the figure was only 57 per cent. Their record on appeals has been described in the Chamber as even worse.

Defence manufacturers have expressed their concerns, and they told me last week that some applications have taken between two and a half and three years to be processed: that is unacceptable by any standards. The costs have had to be absorbed by manufacturers. Other organisations that sell equipment overseas have been subject to such delays. I declare an interest in the machine tool industry, in which companies that make equipment have suffered from delays in the handling of licences.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my hon. Friend comment on Sir Richard Scott's recommendation that there should be a default system whereby, if a licence is not issued within a certain period, the application should be deemed to have been successful?

Mr. Page: That idea should be adequately investigated in Committee. Unfortunately, I am concerned that the draconian time reduction in the Government's programming means that there will not be enough time to develop that argument, which is perfectly legitimate and should be available to our manufacturers as a form of recompense.

We seem to be envisaging the Bill as a catch-all—a considerable extension of bureaucratic controls. The Government are confident that the measures will have only a modest bureaucratic impact, but that view is not shared by the Defence Manufacturers Association or the Society of British Aerospace Companies, both of which believe that there will be a significant rise in the number of inquiries made of the Department of Trade and Industry. We recognise that the Department is only a postbox for inquiries, which go on to be dealt with by the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign Office.

There will also be a rise in the number of export licence applications. Last week, the SBAC estimated that there could be a fourfold increase in licensing activity. The measures will represent a significant additional burden for large firms. For small and medium-sized businesses, it could be too much to bear. The CBI has made known its concerns about the difficulties that the extra work could cause. I am afraid that the cost to our companies will be high. We can see that the red tape machine inside the Government is alive and well, and producing.

I must take issue with the costs in the explanatory notes. The estimate that implementation of the measures will cost £800,000 in the first year, and £500,000 in subsequent years, is not only low but absolutely ridiculous.

Time has beaten me, and I am prevented from tackling all the issues that I wanted to mention, including the enforcement difficulties posed by electronic transmission, the question of what records have to be kept by companies to protect themselves and what will happen to employees working overseas. No doubt, some of that will come out in Committee. As I said at the beginning of my speech, the Bill is necessary: whether it is sufficient or goes too far is another matter. No doubt time, and the Committee stage, will tell.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The Export Control Bill is the product of four years' work and is the culmination of a series of great improvements that will ensure that the United Kingdom has one of the most effective, comprehensive, open and transparent export control regimes in the world. Today, we heard a number of quality contributions from right hon. and hon. Members; there were five exceptional maiden speeches and several embarrassing references to myself—it is not so much "The Mummy Returns" as "The Minister returns".

We want to create a world climate of non-proliferation. We have demonstrated our commitment to non-proliferation by greatly reducing our holdings of nuclear weapons. We have signed and ratified the comprehensive test ban treaty and, clearly, we have made significant changes to the export control regime since coming to power in 1997. Five memorable maiden speeches were given in the House today, the first by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), who spoke eloquently and warmly of our colleague Mo Mowlam and the fact that the constituency had produced two successive women MPs. We hope and trust that Redcar has produced two exceptional MPs.

The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) paid a fitting tribute to his predecessor, Tom King, and his towering role in the House. The hon. Gentleman listed manufacturing success stories and spoke about tourism, farming and flooding; he will be a doughty fighter, I am sure, for his constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris)—or perhaps I should say my hon. Friend the Member for the city of Wolverhampton, South-West—showed an immediate and impressive grasp of Second Readings in the House. He, too, praised the much admired work of his predecessor, Jenny Jones—especially her work on abolishing the death penalty. His mention of his local paper, the *Express and Star*, will, I am sure, mean that he will be given a long honeymoon.

[Nigel Griffiths]

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) demonstrated his keen knowledge of his constituency and made a relevant contribution to the debate. He also demonstrated his detailed knowledge of the many companies involved in defence projects, and brings to the House a wealth of experience from the manufacturing sector. Last, but certainly not least, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), paid tribute to Bowen Wells, a much respected Member of Parliament who chaired the Select Committee on International Development. In a wide-ranging maiden speech, which covered the defence and aviation sectors, the hon. Gentleman's remarks on the need to challenge Government are well timed; I hope that he devotes his parliamentary career to that cause.

It was a pleasure to listen to all those speeches and many others. Several thoughtful comments have been made by colleagues, and I should like to deal with them as they arise in the Bill. Before doing so, however, I shall take up several points made by members of the Quadripartite Committee and others. Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), asked about prior parliamentary scrutiny. As she will acknowledge, we have introduced more scrutiny in the past four years than there has been in the past 50 years of the operation of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939.

The Bill ensures that, for the first time, annual reports are required to be published by statute. For the past three years, each report has been more informative than the last, mainly in response to comments from the Quadripartite Committee and organisations like Saferworld, Amnesty and Oxfam. The reports themselves now allow much more effective scrutiny after decisions have been taken. We shall soon report our conclusions on prior parliamentary scrutiny to the House in our detailed response to the Quadripartite Committee report.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) alleged that the Government had done nothing on export control for four years. I have to ask him what he calls the weighty documents that have been published. There are 668 pages, many of which detail the firm action that we have taken. Does the right hon. Gentleman not realise that we have banned the import, export, transfer and manufacture of all forms of anti-personnel land mines, as has been mentioned, as well as the export and trans-shipment through the UK of torture equipment? We have also published national criteria against which UK export licence applications are judged, and have worked with our EU colleagues to develop an EU code of conduct on arms exports, which we consolidated into our national criteria in October 2000.

We have taken many other measures, and it was uncharacteristic of the right hon. Member for Wells not to give credit to the Government and my right hon. Friend the new Leader of the House of Commons, the original architect of so much of the drive to modernise. We published the White Paper on the legislation in 1998. In the light of the many comments that were made, we have gone significantly further than its proposals on trafficking and brokering, which have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The right hon. Member for Wells suggested that the Bill might place an excessive burden on British industry. We are working closely with industry and others to ensure that we achieve targeted and effective controls without overburdening legitimate business. Let us consider the industry's constructive and positive attitude to the Bill. A recent CBI press release states:

> "The CBI welcomes this legislation. Business supports the need for strategic export controls, including improved accountability."

We are sure that that will prove possible.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the time taken to provide the response to the Quadripartite Committee and was concerned that it was published only this morning. The response to the Committee's line, which was set out in the report published on 9 April, has been published within the two-month period that is conventional for a Government response to such reports. We will respond to the Committee's other report as soon as possible.

The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) spoke about the performance of the Department of Trade and Industry on licensing. I assure the House that all applications are processed expeditiously and with care. The whole House will realise that some cases cause particular concern and raise especially difficult issues, and therefore take longer to process.

Many hon. Members asked for proper and even better checks to be made by our overseas staff in embassies and consulates abroad. All that takes time. Concern was expressed about the fact that in 2000, 57 per cent. of processed standard individual export licence applications were within target. The figure has so far risen to 62 per cent. this year and we are working to improve it still further.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) asked why the Bill did not deal with licensed production overseas and said that its absence would leave a gaping hole in UK legislation. Following consultation on the Bill, the Government have concluded that specific measures in primary legislation are not the best way of dealing with licensed production. We set out in the consultation document a range of options, of which primary legislation was only one.

It is simply not true to say that there is a gaping hole in our export control legislation. The Government already control the export of technology needed to set up such production overseas, as well as the export of production equipment and components especially designed for military use. We continue to believe that the surest way to prevent diversion is not to let the technology or other equipment out of the UK in the first place. We must certainly not let it get to any place where we fear that products may be diverted for illegal purposes.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Griffiths: I hope to come to the hon. Gentleman in a minute. I am keen to respond to as many points as possible.

The hon. Members for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) mentioned the Export Credits Guarantee Department. The hon. Member for Twickenham also mentioned a recent Saferworld report

and allegations of subsidies. I am aware of allegations about the amount of the subsidy. A forthcoming Ministry of Defence study will tackle them, and we do not expect it to justify the claims in the report. The ECGD charges a premium for the business that it supports; it is required to run its credit insurance operations as a business and to generate sufficient reserves to break even. It has contributed money to the Exchequer in the past few years. It also puts United Kingdom exporters on an equal footing with overseas competitors, who receive similar support from their Governments.

ECGD support for exports to the poorest countries is limited to those that back economic and social recovery. It does not support exports of defence equipment to other countries unless a valid export licence is obtained.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) asked about end-use monitoring. Sadly, that is the best example of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. End-use or follow-up monitoring can confirm misuse or illegal diversion only after they have taken place, when it offers minimal opportunity of effective action. Several examples have been cited this evening.

The most effective way to ensure that products and technologies do not get into the hands of unscrupulous end users is to refuse an export licence when there is a risk of such an outcome. The Government therefore set our overseas posts the task of considering proposed end users when we have ground for anxiety.

We monitor reports from human rights activists, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, journalists and even, I suspect, my hon. Friends. The end user's track record is taken into account. Our latest annual report on strategic export controls shows that the reason for the second highest number of export licence refusals is the risk of diversion or re-export to undesirable end users. That shows that we share the aims of the Quadripartite Committee, Amnesty and Oxfam. Our latest report covers the matter, but the powers that the Bill proposes do not limit the introduction of further improvement to the rules on end-user certification.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) asked whether the powers were too broad. We need to be able to adapt controls to fulfil our obligations under the international export control regimes. However, we have made changes to deal with the anxieties of the Delegated Powers and Deregulation Committee in another place about the extent of specific measures in the draft Bill.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) suggested that the Bill is defective because it does not repeal the import section of the 1939 Act. The Committee recommended that we consulted about the clauses to repeal those import powers. We have considered the recommendation carefully. We believe that the controls effect import control regimes under specific United Nations Security Council resolutions. Those regimes are subject to full parliamentary scrutiny procedures and the import powers do not give rise to the sort of issues raised by export control provisions.

If hon. Members wish me to respond to other matters, I shall be happy to do so.

We led the world in halting the manufacture and export of anti-personnel land mines. We banned UK dealers from trading in torture equipment such as electric shock batons. The Bill enshrines our policy to deny export licences to any regime for any product or technology intended for internal repression. It ensures that the UK has one of the most effective, comprehensive, open and transparent export control regimes in the world, and that even the latest technology cannot be used to evade our tough export controls. The Bill puts Britain at the forefront of international efforts to control an explosion of illegal weapons, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

EXPORT CONTROL BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Export Control Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. Proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Standing Committee

3.—(1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 23rd October 2001.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(2) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—[*Jim Fitzpatrick.*]

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 62.

Division No. 16] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*

Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and Dan Norris.

NOES

Barker, Greg
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Brooke, Annette
Bruce, Malcolm
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Flook, Adrian
Francois, Mark

Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Douglas Hogg and
Mr. Eric Forth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

EXPORT CONTROL BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Export Control Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of a government department incurred in consequence of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 June],

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE

Motion made,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. David Chaytor, Brian Cotter, John Cryer, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Paul Goodman, Andy King, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Mr. Andrew Love, John McDonnell, Mr. Denis Murphy, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Andrew Rosindell, Mr. Anthony Steen, Ian Stewart and Brian White be members of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Elections (Belarus)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): As this is my first opportunity to do so, may I welcome the Minister to his new position? He will know that I am raising the issue of Belarus as a governor of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which is ably led by the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). It continues to make good progress in countries newly arrived at democracy and civic society around the world. Indeed, sitting in at European Union summits such as that held in Gothenburg a few weeks ago are a number of aspirant countries which only a few years ago were bound fast into a system wholly opposed to the democratic process.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy's earlier work in countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary has played a significant part in bringing nations through the often painful and difficult transition from tyranny to democracy. However, there remains much for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to do. Recently, it has been busy in Bosnia and Kosovo. Currently, we are all thinking about the position in Macedonia.

Much work also goes on in other parts of the world, especially in Africa, and I am thinking particularly of Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone. We should commend the work of the professional staff who work for the WFD and also that of the non-party governors. The House should also recognise that the co-operation of our political parties in the Westminster Foundation for Democracy is a testimony to what we as Members of Parliament can achieve together in the important work of representing our country's basic values overseas.

This is the third time in 12 months that I have brought before the House the current situation in Belarus, and I make no apologies for doing so. The people of Belarus have severe difficulty in getting their voice heard in the world, and it is surely our duty to help give them a voice. Belarus has the worst human rights record of any European country; with the fall of Milosevic in Yugoslavia, Belarus's President Lukashenko holds the unenviable title of our continent's most despotic and tyrannical leader. Belarus is in crisis again at this very moment.

I visited Minsk last year. In a subsequent debate in Westminster Hall, I described the atmosphere of oppression and fear that exists in Belarus—whose ruling elite is proud still to run its own KGB and quite aggressively to call it that. Last year we also had a powerful report from Amnesty International, which, sadly, often reminded one of its earlier excellent work in the former Soviet Union. Belarus is a country where prominent public figures still all too often flee into exile or are disappeared or murdered.

All is not gloom in Belarus, however. The country has developed a remarkably cohesive democratic opposition, which approached last year's elections to Lukashenko's puppet parliament in a united spirit of defiance. I asked the Government for their reaction and was told that they endorsed the assessment of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission, that the elections did

[Mr. Michael Trend]

not meet international standards for democratic process. A parliamentary troika drawn from the European Parliament, the OSCE and the Council of Europe reached a similar conclusion.

Last December, I returned to the subject in the Chamber, in particular to criticise the withdrawal of the British Council from Minsk. We should not lose sight of that mistaken and shameful act. I was pleased to see that the Foreign Affairs Committee followed up the cause and gave the British Council a hard time in January at one of its evidence sessions.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who has a distinguished record on Belarus matters, did well to attack the view, shared by the British Council and the Foreign Office, that Belarus had a "relative lack of importance"—a direct quotation from the British Council's statement. Dr. Baker of the British Council told the Committee that the matter was

"certainly discussed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and we both concluded that Belarus was not a high priority."

What a sorry state of affairs. Much has changed for the better in the British Council in recent years, but I am very sorry that the generation that regarded part of its responsibility as working with the oppressed against their oppressors seems to have been superseded.

In sending the wrong signal to Belarus, we betray all those brave men and women in its political parties, trade unions and non-governmental organisations, across the political spectrum, who are struggling to establish the most basic human rights in their country. I ask the Government urgently to review the decision and restore the British Council's presence in Belarus.

Belarus faces a presidential election, set for 9 September. The four basic conditions laid down for last year's elections, which were not met then, have still not even been addressed. First, Belarus still needs a fully powered, properly functioned parliament, as part of a proper division of powers, for President Lukashenko still rules by decree. Secondly, Belarus's electoral legislation still needs thoroughgoing reform. Thirdly, there is still no guaranteed real and regular access to the state-run electronic media. Fourthly, and in many ways most important, there has been no effective or visible change in the political atmosphere.

In other words, there has been no end to political repression. Indeed, in many ways it has got worse. This March, the president issued a decree banning any outside help for the democrats and enabling the authorities to block the activities of political parties and NGOs directly involved in the process of preparation for the presidential elections, including such simple matters—simple to us, at least—as collecting signatures, distributing leaflets and direct campaigning.

The decree was followed by demonstrations in Minsk on 25 March, during which Mr. Vintsuk Viachorka and Mr. Ales Belyatsky, respectively chairman and deputy chairman of the Belarus Popular Front, were arrested and imprisoned. Again, I tabled questions to the Foreign Office to discover the Government's view of the matter and was told eventually that the Government, together with EU partners, had delivered a démarche to the Belarus authorities about the cases, for which we are grateful.

Meanwhile, however, it is left to the OSCE to make the running in Minsk. In April, the Belarus authorities ludicrously accused the OSCE of training spies rather than election observers. The OSCE robustly denied that, insisting that the observers' work was both legitimate and necessary. Later the same month, Freimut Duve, the OSCE representative on freedom and media, publicly cancelled his scheduled visit to Belarus, stating that he could not accept what he called

"severe interference in the independence of his OSCE institution by a participating state".

There is here a clear pattern of persecution by the Belarus authorities of the OSCE. We should admire the OSCE's stand and further regret the fact that the British Government were not so robust over the British Council presence in Minsk.

Persecution in the run-up to Belarus's presidential elections spreads much wider. The bigger picture was well summarised by the deputy chief of the US OSCE mission, Josiah B. Rosenblatt, a few days ago. His view closely reflects the tougher thinking of the US Government. Mr. Rosenblatt points out that the presidential elections present Belarus with an opportunity to end its self-imposed isolation. He says that Belarus needs in particular to release political prisoners Andrei Klimov and Valery Shchukin and account for the missing, among whom are the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Yury Zakharenko, the Deputy Chairman of the legitimate Representative Assembly, Viktor Gonchar, and his associate, Anatoly Krasovsky, as well as the television cameraman, Dmitri Zavadsky.

Mr. Rosenblatt added that Belarus must allow all candidates equal access to the state media; cease the arbitrary disqualification of candidates; and enable the electoral commission to ensure that the votes are counted accurately. But the problems are starting even earlier in the process in Belarus. At the moment, evidence is mounting from all over the country that opposition parties are deliberately being excluded from the local territorial electoral commissions. It appears that none of the 600 applications nationwide made by the opposition or the presidential candidates to the commissions have been accepted by the state authorities. Lukashenko is forming the electoral commission for his own presidential election on his own. The Belarus Helsinki Committee states that it has been formed in violation of the law.

In the past few weeks, further worrying developments have taken place. While it has always been difficult to get the western media to take an interest in Belarus, a story of the sort our media understands has broken into news reports. Among others, the BBC has reported on the allegations that a death squad working for the country's senior leadership has assassinated key political opponents of President Lukashenko. That is not a new claim, but for the first time it has been made by insiders—two former staff members of the state prosecutor's office, one of whom was formerly one of the investigating officers in the Zavadsky case. In particular, they allege the complicity of the country's leadership in the murders of Mr. Zakharenko, Mr. Gonchar and Mr. Zavadsky, all of whom I mentioned earlier in a context in which it was hoped they might still be alive. In all, it is claimed that there have been more than 30 murders.

The stakes are already high and will, no doubt, rise yet higher in the run-up to the Belarus presidential election. I have every confidence in our diplomatic presence in

Minsk, but I urge Ministers to follow events closely. I also have every confidence that the united opposition forces will agree on one joint significant candidate for president—it will have to be a very brave person—to represent them all. That individual will need all possible practical help as well as maximum moral support.

What else can we do to help? The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is meeting in Paris and I very much hope that progress will be made there to extend its tough line against Lukashenko. I believe the British Government should also speak out and strongly condemn tyranny in Belarus. In particular, I would urge the Government to bring what pressure they can to bear on the Belarus authorities to form their electoral commissions in a proper and acceptable way. It is also vital to send a clear message to Lukashenko that all contenders in the presidential election must have equal access to the mass media.

Moreover, every effort should be made to insist that both domestic and international observers are allowed to scrutinise the election. We need to be sure that the registration of the presidential candidates and a most curious and suspect procedure for early voting in Belarus will be watched with as much care as the main polling process. We must also tell Lukashenko in the clearest terms that threatening political opponents and opposition parties, and creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, will not be tolerated.

Some might say that we have little power to influence a country such as Belarus, but I do not agree. The work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy became necessary because, in the not-too-distant past, we bore down heavily on countries where oppression was the order of the day. We did that in many ways, but especially by refusing to accept the legion of lies that support the totalitarian structures of such states. Each little lie is a vital part of the great lie that sustains tyranny, and each blow we make chips away at its foundations. In this case, we must make it quite clear to Lukashenko that if he does not observe the basic minimum standards we expect, we shall refuse to recognise the validity, the legitimacy, of the election, and we should make that clear in advance.

In today's Belarus, an event the like of which we thought—we hoped—had disappeared into European history is going on. I believe that our Government should take a lead in condemning the corrupt processes of the Belarusian presidential election. This policy could and should be a centrepiece of a new approach by the Foreign Office ministerial team. Here is a country where the police are far more efficient at harassing their own citizens than in combating the ever-growing flood of drug trafficking and organised crime. This is a country that we very much hope will soon share a border with the European Union. A former Home Secretary, now at the Foreign Office, will surely understand the importance of that.

Here is a country which, in one way or another, understands its need for western investment and economic assistance. Britain and the European Union have clear self-interest in the condition of Belarus and real leverage on the situation there. Here also is a cause—the cause of liberty—that we in Britain should champion, as we did those of other central and eastern European countries not so many years ago. I ask the Government to speak with a clear and urgent voice on this matter.

10.31 am

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I thank the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) for initiating this debate on Belarus. He is an experienced observer of Belarus politics, and his interest, energy and expertise are very welcome, as is his work for the admirable Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Like him, I think it long overdue that the torch of liberty should be lit in Belarus. I congratulate him on keeping that flame alive and for drawing the House's attention to that need.

The hon. Gentleman has developed close links with the centre right United Civic party and the Belarusian Popular Front. I know that he has gained the trust of the leaders of those two parties, Mr. Anatoly Lebedko and Mr. Vintsuk Viachorka. As he knows, the Government have a great deal of respect for these and other democrats in Belarus, as was shown last November when they visited London and called on my predecessor.

The hon. Gentleman's Adjournment debate last July came at a time when Belarus was preparing for parliamentary elections in October. The international community hoped that Belarus would use that opportunity to take a tangible step towards democracy. Unfortunately, those hopes were not fulfilled. Belarus has now entered another crucial pre-election stage, with presidential elections to be held on 9 September.

Let me turn to the British Council closure, about which the hon. Gentleman, to his credit, has kept badgering the Foreign Office. The decision to close the British Council operation in Minsk followed a strategic review by the council designed to maximise effectiveness world wide. This focuses resources on countries where the Council can achieve greatest impact in support of British interests. It is important to stress, however, that council activity has not ceased. Through its offices in neighbouring countries, the council continues to co-ordinate Foreign Office Chevening scholarships for Belarusian students, youth exchange visits, Department for International Development regional academic partnerships with Belarusian universities and examinations work. The council enabled 92 Belarusians to sit British examinations in June this year alone.

It is also important to stress that the closure of the British Council does not affect our support for civil society, human rights and democracy-building projects. That support is not dependent on the presence of a British Council office. The Government have recently funded projects such as a domestic election observation network; a human rights conference and workshop organised by the British East-West Centre; a freedom of the media workshop organised by the OSCE's media freedom expert, Freimut Duve; a United Nations Development Programme project to improve the legal framework under which Belarusian non-governmental organisations operate, and funding for four Belarusian journalists and two NGO representatives on a United Kingdom study tour of the British election.

Belarus occupies a strategic position in Europe, as the hon. Gentleman said. It is set to be a neighbour of an enlarged European Union and it borders NATO. Given the country's strategic location in the east of the continent, it is extremely regrettable that Belarus, which promised so much at independence in 1991, cannot be regarded in any sense as a member of the family of democratic European states.

[Peter Hain]

From the hon. Gentleman's contacts and visits, he will be familiar with the nature of Mr. Lukashenko's regime. The flawed Belarus referendum in November 1996 significantly increased Mr. Lukashenko's powers; undemocratically and unconstitutionally extended his term of office until 2001; and undermined the democratically elected Parliament of the 13th Supreme Soviet. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Mr. Lukashenko continues to rule in an autocratic and increasingly idiosyncratic manner, preventing the development of civil society. He has ensured that no significant legislative powers have been granted to the National Assembly—a body that we and our partners do not recognise as legitimate. Crucially, the Assembly is unable to exert control over Government or president.

The judiciary lacks independence. The judicial process is inconsistent and prone to abuse for political ends. The recent trial of eminent professor Yuri Bandazhevsky is an example of that. The professor had criticised the Government for suppressing information on the harmful effects of even small doses of the radiation resulting from the Chernobyl disaster. The British Government and the European Union are appalled at the harshness of the treatment received by the professor. The sentence of eight years hard labour for allegedly taking a bribe is vindictive; it was based on the testimony of one person and no material evidence was offered by the prosecution.

In the face of that oppressive regime, our Government have a good track record of supporting projects—some of which I mentioned—which promote democracy and civil society, raise awareness of human rights issues and encourage objective, independent media in Belarus. We shall continue to look for such opportunities, and we hope that the Government of Belarus will not stand in our way. If the hon. Gentleman has any other suggestions, I shall be happy to receive them.

In that regard, we are concerned about another negative development—the issue in March of presidential decree No. 8. The decree, which has brought condemnation from the British Government, in concert with the United States and our EU partners, regulates and limits the use of foreign financial assistance in Belarus. It has the potential to restrict the legitimate activities that we, the EU and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe choose to support in Belarus as a means of promoting democracy and civil society there.

The OSCE's advisory and monitoring group is doing an excellent job carrying out its mandate under increasing pressure from the Belarus authorities. It is running good projects, some of which are directly funded by the UK. The head of the OSCE advisory and monitoring group has recently come under intense criticism for his activities and has even been threatened with expulsion by the Belarusian authorities. I deplore those attacks and, needless to say, we and the EU will continue to support the tireless efforts of Ambassador Wieck and his team. We hope that the recent criticisms from Mr. Lukashenko and some of those close to him in the Government will cease.

Belarus had an opportunity to demonstrate to the international community that it was committed to taking a democratic path at last October's parliamentary elections. Regrettably, it did not seize that opportunity. The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which carried out limited observation of the elections, concluded that they had failed to meet international democratic standards. As a result of that assessment, the EU does not recognise the legitimacy of the Belarus National Assembly.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I was also alarmed at recent newspaper reports of the existence of so-called death squads in Belarus. Our embassy in Minsk is monitoring that situation closely, and will inform us of any evidence that substantiates reports of the alleged existence and operation of such death squads.

On disappearances, Britain, together with our European Union partners, has, as the hon. Gentleman said, repeatedly called for the Belarusian authorities to investigate the disappearances of Viktor Gonchar, Deputy Chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet; Mr. Gonchar's business associate, Anatoly Krasovsky; former Interior Minister, Yury Zakharenko; and television journalist for Russian ORT, Dmitri Zavadsky. The latest European Union declaration issued on 7 May—the second anniversary of Zakharenka's disappearance—urges the Belarusian authorities to do more to ascertain the fate of the disappeared, and it is part of the pressure that we are putting on them.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, current European Union policy towards Belarus is based on the General Affairs Council conclusions of September 1997, which were adopted in response to Belarus's poor record on constitutional matters and human rights. Those conclusions include a restriction on bilateral ministerial contact; the suspension of aid to Belarus, except for projects that directly support humanitarian causes or the democratisation process; the suspension of the ratification of the EU-Belarus partnership and co-operation agreement; and an agreement by the EU member states to oppose Belarus's accession to the Council of Europe.

The United States has a similarly restrictive policy towards Belarus. Of course, Britain and our European Union partners have no desire to isolate Belarus, but we remain very concerned about the continued dreadful human rights record, the harassment of opposition politicians and the failure of the Belarusian authorities to investigate the disappearance of several opposition sympathisers. We continue to receive reports of harassment of the independent media, with publishing houses being burgled or their printing presses impounded. We stand ready to review the General Affairs Council conclusions and to engage further with the Belarusian Administration when we see signs of steps towards democracy and respect for human rights.

In a statement made on 11 June, the European Union made it clear that the holding of free and fair elections could be the step towards modernising relations with Belarus. I underline that message in the House this evening. Full, mutual beneficial relations would be to the advantage of all the citizens of Belarus and the EU, but policy has to change for that to be possible. EU Commissioner Chris Patten's tough statement on Belarus, delivered to the European Parliament on 5 July, shows that European Commission thinking at the highest level is very much in line with ours.

The presidential elections of 9 September represent yet another opportunity for Mr. Lukashenko. It appears that he is a popular politician in his country, so I call on him to rise to the challenge of allowing democratically accountable presidential elections to take place in an environment free of intimidation, but I fear that that will

not happen. Following its visit to Minsk from 30 June to 2 July, the OSCE parliamentary working group to Minsk reported no improvement in political conditions in Belarus at all. In fact, it seems that the reverse is true.

What does the international community want of Belarus? What do we mean by free and fair elections in that country? We want opposition candidates to have better access to the state-controlled media, coupled with objective political reporting in regular current affairs and news programming. We want the political campaign to be free of harassment, starting with the registration and signature-collecting phase that is under way at the moment. We want the electoral code to be implemented in such a way that those who have complaints against the system can seek and obtain redress. We want the voting and counting process to be transparent and reliable, and preferably to be observed by a full international observation mission under the authority of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. It is not who wins but how that person wins that concerns us. We are concerned only with the fairness and transparency of the process, not with the individuals.

We should not overlook the pivotal role of Russia, either. As Belarus's closest ally and largest trading partner, Russia has more potential than any other country for exerting a positive influence on Belarus. I hope that Russia will seek to convince her neighbour of the need to conform with democratic norms appropriate to a member of the OSCE and to a Council of Europe aspirant. I hope, too, that the other neighbours of Belarus, including the Baltic states and Ukraine, will use their special relationship with Minsk to convey that message.

We want to deepen our bilateral relationship with Belarus. The country is too important for us to neglect. The holding of free and fair democratic presidential elections will be a first important step in allowing us to realise our aim. I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman and to receiving his representations to achieve the objective that we share.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 July 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREENHAM AND CROOKHAM COMMONS BILL

Ordered,

That the promoters of the Greenham and Crookham Commons Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the current session of Parliament the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it had passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages;

That the petition relating to the bill which stood referred to the committee on the bill in the last Parliament shall stand referred to the committee on the bill in the current session of Parliament;

That no petitioners shall be heard before the committee unless their petition has been presented within the time provided for petitioning or has been deposited pursuant to Private Business Standing Order 126(b);

That, in relation to the bill, Private Business Standing Order 127 shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)' were omitted.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Drugs Trade

1. **Mr. David Watts** (St. Helens, North): If he will make a statement on the involvement of his Department in the campaign against the drugs trade. [1538]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office co-ordinates international anti-drugs activity for the United Kingdom. On 25 and 26 June, we hosted an international conference on the global economy of illegal drugs. We have a substantial programme of counter-drugs assistance overseas, which is directed at countries that produce or transport illegal drugs.

Mr. Watts: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Does he agree that it is crucial that drug barons' assets can be seized in any country? What action are the Government taking to press other countries throughout the world to take similar action to that which we propose to take, whereby we can seize the assets of drug barons? Does he share my amazement at Opposition Members, who seem to be opposed to such legislation?

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend notes, the Government are committed to introducing legislation to facilitate the confiscation of drug barons' assets. Much work is going on with our European Union partners and countries throughout the world to strengthen the arrangements for mutual legal assistance so that we can ensure that such drug dealers and transporters are convicted in many countries.

My hon. Friend asks me to express amazement at the stance being taken by a number of Opposition Members. I am sorry to say that I am not amazed by anything that candidates for the Conservative party leadership are getting up to.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can the Foreign Secretary assure the House that Her Majesty's Government are not merely doing everything they can to assist the coca eradication programmes in Andean countries such as Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, but pursuing proper replacement strategies, otherwise, poor people, farming communities and the peasantry will be further impoverished?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I can. We are working closely with, for example, the Colombian Government following the change of presidency in 1998. I accept entirely what the hon. Gentleman says. We must not only have the eradication programmes but recognise the economic reliance of many poor people in those countries on the drugs trade. Therefore, we must ensure that that income stream is replaced by lawful income streams.

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that Russia has recognised the massive problem that it has with the drugs trade. At a meeting earlier this year with Russian MPs in the Duma, it was made clear to me and to parliamentary colleagues that Russia is keen to co-operate far more fully with European countries to build an effective partnership. Have there been any recent discussions with the Russian Government on the issue, and are any initiatives planned?

Mr. Straw: In my previous post as Home Secretary, I discussed the drugs trade—both through Russia and in it—with my opposite number in the Russian Federation.

It has continued to be discussed in the G8. It will be discussed further by me and my Russian colleague when Foreign Ministers meet next week in Rome.

Western Sahara

2. **Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): What recent representations he has made to the UN concerning the referendum in Western Sahara. [1539]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): We supported United Nations Security Council resolution 1359, which was passed unanimously on 29 June and which extended the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara until 30 November 2001.

Dr. Tonge: I welcome the Minister to his new post.

There seems to be some confusion in the Minister's Department about the referendum in Western Sahara. On 4 July, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) received a reply that indicated support for the framework agreement passed by the Security Council. On 5 July, the Government went back to the original position of supporting the UN settlement, which was for a free and fair referendum for the Saharawi people to take place as soon as possible—the settlement was reached 10 years ago. Does he not appreciate that the framework agreement means that the electorate for the referendum in Western Sahara will be increased by hundreds and thousands of Moroccan settlers and soldiers and therefore will not be a true referendum of the Saharawi people?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry if the hon. Lady is confused, but as far as we are concerned there is no confusion. The resolution is absolutely clear: it reiterates full support for the on-going efforts of the United Nation's mission to implement the settlement plan, and for agreements adopted by the parties to hold a free, fair and impartial referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister assure the House, first, that there will be no further arms sales to Morocco until the situation in Western Sahara has been resolved and, secondly, that Britain will not take part in any operation to try to rewrite the 1974 census agreement on who should be allowed to vote in the referendum? As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) rightly said, it must be for the Saharawi people, and only for them, to decide their future and their self-determination in peace. We do not want more of this constant delay; the UN operation has already been delayed for more than 10 years.

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry to tell my hon. Friend that I cannot give him the first assurance that he seeks. All United Kingdom arms exports are approved under extremely strict European Union and UK guidelines: they are among the strictest in the world, and are being made even stricter by legislation currently passing through the House.

As for the second part of my hon. Friend's question, there is absolutely no suggestion that the UK is giving up its commitment to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.

EU Enlargement

3. **Mr. Mike Hall** (Weaver Vale): When he expects EU enlargement negotiations to be completed. [1540]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Gothenburg European Council agreed last month that we should make it possible to complete the negotiations by the end of 2002 for candidates that are ready. The objective is that those candidate countries should then participate in the European parliamentary elections of 2004, as members.

Mr. Hall: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment, and wish him well in his challenging job.

I welcome the news that enlargement of the European Union can commence in 2002. I should like the Czech Republic to be one of the first members in that tranche. What steps will the British Government take, however, if the euro continues to be weak, to ensure that our economy does not suffer as a result of enlargement?

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. He may like to know that the Czech Republic has closed 20 of the chapters for accession, and is among the first five or six countries in terms of its advance towards satisfactory accession. As for his second question, about the euro, he will know that just 11 countries are currently in it. Whether the accession countries come in will depend on whether they meet the criteria for the euro, and whether they decide to join. The assumption behind the question does not, therefore, arise for the moment.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I too congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his promotion.

It is clear that the Irish people have voted no, so the treaty of Nice cannot be ratified. Does the Foreign Secretary not agree that it is a most important democratic principle that if a people are consulted in a referendum and vote no, "no" means no? Or does he belong to the new wonky school of democracy according to which, if the people give the wrong answer, they must be polled as many times as the Conservative party in the election of its leader, in the hope that they will change their minds?

Mr. Straw: I made it perfectly clear during last week's debate on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill that the Irish people's decision in the referendum meant what it said—that they had rejected membership of the Nice treaty. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I cannot remember whether the right hon. Gentleman was in the Government at the time, as he was in and out so often; but in 1992, when he may have been—*[Interruption.]* We have now ascertained that the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the last Administration. In 1992 they decided, in the

light of the Danish refusal to vote yes on Maastricht, to follow a similar procedure to that agreed by the 15 members of the General Affairs Council.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): We delayed the Bill.

Mr. Straw: It is not about delaying the Bill; it is about the principle of the thing.

At the General Affairs Council in mid-June, we agreed that we would stick to the text of the Nice treaty, while providing Ireland—if we could—with some accommodation in respect of its worries. *[Interruption.]* That was exactly the approach of the last Administration, and it is the approach that we have agreed to adopt. It remains to be seen whether in due course there is a further referendum for the Irish people, and whether they agree to the Nice treaty. If they do not, the treaty will not go ahead.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Has my right hon. Friend received any representations from business leaders on enlargement of the European Union? When I met business leaders in my constituency over the weekend, they were very keen that we move towards the speediest possible enlargement of the European Union. They recognise that access to new markets is good for jobs in my constituency and good for jobs in Britain.

Mr. Straw: We have had a great many representations on enlargement from business leaders in the United Kingdom. Almost without exception, they support enlargement because of the benefits that it would bring to British jobs and to British business.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): May I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his post? This month, in the Nice treaty debate, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) berated my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) for not reading the Foreign Affairs Committee report, saying that had he done so,

"he would know that six of the applicant countries had closed the chapter on agriculture."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 282.]

Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the hon. Lady was completely wrong about the contents of her own report, and that, as the report states, even after all these years none of the candidates for enlargement

"has yet resolved the thorniest issues: freedom of movement . . . agriculture, competition policy, transport policy, taxation, environment and budget"?

Given the Foreign Secretary's very words today that the Nice treaty might not go ahead, rather than that enlargement will forge ahead, is not the cruel reality that EU enlargement is turning out to be a promise that ranks with the other great deceptions such as "the cheque is in the post" and "I will love you in the morning"?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her generous congratulations on my assumption of this post. I did not hear all of her last point—I heard only bits of it, about loving in the morning—so I shall let it pass. As for her point about whether chapters are open or closed, as I understand it my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West corrected herself. The truth is that none of the applicant countries has closed the chapter on agriculture. The hon. Lady is wrong, however, because a number of countries including Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia have closed chapters on the free movement of goods, services and persons.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I welcome my right hon. Friend—a Euro-realist, like the Chancellor and me—to his new post? Does he recognise that there is huge enthusiasm among Labour Members for the completion of enlargement, as it will underpin emerging democracies in eastern Europe and force a very substantial renegotiation of the common agricultural policy? However, does he also agree that enlargement will make it all the more important that we approach the euro with caution, and will he ensure that at least the European Central Bank becomes far more transparent and that it begins to take employment and output into consideration in pursuing its inflation targets?

Mr. Straw: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks. We believe that enlargement is very much in the interests of the United Kingdom, the applicant countries and the stability of the peace and security of Europe. I greatly regret the fact that the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) seemed to welcome the fact that there have been some temporary difficulties in the pathway to enlargement, as there always will be. The extraordinary achievement of the EU in the past 20 years is the way in which it has enlarged but still brought benefits to the people of Europe. We believe that that will be the case with the enlargement countries.

It will also come as no great surprise to my right hon. Friend that I fully support the position on the euro set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his excellent speech at the Mansion House a few weeks ago.

Nice Treaty

4. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): If he will make a statement on progress with ratification of the treaty of Nice. [1541]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): The Gothenburg European Council reaffirmed that the ratification process for the treaty of Nice will continue so that the Union is in a position to welcome new member states from the end of 2002.

Tim Loughton: May I also welcome the Minister to his post and hope that he will be rather more forthcoming with answers to European questions than his boss?

If the UK held a referendum on the treaty of Nice that resulted in a "no" vote, would he be happy for our EU partners to carry on regardless with the treaty? In which case, what is the point of holding any referendums in this country on Europe? Or is it just that he regards Ireland as a second-class partner?

Peter Hain: That was a pretty poor effort, Mr. Speaker. No referendum is planned on the Nice treaty, just as there was no referendum on the Amsterdam treaty or on the Maastricht treaty, which the Conservative Government took through and was constitutionally far more important

and far-reaching than the Nice treaty. We respect the view of the Irish people and we await advice from the Irish Government on how they intend to take the matter forward.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the Minister agree that those of us who support EU enlargement do not take lightly the Irish voters' rejection of the Nice treaty? Does he agree that one of the main issues is that the EU as an institution must be much more democratically accountable? Is it not important that we engage with Europe, as we will lose massive economic benefits in manufacturing in each of our constituencies if we do not ensure that EU enlargement takes place?

Hon. Members: What benefits?

Peter Hain: It is very interesting to hear the Opposition's catcalls of, "What benefits?"

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Well, tell us.

Peter Hain: I will tell the hon. Gentleman. More than 3.5 million jobs are dependent on our membership of the EU—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Rubbish!

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be calm.

Peter Hain: Conservative Members do not understand why they were so roundly rejected by the electorate on 7 June. Membership of the EU has been enormously beneficial to Britain, and the many companies in the constituencies of Conservative Members that depend on exports to Europe or trade with Europe will hound them out of office if they persist with their policy, which is nothing less than a programme for withdrawal from Europe.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Minister share my assessment that one of the reasons why the Irish people turned down the treaty of Nice was that they benefit so greatly from the cohesion fund? Will he and his colleagues bring pressure to bear on Ireland, and other partners in Europe who benefit greatly, to share the prize of enlargement with us?

Peter Hain: May I very much welcome the hon. Lady's point, which for a change was a serious point about enlargement from a Conservative? She makes the point that enlargement has enormous benefits, not just for the accession states but for the British companies and jobs that will benefit from the enlarged market that will be created. The point she makes about the cohesion fund is important. A number of sticky issues need to be addressed as progress is made chapter by chapter, including the common agricultural and the structural funds.

Missile Defence

5. **Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): What recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on missile defence. [1542]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I discussed missile defence with the US Secretary of State Colin Powell at the recent meeting of the North Atlantic Council and the European Council on 13 and 15 June. I look forward to renewing the discussions during my visit to Washington, for which I leave later today.

Mr. Savidge: May I welcome and congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his appointment? More than 250 Members of Parliament have already signed early-day motion 23. With all due and delicate diplomacy, will my right hon. Friend convey to our United States allies the concern that star wars, in attempting to reduce a comparatively remote threat, might increase far graver dangers? There is also a wider worry: on a catalogue of vital issues the Bush Administration seem recklessly ready either to block or breach international agreements that are essential to a safer and more civilised future and, indeed, to George Bush Snr's vision of a "new world order."

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for his early remarks. I have of course read the early-day motion, and I recognise the concerns expressed in it. I must point out, however, that the motion endorses the unanimous conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which included a commendation of the Prime Minister's approach to the issue.

President George W. Bush has made very clear—he set this out again at the NATO Council in June—his wish to proceed by co-operation and consultation not only with the United Kingdom and other European allies but with China, Russia and other major countries to the east. That is the right way forward.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): But does the Foreign Secretary understand that what unites Labour Back Benchers, Liberal Democrat Members and such influential figures in the Democratic party as Senator Joseph Biden, who has recently become the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Senate, in their scepticism about missile defence is the prospect of unilateral action by the Bush Administration, when nuclear proliferation has been prevented by a network of treaties and collective agreements? What are the prospects, for example, of maintaining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty at its current level of effectiveness if the United States embarks on unilateral action of the kind proposed?

Mr. Straw: I understand those anxieties. To some extent, they are underlined by the current uncertainties in the propositions from the United States. I note that President George W. Bush, in his speech on 1 May, said:

> "We have more work to do to determine the final form the defences might take . . . We recognise the technological difficulties we face".

Given that there is such imprecision in what the United States is proposing, it behoves us, as long-standing allies of the US, not to come to conclusions until we are clear about what we are concluding about. That is why the process of consultation and co-operation that the Prime Minister set in train and that I shall continue tomorrow in Washington is the appropriate way forward.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that sometimes a good and firm ally of the United States should be willing to tell an American Administration when they are wrong? They are wrong over star wars, and we should have the courage to say so.

Mr. Straw: It is very important not to generalise about the propositions and use the label "star wars". There has been a series of propositions, some of which are more likely than others to come into effect. Some, although they are on the table, may have no effect for 20, 30 or 40 years, as the American Administration are making clear.

It ought, though, to be underlined that at the heart of the American propositions is their concern, which we share, that the world has changed in the past 30 years, with a much greater threat from rogue states. The threat from Russia is no longer perceived to be in any sense imminent, but we have to decide how to deal defensively with the threats that exist. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends agree that the appropriate way forward is not to commit ourselves on the nature of the US propositions until we know exactly what they are. That is what I shall be doing in Washington.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I wish the Foreign Secretary well in his Washington discussions. I hope that they prove fruitful. We believe that a successful missile defence system is strongly in our interests and that the Government should be willing to commit themselves now, in principle, to working with our American allies to develop a satisfactory system. We appreciate the fact that this is a difficult issue for many Labour Members, but I want to make it clear that we will give the Government robust support if they choose to proceed in that way. Is the Foreign Secretary in favour, in principle, of missile defence?

Mr. Straw: I would probably rather go naked into a conference chamber than with the robust support of the right hon. Gentleman.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that concern about nuclear missile defence is not confined to the House? In their letters to me, my constituents have expressed three main anxieties, which I hope that my right hon. Friend will raise with the Americans on my behalf. They are worried that the proposed system will not be successful because it is technically flawed, that it will not achieve its aim of dealing with rogue states and that it could cause proliferation in those states that have nuclear weapons. Will my right hon. Friend hammer home those points on behalf of my constituents?

Mr. Straw: The concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed are entirely understandable, and I shall certainly ensure that they are reflected in the discussions.

Cyprus

6. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What plans the Government have for contributing to a lasting peace and constitutional settlement for Cyprus. [1543]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): The current United Nations settlement process offers the best chance of securing a just and lasting settlement in Cyprus, and we remain committed to supporting the UN's efforts. In conjunction with the US and our EU partners, we urge all concerned to engage positively.

Simon Hughes: Will the Minister confirm that, if all goes well, Cyprus should be able to complete accession negotiations with the EU by the end of next year, with a view to taking part in the 2004 European elections? Should not the clearest representations be made, through the Government of Turkey, to the Government of the self-styled "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" that unless that Government help to achieve a solution to the Cyprus problem they will not be able to participate in Cyprus's membership of the EU? Should not it also be made clear that the Turkish Government's own application for membership could also be harmed?

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point that would bear careful study by the Turkish Government, and by the Turkish embassy here. The Government very much welcome the progress being made by Cyprus, which has completed 22 of the 31 chapters needed to qualify for accession. Cyprus is an old friend, and we want its accession bid to succeed.

Those Conservative Members who want to block enlargement by holding up the Nice treaty are preventing friendly nations such as Cyprus, Malta, Hungary and Lithuania from enjoying the benefits of democracy, prosperity, stability and peace that EU membership brings. Cyprus would be among the first wave of countries to benefit from that membership.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that the 27th anniversary of Turkey's invasion of Cyprus is approaching? For all that time, Turkey has been in illegal occupation of one third of a sovereign country that is a member of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations, and a prospective member of the European Union. Will he make it clear to the Turkish Government that the whole House considers that Turkey's admission to the EU remains out of the question as long as it is in illegal occupation of one third of Cyprus?

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend is right to draw the attention of the House and of the Turkish Government to the fact that formidable obstacles remain to be overcome before Turkey can accede to the European Union through the enlargement process. Those obstacles must be dealt with so that we can move forward, which is what we want to happen. We want to work with the Turkish Government

to ensure that the obstacles are overcome in a way that benefits all who would be penalised if they were allowed to remain.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Will the Minister convey to the police and security forces in Cyprus the House's congratulations on their success in defusing, before any lives were lost, the rioting and regrettable violence that took place last week on the island's sovereign bases? What measures is he taking to ensure that the violence will not recur? Can he give the House a firm date by which he expects Cyprus to be able to accede to the European Union? Frankly, nothing that he has said so far gives any confidence that the process will be anything but slow.

Peter Hain: I shall certainly pass on the right hon. Gentleman's message.

We are in close dialogue with Foreign Minister Kasoulides, whom I met earlier last week to discuss the Akrotiri antenna, which is being built on the salt lake there and has caused the difficulties. We made it clear through the environmental assessment that was conducted in 1997 that we see no problems to health or the environment as a result of the construction of that antenna. Obviously, we will want to make progress and resolve people's fears.

On enlargement, if the right hon. Gentleman would enthusiastically support the Nice treaty and the accession of Cyprus, Malta and all those other states—which will realise that the Conservatives are opposing their accession to the EU—we might move faster. The progress that Cyprus is making should mean that it clears all the obstacles by the end of next year. If everything remains on course, enlargement will take place and Cyprus will participate in the 2004 European elections to become a fully fledged member of the EU, as we want it to be.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Will my hon. Friend give us an assurance that the appalling violence that we witnessed last week will not be allowed to interfere in any way with British efforts to secure the peaceful resolution of the wider problems in Cyprus? I appreciate that many people in this country will have been horrified at what they saw, but we seek an absolute assurance that that will not interfere with the normal processes in which Britain is engaged to secure a peaceful resolution of the problems on the island.

Peter Hain: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are working closely, in particular with the assistance of our special envoy, Sir David Hannay, with the United Nations and others—including the European Union—to involve Turkey, Cyprus and Mr. Denktash more positively in discussions to ensure that a settlement and the achievement of our objective and that of the UN, which is a bizonal, bicommunal Cyprus, are achieved.

EU Presidency

7. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): What plans Belgium has for its presidency of the Council; and if he will make a statement. [1544]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Belgium has identified 16 priority areas for its presidency. I will place a list in the Library of the House.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether one of those 16 areas is the proposal pressed by the Prime Minister of Belgium and his Finance Minister to establish a European tax to be levied throughout the European Union on the benighted citizens by unelected authorities in Brussels? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that if that proposal were put forward and pressed, he would use his veto to block it, as it is a fundamental principle of our democracy that there should be no taxation without representation?

Mr. Straw: That proposal is not formally on the list, but perhaps the Prime Minister of Belgium has since expanded it to 17. I confirm what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear, which is that we are opposed to that European tax.

Mr. Paterson: A veto?

Mr. Straw: Hang on. It follows therefore that we will use all the powers at our disposal to ensure that that opposition is carried through.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): What plans does my right hon. Friend have to improve the accountability of European Union institutions to ensure that they are more relevant to the people of Europe?

Mr. Straw: My first plan is to ensure that we better explain, in language that our constituents and citizens understand, the values of the European Union. We should get away from jargon and talk about the benefits that the EU has brought for jobs, security and peace in Europe. Nothing more undermines support for Europe than a retreat into jargon. As for institutional changes, frankly, I am sceptical whether, as if by magic, an institutional change in the necessarily complicated structure of Europe will secure popular support. The Nice European Council set a pathway leading to the intergovernmental conference in 2004, in part so that the institutions could be improved. We are participating in those discussions.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Foreign Secretary's offer to go naked and the offer of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) to love him in the morning are taking social liberalism a little too far.

On the Belgian presidency, will the Foreign Secretary raise again during the Council meetings the question of the takeover directive which was lost by a tied vote in the European Parliament after 12 years of negotiations? The directive is a crucial opening up of the single market. It is absurd that the Germans ratted on an agreement that their Ministers had entered into, and in those circumstances the very essence and effectiveness of the European Union needs to be seen in the way that we react to it. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will take a lead to

ensure that the directive rapidly goes back on to the agenda and that this time the Germans hold to the agreements entered into by their Ministers.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is better qualified to speak about social liberalism than me.

I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the takeover directive. There is a warning there for people who believe that increasing democracy inside the EU means increasing the power of the European Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in a speech in Warsaw that we see the European Union as a union of nation states. It is thus important that the principal power should remain with the Council of Ministers.

People Trafficking

8. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What further action he intends to take to combat trafficking in human beings. [1545]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): We continue to work with our partners in Europe and across the world against the evil trade of people trafficking.

This year for the first time, immigration service officials have been appointed to the staff of British embassies in Europe and 10 officials were sent to reinforce the state border service between Croatia and Bosnia—one of the key conduits for people trafficking. Furthermore, 21 members of the immigration service work as airport liaison officers overseas.

Mr. Thomas: First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on his promotion to the Front Bench.

Does my hon. Friend recognise the continuing concern that Eurostar is being targeted by the mafia-like organisations that traffic in human beings? Can he tell us how successful the measures taken to increase security at Eurostar terminals have been, what further measures are under consideration and whether he agrees that it is co-operation not confrontation with our European partners that will be the key to dealing with this terrible trade?

Mr. MacShane: I thank my hon. Friend for his congratulations. When I returned from Paris recently, I was extremely pleased to see British immigration officers at the Gare du Nord working to try to control that flow of traffic. That issue and the problems with Eurotunnel were raised by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in Paris yesterday. That again proves the necessity for joined-up government between Britain and France to deal with that real menace—in contrast to the isolation and rejection of such integration and co-operation demonstrated by the Opposition.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We welcome the steps that have been taken to deal with human trafficking. Will the Minister also deal with slavery throughout the world, especially in Africa? Are the Government concerned about that? What steps have they taken to put pressure on international businesses to take a stand on the issue?

Mr. MacShane: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his important question. I know of the great concern that he has shown over the years about slavery, especially in some African countries. The Government have taken the lead in supporting the UN convention and in applying the protocol on human trafficking. We are stepping up co-operation with several countries throughout the world to try to put an end to that evil trade.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Is my hon. Friend aware of the claim that financial grants from international organisations, such as the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, are going to organisations in Bosnia, such as the HDZ, which then use the money to smuggle not only tobacco and drugs but human beings?

Mr. MacShane: I am aware of those allegations and I shall address them when I visit Sarajevo later this week. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing them to the attention of the House. We have sent 10 British officials to work with the Bosnian state border police to try to damp down the problems of smuggling and people trafficking. Those problems touch many of us in our constituencies. That is why the first line of defence is overseas and why Britain must be engaged in Europe and throughout the world.

Ministerial Responsibilities

9. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement on the ministerial responsibilities within his Department for Africa. [1547]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Within the Secretary of State's overall responsibilities, Baroness Amos is the Minister for Africa. She is responsible for sub-Saharan African issues. I am the Minister responsible for north African issues and will answer questions on sub-Saharan Africa in the House.

Mr. Brady: I congratulate the Minister on his new appointment. Does he agree that at a time of deepening crisis in Zimbabwe, and as Britain's diplomatic efforts in Africa have completely collapsed this week at the meeting of the Organisation of African Unity, it is extremely regrettable that the British Government's response has been to downgrade the ministerial responsibility for Africa from a Minister of State to two Under-Secretaries?

Mr. Bradshaw: I do not accept for a moment that our diplomacy has failed, and the responsibilities are nothing new. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) split the responsibility between sub-Saharan Africa and north Africa when he was a Minister. Indeed, under the previous Conservative Government, a Minister in the House of Lords, not in this House, had to answer to hon. Members. As I said, my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State carries the primary responsibility for Africa, and the Prime Minister is extremely engaged in the subject.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his new post. What steps are being taken to resolve the long-running land distribution conflict in Zimbabwe?

Mr. Bradshaw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is an urgent need for land reform, but the British Government believe that it must be within the ambit of the rule of law and that it must be sustainable and transparent. We have contributed £44 million to land reform in Zimbabwe since independence, and we have consistently said that we would support land reform in line with the principles agreed by the Government of Zimbabwe and international donors at the 1998 land conference. Sadly, Zimbabwe is not adhering to those principles.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities and congratulate him on his appointment. I also welcome the Government's statements that Africa will be a priority in their foreign policy, although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) that the institutional arrangements set up do not suggest that; they send the reverse signal. There is so much in Africa, particularly in southern Africa, that is encouraging, given the number of countries that have become pluralist, multi-party democracies, that are embracing the open economy and that are flourishing. We understand the desire of the old Organisation of African Unity to rebrand and relaunch itself as a new African Union as a signal of a new era, but does the Minister agree that the decision of the Foreign Ministers of that union to give full support to President Mugabe's tyrannical and ruinous regime is as bad a start for the new organisation as it could possibly have? A generation ago, Africa was wealthier per capita than Asia; since then, the position has been reversed. How will the Minister convey the message that success in today's world lies in embracing the rule of law, democracy and the open economy? Mugabe's regime and the OAU's support for him contaminates the whole continent.

Mr. Bradshaw: The right hon. Gentleman should view the statement by the African Union, as it now calls itself, in the context of its desire to maintain unity, but he and all hon. Members know that many countries in Africa, and many people in Zimbabwe, share our deep concerns about the Zimbabwean human rights record, want that country to move swiftly towards free and fair elections and feel very sad about the state of the Zimbabwean economy.

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): I welcome the Minister to his new post. Can he assure me and my constituents, many of whom are African, that Africa remains a top priority and that conflict resolution and the formation of civil society across Africa is at the top of his agenda?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, Africa remains a top priority. The Opposition were rather unfair about my noble Friend Baroness Amos, who will be an excellent Minister and has already shown great energy. She has met a succession of African leaders and will visit Nigeria shortly. As I said earlier, the Prime Minister has held a summit with President Mbeke of South Africa. We are very supportive of the formation of the new African Union, and the Prime Minister will take the recommendations that come from the meeting of the African Union this week to the forthcoming G8 summit in Genoa.

NATO

10. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): When the Secretary of State will next meet the United States Secretary of State to discuss the future of NATO. [1550]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Tomorrow.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful for that brief and succinct reply. Last year, the Secretary of State for Defence gave the impression that defence spending among European Union nations would increase. Why have the International Institute for Strategic Studies and President Bush of the United States both noted that European defence spending is, in fact, falling? Is it not now essential to repair the damage done to US-British relations by the Labour Government's desire for a European army?

Mr. Bradshaw: No damage at all has been done to US-British relations. Perhaps President Bush is the best judge of that. He said:

"The United States welcomes the EU's European Security and Defence Policy intended to make Europe a stronger, more capable partner in deterring and managing crises affecting the security of the Transatlantic community".

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): When Ministers meet their American counterparts, as well as welcoming the fact that the US Administration have changed their approach to the European defence policy, will they also welcome the fact that there appears to be a growing recognition, particularly in the Senate, of the importance of the American Government having a detailed discussion with Russia, and that any move beyond the anti-ballistic missile treaty should take place on the basis of co-operation, not unilateralism?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already said, we welcome President Bush's willingness to engage not just with us and our European Union and NATO allies but with Russia and China on the important issues of international security.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I join other hon. Members in welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his post.

May I ask the question another way? European Union politicians, such as the Belgian Foreign Minister, Louis Michel—whom I am sure the Minister knows well—talk openly and confirm that the real reason for the European army is to realise Europe politically with a European security and defence policy. Not just the International Institute for Strategic Studies but a succession of reports

have shown that European defence spending, far from increasing to pay for better equipped forces, continues to fall by 5 per cent. a year in constant dollar terms. Notwithstanding the announcements to be made later today, spending on new defence equipment in Europe is at its lowest for decades and NATO officials have complained about gaping holes in our procurement. Therefore, does the Minister not think that it will be an uphill battle for the Secretary of State to prove to the Americans tomorrow that Europe's grand designs and diminishing defence spending will strengthen NATO rather than weaken it? Unfortunately, is it not true that NATO is not safe in the Foreign Secretary's hands?

Mr. Bradshaw: There is rather a lot in that question. The hon. Lady and most of her colleagues on the Opposition Benches need to have a little more confidence, particularly in Britain's ability to win arguments with Belgian politicians. She has a serious point on European defence capabilities that was also made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). All of us in the House share the view that the European defence force and Europe as a whole need to improve their defence capabilities. That is partly a matter of spending more, but it is also a question of how we spend the money. At the moment, compared with the United States, we get very little capability for what we spend.

Kyoto Protocol

11. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): What discussions he has had with his US counterpart on the Kyoto protocol. [1551]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): My right honourable Friend the Foreign Secretary will discuss the Kyoto protocol when he meets Colin Powell during his visit to Washington this week.

Tom Brake: Does the Minister agree that, while US initiatives to promote renewable energy through its Export Credit Agency are welcome, unless the US is willing to put together a detailed package of measures to achieve the CO_2 reductions that have been set for it in the Kyoto protocol, both President Bush and the companies, such as Esso, that backed him during his election campaign will find themselves increasingly isolated in the international community?

Peter Hain: We and the European Union continue to have an active dialogue with the American Administration on how their concerns and reservations about the Kyoto protocol can be addressed. No country, especially one that contributes up to a quarter of the world's emissions, can opt out of the problems. The planet faces a catastrophe unless we work together on climate warming and other environmental problems. The dialogue with the US and others is designed to achieve a solution to that.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I welcome my hon. Friend's response. In making those representations, will he ensure that for every military and industrial adviser that the American Administration listen to, they listen to just three of the 3,000 scientists who have confirmed in a report to the United Nations that global warming is real? They say that it is causing increasing difficulties and inflicting growing costs that cannot be ignored or put on the back burner.

Peter Hain: I hope that everyone concerned takes note of American scientists, including those from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, who made exactly the point that my hon. Friend advances. It is important that we all move together, which is why the European Union has been actively pursuing the issue. Incidentally, that is another reason why it is important for us to join together to ensure that the EU puts the environment at the top of its agenda, as it did in the communiqué from the Gothenburg summit.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Minister will be aware that the last US Administration agreed at Kyoto to reduce greenhouse emissions by 7 per cent. by 2020 on the 1990 levels. At the same conference the British Government commendably pledged to reduce them by 12.5 per cent. Before his right hon. Friend meets the US Secretary of State tomorrow, will he check by what amount greenhouse gases in Britain had been reduced when the commitment was made four years ago and by how much they have been reduced since then?

Peter Hain: We shall certainly check that. The hon. Gentleman draws attention to a wider issue. We all have a responsibility to make progress on reducing the emissions that cause such dangerous climate change and, if necessary, to put in place policies to do so. Simply because someone is not going along with that does not mean that the rest of us should not. His point is welcome in that context.

Plan Colombia

12. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): What recent reports he has received about Plan Colombia; and if he will make a statement. [1552]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): We continually monitor the situation in Colombia, including the implementation of Plan Colombia via our embassy in Bogota and our contacts with the Government and civil society in Colombia and the non-governmental organisations that work at home and abroad.

On behalf of the House, I welcome the safe return of Alistair Taylor who was held by Colombian guerrillas for nearly two years and is now re-united with his family in Aberdeenshire.

Mr. Lloyd: I join my hon. Friend in welcoming the release of Alistair Taylor.

Colombia has been engaged in one of the bloodiest conflicts in one of the most prolonged civil wars. Does he accept that it is astonishing for the United States or Europe to believe that our drugs problems can be solved by beating the Colombian Government into intensifying an unwinnable civil war? Will he ensure that our message to the Colombians is that we and our European allies want to be partners in working to achieve an approach to peace that engages the guerrillas and the paramilitaries? If the

war intensifies on the premise that we can solve our drugs problem, it will be at the expense of the ordinary people of Colombia who have been brutalised in this long conflict.

Mr. MacShane: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution at the Foreign Office and thereafter to solving the problem. The civil war in Colombia has been going on for 40 years, so it started well before drugs became a crucial feature of it. However, he is right to raise that issue. This country and the EU insist on recognising the social dimension to the problem because unless we find replacement jobs for the peasant farmers who grow the crops, they will be attracted to the idea of participating in the drugs trade.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I warmly congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment.

Given the verdict of the head of the United States Drug Enforcement Agency that Plan Colombia is not denting the supply of drugs to the United States, what steps is the Minister taking to encourage other Governments to assist the Colombian Government in their battle against the drugs menace and the activities that accompany it?

Mr. MacShane: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. He meant them sincerely, and I hope that praise from him will continue.

This Government and other European Governments, which are all afflicted by the drugs trade—as our constituencies are afflicted—continue to make it clear to the Colombian Government that all measures must be used in their battle to end that trade, and that economic and social help must go hand in hand with direct attacks on the guerrillas responsible for some of the trade.

Disturbances, Bradford

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the disorder in Bradford at the weekend.

I believe that the response of the whole House will be to make it absolutely clear that we cannot and will not tolerate the wanton destruction and violence that we have witnessed over the last few days. The message must be unequivocal and unwavering: whatever the debate about alienation and disaffection, attacking the police, destroying the well-being of the local community and playing into the hands of organised groups will simply not be tolerated.

The facts can be recounted briefly. The banning order on all marches and processions in Bradford for three months has been in force since 4 July. The police were aware of reports of extreme right-wing elements seeking to defy the ban. Fighting began in the town centre in the late afternoon as efforts were made to disperse an Anti-Nazi League rally. The fighting shifted from the city centre to the Manningham area in the early evening, by which time the police themselves were the focus for attack. Missiles, including petrol bombs that had clearly been prepared in advance, were thrown at the police by a mob numbering 400 to 500 at its peak; 164 police officers were injured; 36 people were arrested, only two of whom were from outside Bradford.

On Sunday night and Monday morning the Manningham area was quiet. Subsequently there was a serious attack on a restaurant in the Ravenscliff area, and I regret to say that there was further disorder last night, involving youths throwing missiles in the Ravenscliff and Holmwood areas of the city. There have been 34 more arrests arising from disorder in the city since Sunday. The police commander at the scene spoke of "senseless violence and criminality"; I endorse his judgment and applaud the courage shown by the police in dealing with the situation.

The damage to local businesses and the prosperity of the area will not be made good quickly. As always, the people who will suffer in the long run are members of the local community. We wish to work with the people of Bradford to restore calm and look to the future. But let me make it clear that a prerequisite for dealing with social ills or rebuilding confidence within the community is to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that order is restored.

Following the disturbances in Oldham and Burnley, I asked the Minister of State with responsibility for crime reduction, policing and community safety, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), to draw together an inter-departmental ministerial group. This has met twice already. My right hon. Friend will today publish preliminary details of wider action proposed by the group in addressing the concerns in a range of communities throughout the country and the way in which, in conjunction with local people, the Government can do more to minimise the risk of further disorder.

I wish to stress that we are not seeking to impose solutions from Whitehall or lift responsibility, which must rest at local level, but we are seeking from local communities possible ideas on how young people can be further aided in taking up opportunities for recreation and other activities over the summer and, in particular, measures that bring together different religious, racial, and community groups.

I now propose to take that work a stage further. The ministerial group will undertake an urgent review over the summer of all the relevant community issues and will be supported by a small, dedicated review team of people with the right skills. That team will seek views from people on the ground in areas which have suffered from violence the most, as well as in other places with similar social and demographic features which have not. The aim will be to draw lessons which can inform future policy at national, local and community levels. The group will continue its work and will be complemented by the development of longer-term proposals from the performance and innovation unit based in the Cabinet Office.

There are many lessons to be learned from the past, as well as present events. For the police, intelligence and practical planning issues are particular challenges. We now need to ensure that the professionalism and experience of our police service is made available quickly and effectively to prevent further disturbances. The Association of Chief Police Officers has already held one meeting of commanders under the auspices of the national operations faculty to establish what lessons can be learned not just in preventing but in bringing to a rapid conclusion the kind of disorder that we saw on Saturday evening.

I will wish to discuss with ACPO how we might build on that initiative, pooling such experience and ensuring that operational commanders can find sources of advice immediately to help them to deal with the exceptionally difficult situation that they face. The vast majority of people in our society, regardless of their ethnic background, want the same things for themselves and their children. As we share a common citizenship, we have to find ways of working and living together in harmony. Our aim is to create an inclusive society, local communities which meet the needs of all groups, and a dialogue which transcends differences.

Organised thugs from whatever background or standpoint undermine that possibility, and that is why the threat from them must be met head on. The message from today is that we will not accept the destruction of hard-won improvements in the most difficult areas of our country—and nor would local people forgive us if we do not provide them with the protection that they deserve.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I thank the Home Secretary for coming to the House to make a statement this afternoon. On behalf of the Opposition, may I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself with his condemnation of the violence and the criminal attacks on both people and property in Bradford over the past few days? Does he agree that the fact that no fewer than 164 police officers were injured is a stark rebuke to those people who now allege that the police were in some way the perpetrators of the violence, rather than the service trying to restore order to the streets of Bradford? On behalf of the Opposition, I should like to offer support to the police, Bradford city council and others in Bradford who are working to restore order and the city's reputation for good community relations.

[Mr. David Lidington]

Will the Home Secretary consider the part played by extremists of both right and left? Does he agree with several people in Bradford and some Labour Members that militant extremists from the self-styled Anti-Nazi League were out to inflame rather than heal divisions in Bradford last weekend?

A couple of days ago, the Home Secretary talked about the possibility of equipping the police with water cannon and tear gas to cope with future riots. Is he still considering that? Have the police in West Yorkshire or elsewhere requested the provision of such equipment? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is too simplistic to brand events in Bradford the product of racial tension? I agree with him that the social problems that he described—poor education, lack of skills and poor opportunities—afflict young men from British Pakistani and British white homes alike. Those problems must be tackled but they do not for a moment justify the behaviour in Bradford on Saturday night and more recently.

Will the Home Secretary launch an urgent inquiry into policing pressures in Bradford and elsewhere in West Yorkshire? Surely he knows that police numbers in the West Yorkshire force are nearly 400 lower than when the Government first took office. Even last year, the West Yorkshire police force lost more officers through resignation than it was able to recruit. Is he aware of local anxiety in Bradford that the police are too stretched to deal promptly and effectively with minor disorder, drug dealing and racist abuse on the streets? That encourages criminals and political extremists to be bolder.

I assure the Home Secretary that if he takes the necessary steps to bolster the strength and effectiveness of the police force, he will deserve support from all parties.

Mr. Blunkett: I welcome the first part of the hon. Gentleman's response. I am sorry that the second half degenerated into the party politics of police numbers. I want to make it clear that a lack of police did not contribute to the prolonged disorder on Saturday night. The number of police available was that requested from West Yorkshire police and neighbouring authorities throughout the north of England. Those numbers remain available; there are approximately 300 police on the streets. We are determined to ensure that they are there when needed.

Under the crime fighting fund, we had already planned for 292 extra police, with 92 being appointed immediately. The local police authority was also contributing through the police grant and local resources so that the total increase this year was to be 400 extra police officers—far more than 200 when we had netted off any losses through those leaving.

Last weekend was not caused by a lack of policing or police numbers. As I said earlier, we must deal with issues such as how to make the best use of experience, including that in the Metropolitan police. It is a question of how we can do that quickly and effectively when police commanders on the ground need it.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about particular police methods and equipment. I want to make it clear—on a lighter note, the shadow Chancellor might share this belief—that we should not always believe what we read in *The Guardian*. Although plastic baton rounds and CS gas are available, I have never mentioned gas of any sort either publicly or privately to colleagues or journalists; so they made it up. I am interested in how we can use methods that are less of a risk than plastic baton rounds, which are available on the British mainland, but about which I have doubts in terms of public safety.

I am prepared to consider other methods that would allow the police to deal quickly and effectively with mass disorder and a threat to life, limb and property. I shall receive reports and we will consider the issues carefully, but in the end, good intelligence and preparation, and the willingness of the local community to be part of the solution, will be the way forward. I think that the House will join me in wanting to find ways of preventing, predicting and then dealing quickly with any further incidents of this sort.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. We must bear in mind the fact that what happened on Saturday was pure, wanton, mindless and criminal violence, but notwithstanding that, we can see the similarities between what has happened in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. The common thread is the presence on the streets of far-right groups: the National Front and the British National party. Those organisations exist purely to foment racial hatred. We in Bradford have believed for many years that there is no place on the streets for fascists and Nazis. Is it possible to call on the full powers of the National Criminal Intelligence Service to track and control the movement of these fascist thugs? I believe that the time is coming when Parliament must seriously consider proscribing those organisations and removing that blight from our society. Communities such as Bradford will never feel safe as long as these people are about.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank my hon. Friend, and I want to say to the people of Bradford how sorry we all are that they have had to endure these disturbances and have their well-being undermined and destroyed by others who came from outside to do so or threaten to do so, who were part of the cause. There is no question but that if the National Front had not sought a march and demonstration in Bradford, and if the reaction that led to the curtailment of the Bradford Vision festival had not been provoked, people would on Saturday have been living not only in peace and quietude but in racial harmony. They would have been enjoying themselves as part of that multiracial festival, which is drawing people together and building on the lessons of 1995.

Yes, I am unequivocal in my condemnation, but I also ask those who seek to combat fascism to hold their hand carefully. I ask them to allow us to deal with public order and not to take it into their own hands. I agree that the National Criminal Intelligence Service and our security services will need to consider all those who threaten our democracy. If we can develop intelligence to know where and when they intend to destroy our community and racial harmony, we can take effective measures to stop them.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the Home Secretary for his statement, which I endorse. I want to share with him from the Liberal Democrat Benches the feeling that, whatever the problems in the urban communities of our country, resort to violence, racism and intolerance of the sort that we saw

at the weekend is an unacceptable response, wherever it comes from. I happily join with him and the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) in sending our support to the police and the elected representatives of the city of Bradford—the two groups that are most accountable for good order in that great city.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with me that the city council, which I understand has already commissioned some work and some reports which are due out later this week, must receive the support that it needs and for which it has asked in dealing with the problems that it is aware of and is seeking to address?

Slightly more broadly, I ask the right hon. Gentleman to consider that the responses that he proposes through the working group and the performance and innovation unit may before long be better dealt with by the Government's doing for urban policy what they sensibly did for rural policy after the election? That would involve finding a Cabinet Minister—it may be the right hon. Gentleman or a colleague—who would be responsible throughout the country for pulling together policy in urban and suburban areas. As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said in his statement, these matters are not only about law and order but about education, community relations and other factors.

There is an important supplementary question that follows on from the remarks of the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney). As part of the review of policy—I do not go down the road of proscribing far-right or far-left organisations—can we consider the intelligence that relates to what has happened in recent months throughout the country, the links between the far right and occasionally the far left and community disorder, and the way in which we might be able to review public order legislation to make it less frequently possible for people to "exercise their rights", when actually they are seeking to provoke difficulty, tension and racism in urban communities? We must deal with those who have committed offences through the law.

The other common thread is that many young people have taken to the streets, misbehaving and demonstrating clearly that they are willing to participate. Can we ensure that what they want to say about the future of their city and of their communities is listened to as much as what anyone else says, so that the next generation feels empowered in the process of developing their future? Wherever they come from and whatever their race, let us ensure that they do not feel that they are disengaged from, or have no stake in, the city or the town in which they belong and to which I am sure they want to contribute.

Mr. Blunkett: I think that there were four key questions. On a slightly light note, after the past four and a half weeks, I feel that I have enough on my plate without taking on the whole of urban Britain. However, I take the point about the coherence of the response. That is why, both within the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Cabinet Office, we will want to pull together regeneration programmes with a review.

We will want carefully to listen to young people. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will include young people in the review group so that they are clearly represented and heard. However, it is my evidence—perhaps colleagues from Bradford will confirm it—that some of the hard core who were stimulating, organising and communicating the disorder on Saturday night were not young people who will join our review groups. That is because they are drug pushers and traffickers, and we need to deal with them head on.

Yes, we will take on board Lord Ouseley's report. However, I hope that everyone will come forward with ideas for finding solutions, rather than merely posing questions for others to answer. Bussing children round cities to ensure multi-ethnic schooling is easier said than done. It was tried in Bradford and it has been tried extensively in north America, and on every occasion it has been abandoned.

We all share an intent. Finding solutions that are acceptable in a democracy is entirely another matter. We would consider public order legislation, but, again, it is a difficult area. I said to the chief constable of Manchester after the Oldham incidents that the issue of when a march or assembly turns out to be a gathering of citizens goes back to 1815 and Peterloo. There are some difficult legal issues. I will happily consider them, but we have an interesting reversal of positions here: I am defending human rights and the hon. Gentleman is helping me to find the right balance between those who would destroy our society and those who have the right to demonstrate in it.

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Does he appreciate the level of dismay and shock felt by me, my fellow Bradford MPs and the people of Bradford at what happened on Saturday? Does he appreciate how dangerous the situation now is in Bradford and how fractured community relations are? Does he agree that the vast majority of the Muslim community in Bradford are peaceful, decent and law-abiding and should not be scapegoated along with the mindless minority?

I join my right hon. Friend in praising the police for their courage. I was there and I saw it. It cannot be right for our police forces to face for hour upon hour a sustained assault of bricks, bottles, powerful explosives and petrol bombs without being able to do anything about it. It cannot be right for a community to be laid siege to for hour upon hour when it needs emergency services. We have a duty of care to them, too. When my right hon. Friends consults chief officers about the need for water cannon on our streets, I hope that he will consult ordinary bobbies to see what they feel about it.

Will my right hon. Friend look at giving areas such as Bradford, over and above the police complement, beat bobbies dedicated to troubled areas who work just that beat? May I ask him to understand our feeling that Bradford lies bleeding? It needs to heal. We need my right hon. Friend's support and the support of the whole House for that healing process to begin and to finish.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank my hon. Friend, who puts it eloquently and with great feeling. What the people of Bradford need immediately is the quietness and calm that will enable the prosperity and the image of Bradford to be restored to what it was for several years following enormous efforts by the community, the business community and those who came together in the Vision platform. Let us take up my hon. Friend's suggestion and be able to respond to what is required within the community itself: the dedicated policing that he describes seems an admirable suggestion.

[Mr. Blunkett]

It also seems that a wider community safety and disorder partnership is required, so that we can work with local people to identify those responsible, giving them the courage and protection that they need if they witness people destroying their neighbourhood and area. If we can come together and back people who witness those events, we will be able to see off those who have not only destroyed the immediate neighbourhood and people's prosperity and well-being, but created dangerous racial tension in Bradford and throughout the country. We are at a difficult moment. That is why getting it right quickly matters to all of us.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): As 34 of the 36 persons who were arrested were effectively local residents, are we not in danger of misleading ourselves by thinking that the prime responsibility lies with troublemakers from outside? Would it not be better for the Home Secretary to think carefully about the fact that, in all areas of Britain and the world where people are effectively segregated on the basis of religion, nationality or colour, there is always the potential for violence? All the Government's efforts should be aimed at trying to integrate the societies and stop having areas that are inhabited by one race or another race.

Mr. Blunkett: I understand the hon. Gentleman's intention, which is being expressed more broadly at the moment, including in Herman Ouseley's report, but, as I have said, the question is how to achieve that aim. Those who have come into the country over the years—be they Jewish, Chinese, Irish, or latterly from the Caribbean, Pakistan, Bangladesh or India—have inevitably come together with family and cultural friends in the initial stages of their integration into society. It is difficult to break that up, given the availability of specific housing and support services. We all want to ensure that there is true integration, in which people understand cultural differences and diversity and the strength that they bring; but achieving that is another matter.

Yes, it was primarily local people who—regrettably—were destroying their own community, and many of them will not be those who must experience the consequences that we must address. As with Oldham and Burnley, however, people came into Bradford to cause trouble. These people light fires and walk away from them, leaving others both to take the blame and to pick up the pieces. It is they who are our true enemy, and we should be clear about that.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the work done over the years to build community relations in Bradford has been an exemplar for all of us? Living close to Bradford as I do, with a constituency close to Bradford, I much admire what has been done both by my colleagues in the House and by community leaders.

Does my right hon. Friend also agree that, while most of the Bradford community hated all that happened on Saturday night, there are extreme and wicked people on all sides—in the ethnic minorities, on the right and on the left? They are a very dangerous mix: they will move across the Pennines, and from town to city, in order to stir up trouble in many different ways.

Is it not time for us, as politicians, to ponder deeply what is happening, not just on the streets of Bradford? In the last few years, we have witnessed politics going on to the streets. I do not like that, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend does not. We have seen a wider phenomenon recently, internationally—in Gothenburg during the recent meeting there, and in Seattle during meetings of the World Bank and G7—and in our own cities, with "Reclaim the Streets" in the City of London. We ignore that wider phenomenon at our peril; if we do so, we shall fail either to understand or to combat it.

I hope my right hon. Friend agrees that we need thought and firm action in equal measure.

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely agree with the last suggestion.

My hon. Friend is right: there is a danger of alienation from politics, politicians and democracy. I commented on that the day after the general election. One of the main things that alienate people from democracy is Government's inability to deliver the most basic requirement of all—order in communities, and the ability to live peacefully. It is important for us to establish that as a prerequisite.

History shows us that those who wish to destroy society benefit most when there is disorder on the streets. That is a simple lesson not just from the last century but from long before. Those of us on the left who miss that key lesson from history delude ourselves into believing that the Weimar republic, or what happened in republican Spain, was some kind of accident. That is not so. The right flourished as a result of the disorder on the streets when the left failed to act.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I associate myself with what was said by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh). For those of us who have great affection for Bradford, it was a shocking experience to see the television pictures at the weekend and to discuss the events with friends yesterday and today.

I commend the Home Secretary's robust attitude to the extremists on both right and left who lit the fires and have gone away. Those of good intent will now have to put things right. I see one danger, however. Some newspapers have mentioned the suggestion that one solution would be to disperse people of Asian descent around the city. I am with the Home Secretary on this matter. I think that the idea of bussing or housing dispersal is anathema and plays right into the hands of racists.

We have a vibrant community in Bradford. Some parts of the community come originally from the Indian sub-continent, but they are all an integral part of Bradford, and Bradford would be the less for it were they to be dispersed through either education or housing. It is our duty as politicians to meet the needs of people rather than to get people to meet the needs of those services. I therefore hope that ideas such as bussing and dispersal will be resisted.

I hope that the Home Secretary will look favourably on the idea of opening up schools and further education institutions in the summer. Schools are about to break up, and such an arrangement would be helpful. I also go along with the suggestion, which I read about, made by the hon.

Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh). We need an accelerated programme to recruit black and Asian British to the West Yorkshire police force.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Before the Home Secretary replies, I remind the House that there is another statement. I wish to call all hon. Members who are standing, but I will need the co-operation of the House to do so. I therefore require shorter questions and, of course, shorter answers.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall attempt to be brief, Mr. Speaker.

After all the years in which the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) and I were in local government and disagreed, it is nice for us to agree on something. It is also appropriate that we should do so today. I agree with his remarks on dispersal. Additionally, throughout the summer, we should and we will provide activities in colleges, theatres and leisure centres. Moreover, this year, the outward bound programme for 15 and 16-year-olds will be backed by £10 million. I am proud of that because I was the one who initiated it.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I endorse the comments of my right hon. Friend and of my two Bradford colleagues. However, I feel that we should perhaps be digging a little deeper and looking a little further, beyond the actions on Saturday of a minority of Bradfordians. The reason why young Asian men were on the streets of Bradford last Saturday could just be that they feel disaffected. They cannot appreciate why the good jobs, the expensive cars and the nice homes should all go to the whites. Perhaps we, too, should be asking why.

May I suggest that the remedies will not be found in new and better community centres? The remedies that I am going to suggest—like my comments two years ago on forced marriages—will not go down well with the Asian leadership in Bradford or Keighley. However, I feel compelled to make them because of the severity of the situation.

In Canada, which has otherwise very similar immigration laws to ours—

Mr. Speaker: Order. During a statement hon. Members must ask questions. The hon. Lady seems to be making a speech.

Mrs. Cryer: I am coming to it, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Lady has given the Home Secretary enough to chew on.

Mrs. Cryer: I was about—

Mr. Speaker: Order. My ruling is that the Home Secretary will reply to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend's reference to Canada must have been in connection with the Canadians' induction programme, which involves the acquisition of language and culture. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Asylum and Immigration, the Under-Secretary who has responsibility for immigration and nationality, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), and I will want to take ideas on how we can make being a British citizen and British national something to be proud of and ensure that induction into our community involves positive measures rather than simply the right to remain.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Home Secretary mentioned the Oldham and Burnley events that occurred before Bradford. To what extent has he explored the possibility that these are not simply copycat events, but co-ordinated events which form part of a conspiracy? Has he considered the use of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the Secret Intelligence Service to investigate the activities of far-right and far-left groups who may be deliberately stirring up trouble in those three towns and others in the north in the weeks to come?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) asked about NCIS and the use of the available intelligence in looking at the issues. I gave a comprehensive reply, but I repeat that we must act as sensitively and sensibly as we can. There is no evidence of conspiracy in relation to Saturday night's events and provocation, but there was enormous communication via mobile phones and other equipment to co-ordinate the action against the police.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Does my right hon. Friend accept that my constituents in Rochdale are vigilant because we are aware that what happened in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley could happen to us? Does he agree that we all have an individual responsibility to do all we can to ensure that violence such as that which we saw on Saturday does not continue and get a foothold in our community? However, does he agree that we cannot criminalise all young people, whether white or Asian? We must do all we can to empower them within their communities and make sure that they are involved in formal decision making to give them some ownership in the future.

Mr. Blunkett: None of us would seek to criminalise young people; we want to engage with them positively. However, there must be messages from the family and the cultural communities. I am aware of the divide between elders and young people in some of the communities. The message in the peer group has to be clear; bringing about greater engagement and reducing alienation will not come from destroying the livelihoods of others on the streets.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I commend the wise warning of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) and suggest that what he has said ought to be heeded by many hon. Members who represent big-city constituencies? I also applaud the early formation of the inter-departmental ministerial group by the Government and suggest that its work ought to be reinforced by Members of Parliament. Could we not have an ad hoc Select Committee on race relations and immigration that sits specifically to investigate the question of racial tension in our big cities and reports in advance of the formation of other departmental Select Committees? This is a matter of the gravest importance that concerns constituents in many cities and the country as a whole.

Mr. Blunkett: I respond in the spirit in which the hon. Gentleman asked his question, and I welcome what he

[Mr. Blunkett]

said. My right hon. and hon. Friends who are taking the matter forward will be happy to engage with Members of Parliament. When the Select Committee is formed, we will be happy to talk with the Chairman and others about how we make the approach inclusive. I am very happy to do so.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I support what my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) and for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) have said, and join them in condemning the mindless violence in Bradford. We must make it clear that this is not a game and that if it does not stop, someone will be killed. On a more positive note, will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating my local newspaper editor and his staff, Mr. Chaudhury Hussein—the chairman of the Calderdale youth forum—local authority officers and others who last night met hundreds of young Asians who, in a good-humoured and constructive meeting, pledged their commitment to work for a continued peaceful co-existence not just in Bradford but in Halifax? That is the way forward for all our communities; not petrol bombs, violence or the hatred and racism preached by the British National party.

Mr. Blunkett: I happen to know that my hon. Friend has herself played a significant role and was one of the first to make contact to warn of the dangers ahead, and I commend her for it. I also commend wholeheartedly the initiative taken at local level in Halifax, and the role that the local news media can play and have played in this instance. There is a crucial role for local newspapers and radio, and for regional television, in ensuring that we get this right. Reporters must ask sensible questions, not stirring up hatred and division but fostering and spreading excellent initiatives such as the one to which she referred.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the activities of the National Front and the far right sparked some of the trouble that took place at the weekend, and that, although we would all condemn the violence, in some East Lancashire and West Yorkshire towns pockets of alienation are growing, despite all the wealth being generated in this country, and some youths are being tempted into joining drugs gangs, which were obviously active at the weekend? Does he agree that regeneration is the answer, so that youngsters do not fall prey to that temptation and can engage in legitimate activity?

Mr. Blunkett: Regeneration, employment and positive hope for the future, so that people have an expectation that tomorrow will be better than today, are crucial, but there is no magic wand to be waved in relation to what is happening with drugs and the pressure on young people. It will take a great effort and great wisdom to be able to pull together the resources and the commitment necessary to overcome that scourge around us.

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Many younger people in this country, including myself, who woke up after similar problems in the 1980s in places such as Brixton and Tottenham will be saddened because we know that the stigma lasts a long time and that it can never be right for people to destroy their own homes and those of their neighbours. Will he take note of the examples of success in some of our multi-ethnic communities, such as the Broadwater Farm estate in my constituency? I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) would want me to talk about success in Brixton in her constituency, too. There are examples of people working successfully together and turning things around. We need to create a bank of best practice in multi-ethnic constituencies.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely. That is precisely what my colleagues are seeking to do in pulling the group together: to learn from experience and share best practice, enabling us to configure similar social and demographic factors in other areas and consider what has worked best there.

Make no mistake, though: the issues of regeneration, avoiding alienation and tackling some of the greatest social scourges of our time are not ones solely for areas where there are inter-racial or ethnic tensions. They also exist on the white housing estates such as those that I represent. We must balance the two if the message is to be clear that we care about all, regardless of race, colour or creed. If we do that, we will stop those who deliberately stir up hatred and use those factors to light the flames that we saw on Saturday in Bradford. That is a task for all of us.

Type 45 Destroyer

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the procurement strategy for the type 45 destroyer.

It is almost a year to the day since I announced to the House the decision to procure the first batch of three type 45 destroyers, as part of a planned class of up to 12 ships. The type 45s will be the largest and most powerful air defence destroyers ever ordered for the Royal Navy.

Since that announcement, we have made good progress. The contract to complete the design and build of the first three ships was placed with BAE Systems on 20 December last year. Design work is also progressing well. An integrated design team—whose members come from the prime contractor, BAE Systems, and the two shipbuilding companies BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thornycroft—has been established at Scotstoun for the last six months. In addition, a number of key subcontracts, such as those for the Rolls-Royce WR21 engine and much of the combat system, have now been placed. There have been a number of successful test firings of the Aster missile, the ship's main armament, which is being developed with France and Italy.

However, progress towards the shipbuilding subcontracts has been more difficult. The procurement strategy for the type 45 was based on the allocation of shipbuilding work for the first three ships between the BAE Systems Marine yards at Barrow-in-Furness and on the Clyde, and Vosper Thornycroft. Thereafter, it was assumed that both companies would compete for the assembly of batches of the succeeding ships.

At the end of last year, however, BAE Systems Marine put forward an unsolicited proposal for the construction of all 12 of the type 45 destroyers. We have been examining this proposal carefully to establish whether it offered better value for money for the taxpayer. We have also called on the services of RAND—a highly respected independent consultancy, experienced in this type of issue—to take a fresh look at possible procurement strategies for this programme in the context of the future warship programme as a whole.

For the original procurement strategy to work, the shipbuilding companies need to work closely together during the development and manufacture of the first batch of ships already on order. Such co-operation has not been encouraged by the existence of the unsolicited proposal, nor by the prospect that the companies would have to compete against each other for the second batch of ships.

We have been keen to resolve these problems, as has industry. Working with the companies, we have developed a revised strategy, which allocates work on the ships between the two shipbuilders for the whole class of type 45 destroyers. The first-of-class ship will be assembled and launched at Scotstoun. The focus of design support to the whole class will remain there, with continuing participation by both shipbuilders. The remaining ships will be assembled and launched at Barrow-in-Furness.

Vosper Thornycroft at Portsmouth, and BAE Systems Marine—on the Clyde and at Barrow-in-Furness—will both build and outfit substantial sections of each ship. The yards will continue to build the same sections throughout the programme, to increase efficiency and produce better value for money for the taxpayer.

Under the strategy, a commitment has now been made to six ships in a planned class of up to 12 ships. That commitment has therefore doubled the number on order. This larger volume of guaranteed work, and a stable foundation to the project, will allow industry to make long-term investment decisions.

Subject to negotiations being completed satisfactorily, I propose to adopt this revised approach, through which we are confident that we can secure demonstrable value for money. We are seeking demanding efficiency improvements from industry. The initial findings of the RAND study support this new approach. It reflects the best features of the BAE Systems Marine bid in terms of learning from experience from one ship to the next, but it also preserves the possibility of competition for a number of subsequent defence programmes. The new strategy gives a welcome level of stability to our warship building industry. Above all, it offers the best prospect of achieving the in-service date for the type 45 destroyer, with deliveries to the Royal Navy starting in 2007. Any significant delay in that date would have significant operational and cost penalties.

The new approach gives Vosper Thornycroft a defined and significant role in the type 45 programme. The company will be able to move its operation, as planned, into the Portsmouth naval base, and to invest in new shipbuilding facilities there. The new approach also provides a solid foundation from which the company can sustain its export business and enter competitions for future naval programmes. The company estimates that the substantial level of high-quality type 45 work should sustain a steady level of some 650 jobs well into the current decade.

Type 45 work, together with the first three Astute class submarines and the order for two alternative landing ships (logistic) announced last year, should support BAE Systems Marine shipbuilding for the rest of the decade. The company's own estimates show that, once the total construction programme is up and running, work on type 45 vessels can sustain a steady level of some 1,200 jobs on the Clyde and about a further 900 jobs at Barrow-in-Furness. I understand that, in the light of this package of work, the company has no plans to close any of its yards.

This revised procurement strategy for the type 45 destroyer is a further example of the benefits of smart acquisition, which involves an integrated team approach by the key industrial partners. The companies involved have welcomed this new strategy, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I start by thanking the Secretary of State for his courtesy in allowing me to see a copy of the statement.

I unequivocally welcome today's announcement. Whatever else I have to say about it, the Royal Navy has been waiting a great deal of time—through two Governments—for these ships. I hope that the Government will also be able to guarantee that the in-service dates will be met and that they will stay strict and firm on the penalties they have proposed and will not allow the dates to slip any further.

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

I congratulate Vosper Thornycroft and BAE Systems on finally receiving an order and wish them well as they set about building those important ships. On that note, however, will the Secretary of State clarify Vosper's role? Will he confirm that it will continue to be fully involved in all stages of design? The company would be grateful to know that, as would Conservative Members.

Despite all the words about competition and smart procurement, nothing in the statement can disguise the fact that the announcement marks the end of competition policy in warship design and build as we have known it in the past few years. From what I have heard and read, it appears that there has been a U-turn on existing Government policy and the Secretary of State needs to confirm that and explain the reasons.

It is important to cast the matter in context. The chief executive of the Defence Procurement Agency, Sir Robert Wormsley, said:

"if we do not compete the follow-on production order there will be very little incentive for shipyards to improve their performance".

I agree, and the Prime Minister went on to say:

"competition remains the basis for our approach to procuring warships".

The Secretary of State needs to explain carefully, therefore, why he has broken with that position and that pledge. How can the Government realistically expect competition for the final two batches when only BAE will assemble and launch all six of the ships as ordered? Surely the right hon. Gentleman should admit today that the arrangements will continue into the next two batches as well, regardless of cost, and that there is no real chance of any future competition.

It is important also to remember that competition is not only about pitting one company against another but about deriving savings, not only for the Treasury but in this case for the Navy. For example, in the type 23 order, I understand that about 36 per cent. savings were made over the lifetime of the build programme. Will the right hon. Gentleman be able to indicate what savings he expects over the lifetime of this programme if he is not going to compete it?

I also understand that Vosper Thornycroft is asking much the same question and wants the Secretary of State to clarify that the decision to move away from competition relates to the type 45 programme alone and is not a statement of the Government's intent to leave competition altogether. If the right hon. Gentleman fails to give us that reassurance, we can assume that the Government intend to move away completely from the procurement system that has operated until now.

On the systems to be installed on the ships, what was most remarkable about the statement was that the Secretary of State gave little or no detail about how the ships will be fitted out for their real role. Will he confirm today that the type 45 as now planned and contracted for will in essence have little or no anti-submarine capability, particularly when the Lynx helicopter is not operational, as I understand that the ship will carry no torpedoes?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the type 45 was originally due to carry the new Merlin helicopter, but that since the Government are not including a platform for the Merlin it will only be able to carry the Lynx, which will not have anything like the capability by 2007 that the Merlin would have had in the anti-submarine role?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm also that he is not providing any close-in-range weapons system, such as Phallanx, and finally, that the type 45 will have no real anti-surface capability and no land-attack capability?

The Secretary of State said in his statement that the type 45s would be the largest and most powerful air defence destroyers ever ordered for the Royal Navy. The real point is that they were intended for far more—they were meant to be ships that were capable not only of defending themselves but of defending other ships in a fleet operation. However, now it appears that unless those concerns are met the ships will have to put to sea defended by other ships.

Although I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that the ships will be ordered, too many questions have been left unanswered and too many concerns about future programmes remain to permit us to give an unequivocal welcome across the board.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening observations. I shall do my best to deal with the important issues that he raises.

As I said in my statement, design co-operation has gone extremely well. I see no reason why that co-operation should not continue with the same success—with both companies fully represented in the design team and with people working successfully together.

It is not right to say that we have ended competition policy, but neither is it right to suggest that competition was the only means whereby successive Governments delivered vital defence equipment. The purpose of our approach is to ensure the best value for taxpayers' money. Competition may be one way of delivering best value, but it is not the only way. In any event, the decision will allow Vosper's and BAE Systems Marine to plan their forward investment programme and to develop appropriate facilities to ensure that both shipyards can compete not only for future Royal Navy orders but for orders from around the world. The key point for our shipbuilding industry is that our shipbuilding companies should be given a platform from which they can properly invest and that—crucially for them—allows them to compete for the many orders that exist throughout the world.

The point about savings is that by allowing each company to build the same sections of each ship, on a progressive learning curve, not only will they build in the ensuing efficiency benefits but they will enable us to make savings as the work progresses. That was a major factor in deciding on our approach.

I think that the hon. Gentleman rather misses the point about equipment for the type 45. At this stage, it is not necessarily the case that we shall design in all the equipment required by those ships. Indeed, one of the problems in the procurement of warships in the past was that the ships were so heavily over-designed that as their role changed to meet new realities, there was not enough flexibility to allow the incorporation of new ideas, new thinking and, crucially, new equipment. That is why we have not yet taken all the decisions about equipment and,

more important, why there will be flexibility on the ships in order to be able to adjust to the changing strategic reality.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I thank my right hon. Friend for the announcement. I am pleased that yet again the Clyde has been given the opportunity to show that it can meet this country's present requirements and its future needs.

Will my right hon. Friend tell us what has happened to the ALSL orders that were supposed to have come on line in June? What will happen to the present work force? How can they be kept in employment during the coming months? It is my understanding that the diagrams and so on for the ALSLs are not due to be received until next year so obviously there is a shortfall of work, especially at the Scotstoun yard in my constituency. At present, members of its work force are having to go down south.

Will my right hon. Friend shed some light on what BAE Systems is saying? I and several colleagues have had great difficulty in getting any information from the company about what it has been doing. Will my right hon. Friend intercede on our behalf to find out exactly what BAE Systems plans to do? As a trade union official said to me, the silence coming from the company is deafening.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his general welcome for the proposals. I shall deal as best I can with his concerns, especially those relating to the plans of BAE Systems, although I must point out to him and to the House that commercial judgments as to the organisation of particular companies are obviously matters for those companies.

The proposal allows planning to take place over 10 years, to give a guaranteed level of work to BAE Systems and Vosper's. Both companies have welcomed that; it will allow them to go into the market and to compete successfully, I hope, for orders not only from the Royal Navy but from around the world. Notwithstanding that this is a very exciting programme of warship orders, it amounts to about 30 ships—a fraction of the total number of ships procured around the world each year—but it will provide both companies with some stability.

As for the ALSLs, I gave no undertakings about the start of work on those ships. Last year, I said when the work could begin, and that statement was based on the best information then available from the two companies. I share my hon. Friend's disappointment that work has not yet started, but we continue to hope that the two companies involved will reconcile their different approaches to design and build, and that they can eliminate the difficulties that have developed and can proceed to cut steel in due course.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in supplying me with details of his statement in advance. I warmly welcome the news that the Royal Navy will get six new warships—it certainly needs them. I congratulate him on embarking on this new concept in warship building. The concept has been tried in other parts of the world—most notably, in the United States—with some success, and we certainly welcome the approach.

The Secretary of State mentioned the RAND recommendations; will he place at least a summary of them in the Library, so that we can know some of the conclusions? Does he agree that the viability of the British shipyards depends not only on their being able to compete now, but on their retaining the capability to compete in the future? Will he therefore be a bit more specific about the breakdown in the overall order to the individual companies and yards involved? That would certainly help the House to assess the order more fully. Is there enough work, for example, in Scotstoun on the Clyde to ensure that the 1,000 or so job losses suggested in the press today do not happen?

The Secretary of State mentioned equipment, and I certainly agree that we need flexibility in our warship design. Will he therefore confirm whether the Sylver launcher, which will be fitted to the type 45s, will be capable of carrying a land-attack missile, such as Tomahawk, in addition to Aster? The vessels would be much more potent if they had that capability. Does he agree that the lessons of the type 82 programme, cancelled in the 1960s after CVA01 was cancelled, show that warship programmes are interdependent? Is it not the case that the order for the final 12 of those ships is dependent on the overall concept of retaining the two carriers, which lies at the heart of the Government's expeditionary proposals?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. I shall try to deal with as many of the points he raises as I can. If I omit to answer any of his questions, I will certainly write to him.

As for the report, I said that we have now had the early, emerging findings from the study. A good deal of further work is still to be done, but I see no reason why we could not place a copy of the report in the Library, subject only to one exception: obviously, RAND has had available on a confidential basis some commercially sensitive details that I would not consider it appropriate to publish. With that exception, I shall seek to publish the study when it is finally completed.

As for the breakdown between the companies, essentially, each company will be guaranteed a share of the sections. The hon. Gentleman will probably be aware that these days most ships of this size are constructed in sections—whether in a single yard or in a number of yards—and the basis of the allocation is to guarantee Vosper's work on particular sections of the type 45 design and for the Clyde to have the remainder, with the assembly taking place at Barrow-in-Furness, with the exception of the first of class.

As for land-attack missiles, in answer to an earlier question I referred to the importance of preserving some flexibility. Vertically launched missiles could be launched from such platforms if that were judged at the time to be a relevant capability. That is precisely the kind of flexibility necessary to leave in place on those ships without trying to over-design their capabilities at this stage, as we are not entirely clear what the strategic landscape will be when they are in service.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): Although the shipyard gate of Scotstoun is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), the rest of the yard is in mine. I therefore join his welcome for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement, which will guarantee a very healthy future in the medium and long term for

[Mr. George Galloway]

shipbuilding on the Clyde. That is as it should be. First of class, world-class Clyde-built is still recognised as an important brand around the world.

Although only one fifth of the Scottish National party's Members are here to stand up for Scotland, the statement further demonstrates the value to the Scottish economy of our being within the United Kingdom. If we were not, we would have no Royal Navy, and no orders would be being placed this afternoon.

The one thing that is stopping tin hats being thrown in the air and the Secretary of State's name being chanted joyously on the Clyde is the fact that, as I understand it, the work force are being informed that this Friday, 1,000 people, rather than breaking up for the Glasgow fair as they had hoped, will be on the slippery slope towards redundancy, through no fault of their own. The ALSL drawings should have been there and the work should have been started. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State promised the House last year that the work would be started in the middle of this year.

Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the four oilers proposal? I accept that he has no particular budget for it this year, but the company tells us that it would be cost-neutral for the Ministry. If it builds them now, it can pay for them later at no extra cost.

Will my right hon. Friend also assure the House that he will work closely with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive to try to ensure that the skills base on the Clyde is not scattered by the announcement of 1,000 redundancies and that, in particular, the jobs of the apprentices are saved? Without apprentices, we will have no shipbuilding industry in the future.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the measured welcome that he has given to the proposals. Like him, I am delighted that they will secure the future of shipbuilding on the Clyde for the next 10 years. As I said in response to an earlier question, the key to the future of that yard does not lie with orders from the Ministry of Defence. Notwithstanding an order book of some 30 warships, we simply do not have enough work to keep all Britain's shipyards going over a long period.

It is crucial that shipyards can compete effectively for the hundreds, if not thousands, of orders that are placed every year around the world. What the Ministry of Defence and the Government can do is ensure that Britain's shipyards have an appropriate platform and a programme of stability. My hon. Friend has worked assiduously on behalf of his constituents to ensure that they have a future in shipbuilding, and in the conversations that I have had with him over several months, we have recognised the importance of securing the platform and programme of stability that will allow the yard in his constituency and other yards in the United Kingdom to win work from Europe and the rest of the world. I am confident that the arrangement that I have announced will allow that to happen.

On ALSLs, I gave the House the expectation, not a guarantee, that work could begin at about this time of the year. I am sorry that negotiations between the two companies have not allowed that to happen, but we continue to urge them to commence the cutting of steel as soon as possible.

David Burnside (South Antrim): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for today's statement, and I congratulate one part of the great shipbuilding world—the Clyde—on the securing of jobs for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Will the Secretary of State outline what co-operation and collaboration will take place with the two great parts of the defence industry in Belfast—Harland and Wolff and Shorts—that might lead to joint ventures in relation to these orders or the two future aircraft carrier orders that he might foresee?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome of the statement. As part of the overall defence programme, there will certainly be opportunities for both companies in Northern Ireland to participate in the very considerable order book that is available. I cannot give him specific details at this stage, but I am confident that work is there for Northern Ireland. It is a question that we have addressed in the past. This occasion, however, is not a matter for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and warmly welcome the fresh work for Govan shipyard. I am pleased that the Government have awarded the lion's share of the new type 45 orders to the Clyde. It shows that they have confidence in the skilled work force at Govan and Scotstoun. Although the orders secure future shipbuilding on the Clyde, I am disappointed that the current gap in orders could not be filled. Workers in Govan and Scotstoun shipyards have suffered a great deal in the past two years and the threat of redundancy still hangs over their heads.

I understand that the Secretary of State did not guarantee that ALSL work would start in Govan and Scotstoun shipyards in the summer, but that the Ministry of Defence had thought that it would. The delay means that the work force in Govan shipyard and other people in my constituency will suffer. Will my right hon. Friend use his good offices to put pressure on Swan Hunter to expedite the work so that the number of redundancies in the shipyard is reduced?

Mr. Hoon: I have already made it clear that that is the Government's intention.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will the Secretary of State confirm that Vosper Thornycroft thinks that the arrangement is much better than the original procurement agreement? In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), he said that there would be co-operation on the design. Can he guarantee that Vosper Thornycroft will be involved in all design stages? Does he think that the Government will find themselves trying to get better value from best value, which is what happens in local government?

Mr. Hoon: I shall stick to my responsibilities for Defence, and not stray into local government matters. Although I have not had an opportunity to read Vosper

Thornycroft's statement in detail, I am aware that it welcomes the decision. Obviously, it has been negotiating hard on an entirely commercial basis with BAE Systems on the allocation of work. If we did not take commercial decisions, the hon. Gentleman would be the first to criticise. Vosper's has been heavily engaged in design work and I see no reason why that should not continue. However, that will ultimately be a matter for Vosper's. The Government will make no decision either to prevent that or to require the company to participate if it judges it inappropriate. The co-operation of the two companies on the design work has been remarkably successful and I have every expectation that it will continue.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): We welcome the contract for the type 45 destroyer. I am glad that the Secretary of State took that decision, because the shipbuilding industry cannot be left on a tightrope. He has given us time to get the investment necessary for a long-term strategy. I do not speak as a parochialist; unemployment on the shores of the Thames is the same as unemployment on the shores of the Clyde. I thank him for the investment and hope that many more contracts will come our way.

Mr. Hoon: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend, especially for his appreciation of the opportunities that the announcement affords the Clyde, and of the need for it to respond to challenges from around the world. The platform for stability that we are providing will allow our shipyards to compete effectively with overseas shipyards to win more work for the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Secretary of State has confirmed that the first of class is unlikely to be in service with the fleet until 2007. How does he intend to maintain an effective area air defence capability for the Royal Navy in the interim? Was not the modernisation of Sea Dart cancelled because the new vessel was envisaged as being in service much earlier? Will the Secretary of State initiate a programme of Sea Dart enhancement for the type 42s? Why did he give no figures in his statement? Are not the Government supposed to believe in open government? Is the taxpayer not entitled to know what the overall cost of the programme is, and at least, what the unit cost per vessel will be?

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Gentleman is dissatisfied with any of the answers that I am about to give, I will write to him with any greater detail that is allowed in accordance with commercial confidentiality.

The programme of warship building and significant investment in Britain's armed forces was made necessary by years of cuts under the Conservative Government. If there is any gap in area defence, it is entirely the responsibility of the hon. Gentleman and the Government whom he generally supported to try to explain why, over a long period, the defence budget, instead of being increased as it is now, was cut year after year.

Angus Robertson (Moray): On behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales, may I welcome the references in the statement to the 1,200 jobs that have been secured on the Clyde? How many jobs does the Secretary of State expect to be lost in the short term? Will he guarantee that there will be no compulsory redundancies on the Clyde?

Mr. Hoon: Obviously, jobs are a matter for the companies concerned. This announcement will not cost any jobs, and my responsibility on behalf of the Government is to make the announcement. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the Government's defence plans. I hope that it indicates that from now on, instead of running down Britain's defence, the Scottish nationalists will support the Government's efforts.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): On this occasion, I speak for both Portsmouth MPs when I say that we welcome the proposal, as do the majority of people in Portsmouth.

The Secretary of State talked about flexibility in the defence of the ships and the platforms themselves. Will the Government consider whether, at this late stage in the design, Merlin is still a capability that ought to be put on the type 45? If the ship is to be with us for 20 years from 2007, the use of Merlin will be critical.

If the Secretary of State believes that the future of shipbuilding in this country will be heavily dependent on what we can achieve in bringing contracts from abroad, will he open the doors of Portsmouth naval base as wide as possible to enable and encourage Vosper's to bring contracts to the city and begin shipbuilding there for the first time in 30 years?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the predatory unsolicited bid by BAE Systems, and the way in which it was made, were in no way in keeping with the substantial retention of British shipbuilding that he was trying to achieve, or in the best interests of the defence of this country?

Mr. Hoon: Both Portsmouth MPs worked assiduously on behalf of their constituents and the naval dockyard. As I said, the announcement will give Vosper's the opportunity to move into the naval dockyard and derive significant commercial and practical advantages from being there. I do not think that it is necessary for us to go over that ground. This is a positive announcement for Vosper's, and I understand that the people of Portsmouth will welcome it. It is an opportunity for Vosper's to participate in a competitive shipbuilding programme in the future.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement, particularly for the many of my constituents who work in the Vosper Thornycroft yard. He said that with this programme, Vosper's could now look forward to retaining 650 jobs. I remind him that in the year since he made his earlier announcement, the company's work force has gone down from 1,000 to 650, so this is very much a bottom line for it.

Precisely what proportion of the work on the six type 45 destroyers will be awarded to Vosper's? I am interested to know exactly what sort of player it is. Looking to the future, does the Secretary of State believe that, on completion of the first six vessels in that class, Vosper Thornycroft will be equally well placed to compete for the following six, or will it be brushed away

[Mr. David Chidgey]

into a corner? May I remind him that Vosper Thornycroft has the best record of any shipbuilding company in this country in winning export orders?

Mr. Hoon: As I said, job numbers are a matter for the companies concerned, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not lose sight of a crucial aspect of the discussion. Only if our shipbuilding companies are capable of competing with the best in Europe and the world will they be able to attract new work to their yards. They will have to make a commercial judgment and decide the best level of employment to maintain a competitive position. It is no good the 30 warship orders available from the Ministry of Defence being spread lightly around Britain's shipyards, if those companies and those shipyards are not capable of competing for and winning orders beyond the United Kingdom. There is a commercial reality in what we are doing that cannot be ignored.

I shall set out the precise breakdown in greater detail in due course, and shall write to the hon. Gentleman so that he can be satisfied with the arrangements—but Vosper Thornycroft is satisfied with the arrangements, and as it negotiated vigorously on a commercial basis, it is not for right hon. and hon. Members to second-guess its commercial judgment of what is in its best interests.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Appledore shipbuilders in my constituency competed for what it thought were MOD orders for two ALSLs. As it turned out, four were ordered, but no work has started on any of them. It would give the shipbuilding industry greater confidence if there was more transparency in those MOD orders. Will the Secretary of State confirm that once MOD orders are signed and contracts exchanged, full details of the orders will be put in the public domain?

Mr. Hoon: I have already made clear my determination that the process should be transparent. I am at the Dispatch Box giving details of the arrangements, to allow right hon. and hon. Members the opportunity to question those matters. As for details, subject to questions of commercial confidentiality, I see no reason why the hon. Gentleman cannot use the usual means of asking parliamentary questions or writing to me or to my ministerial colleagues to establish all the information that he requires.

Marconi

4.58 pm

Annette Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, to debate an important matter that requires specific and urgent consideration, namely,

the proposed closure of the Marconi plant in North Poole in my constituency.

The operation has had a presence in my constituency since 1996; only four years ago, £12 million was spent on developing the present site, a high-tech research and development centre employing highly skilled software development engineers. Just one example of the innovative work done by Marconi at Poole is the 1471 callback system that it developed. Only a few weeks ago workers were assured that their jobs were secure, and investment continued in the site until recently.

Last Thursday there was a bombshell for 570 workers: at 11 am, they received their first inkling of the proposed closure of the site. The individuals concerned were devastated, and it is predicted that there will be a £42 million impact on the local economy, and further job losses. Day by day new issues are being raised, and management has been severely criticised at a national level. The company has gone from being cash-rich to being in cash deficit, the chief executive designate has resigned, and share prices have tumbled. All round, this seems to have been a story of the pursuit of short-term profits at the expense of long-term development, whether by the City or by Marconi management. Today union leaders from across the country met Marconi, and they are now in the House, meeting Members of Parliament and reporting back on what happened.

The decision in Poole was undoubtedly made in haste, against the background of a market that is predicted to turn round in a relatively short time. It is a severe blow not only for skilled manufacturing jobs in my constituency but for the United Kingdom. I therefore propose the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 to debate that important matter, which requires urgent consideration in view of the impact on my constituency and in the wider context of the United Kingdom manufacturing base.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady, and I must give my decision without stating any reasons for it. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter she raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, and I cannot therefore submit the application to the House.

Point of Order

5 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to draw your attention to a parliamentary answer that I received from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 4 July. In it, he cites a report by the National Audit Office, called "PFI and Value for Money", as evidence that the private finance initiative has given the public sector good value for money. That National Audit Office has confirmed that it never published that report, and is unaware of any such report. The Treasury has said that a typographical error occurred, but it has not made any substantive further statement.

Given that the Treasury has clearly misled the House, would it be appropriate for it to arrange for an early statement today to clarify the matter? Have you received any requests from Treasury Ministers to make such a statement?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I understand that there was an error in the answer to which he refers, and that the Chief Secretary is taking steps to correct it at the earliest opportunity.

Orders of the Day

Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill gives effect to the proposals in our White Paper, "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland", which was published in March. It provides the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland with additional powers to address the problem of electoral fraud.

The measures build on the excellent work of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Forum committee on electoral malpractice, and an internal Northern Ireland Office review of electoral administration.

Our policy across the United Kingdom is to encourage people to participate more fully in the political process. The turnout at elections has been historically higher in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. That suggests that the electorate in Northern Ireland are more politically active and more politically conscious than elsewhere in the UK. However, there has been growing concern at the perceived extent of electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): The origins of the matter that we are considering lie in a report to the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs on electoral malpractice. It was agreed in March 1998. Why has it taken more than three years to introduce a Bill? It is possible that Assembly elections will take place soon in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I am acutely aware of the date of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report, as I was a member of the Committee when it was published. He asked why it had taken so long for the legislation to appear. The answer is that the process of drawing up specific proposals has taken some time, as they have to be broadly acceptable, workable and fair. Arriving at a set of workable proposals involved extensive consultation with the political parties, especially in Northern Ireland, as well as the electoral office and others. Some new measures have already been taken in other legislation and by administrative means.

There has been growing concern about the perceived level of electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland. The Government have a commitment to protecting the right to free and fair elections. Of course, electoral fraud is a crime. Electoral abuse is an affront to democracy and we are determined to combat it wherever it occurs. If there is a high level of abuse, or even if people only fear that that is the case, the democratic process will be under threat. We do not want voters in Northern Ireland to become disillusioned with politics because they fear that elections are unfair.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the Under-Secretary comment on the intimidation felt by the

[David Burnside]

electorate of Fermanagh and South Tyrone at the general election? There was widespread intimidation by Sinn Fein at polling stations, against the democratic process. Is not that the most glaring example of abuse of democracy in Northern Ireland? Although legal action is now being taken on behalf of one of the defeated candidates, will the Minister comment on what happened in Fermanagh and South Tyrone?

Mr. Browne: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand if I do not comment specifically on any matters that may be before the court or subject to police investigations or electoral petitions. I can make it clear, however, that the Government deplore vote stealing and condemn utterly intimidation of any sort, including that which is linked to the electoral process. I am happy to make this call at the Dispatch Box: if anyone suffered such intimidation in the recent elections, they should report the incident to the police or the electoral office, so it can be dealt with with appropriate vigour.

Although we do not want voters in Northern Ireland to become disillusioned with politics because they fear that elections are not fair, and although the perception of abuse must be dealt with, it is nevertheless the Government's view that draconian measures are not the answer. When taking measures to prevent electoral fraud, we must ensure that we do not put obstacles in the path of genuine voters. Only if we strike that balance will the measures that we take be broadly acceptable to the House and the electorate.

My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), dedicated much of his time at the Northern Ireland Office to considering the nature of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland and what could be done to prevent it. I pay tribute to him for his work. I am sure that the House will agree that his contribution on this issue and also the range of matters with which he dealt as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was significant. It is fair to say that we would not be discussing the Bill without his efforts to find workable solutions to the problems. He met representatives of most of the Northern Ireland parties at the end of last year to discuss the proposals in the Bill. At those meetings, there was broad agreement to the proposals, especially in respect of introducing a photographic electoral identity card.

We have been criticised because the measures in the Bill have not been introduced before now—an issue raised by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). I stress that that has happened not because of a lack of commitment to the problem. The time before publication of the White Paper was used for extensive discussion with the parties and others to ensure that our solutions to the problem of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland were workable and broadly acceptable. I regret that it was not possible to introduce legislation before the elections on 7 June.

Even if the changes made by the Bill had been introduced before the elections, however, the procedures could not have been implemented straight away, as they depend on material collected in the autumn canvass. We had to ensure that the electorate and the parties were well informed about the changes that are being made and that the people were not disfranchised as the result of any untimely haste. In discussion with the Northern Ireland parties, we were constantly reminded of the need to proceed in a careful and considered manner, most recently in the round of consultations in November.

The measures proposed have been refined after detailed consultations with the political parties and the chief electoral officer. We have not been idle in implementing other changes that are not covered by the proposed legislation. For instance, new measures already in place are rolling registration and local processing of absent vote applications. The chief electoral officer has powers to examine the records of certain public bodies—for example, the Housing Executive, the district councils and the Rate Collection Agency. The existing IT in the electoral office is shortly to be replaced with updated equipment that will add to the efficiency of the office.

We have given the chief electoral officer extra resources to provide additional staff in both his headquarters and his area electoral offices. We have also recently commissioned research to quantify with more certainty the scale of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. The results of the research should be available in September. They will enable us to be better informed about the level of abuse and the form that it takes.

As I have said, the Bill builds on the recommendations of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. I wish to emphasise the value and importance of those recommendations. As I have told the House, I was a member of the Committee at the relevant time, and I am proud of the work that was done.

I am sure that the House will forgive me for taking a few moments to pay tribute to the work of the former Chairman of the Committee, Peter Brooke, both on the Committee and in making a significant contribution to the search for peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland. I am pleased to see so many of my former Committee colleagues in the Chamber. I look forward to them lending their particular knowledge and expertise to the debate.

The Select Committee report was extremely thorough—

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I am pleased to be involved in a debate that is led by my hon. Friend, who played an important role in the Select Committee. He has always been involved in Northern Ireland matters during his time in the House, first as a Parliamentary Private Secretary and now as a Minister, and he is welcome.

Will my hon. Friend recognise the work of the committee of the Northern Ireland Forum, which produced a number of proposals that were later picked up by the Select Committee? The forum often produced valuable reports, often on a cross-party basis, which are not always recognised for their significance in the House.

Mr. Browne: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I hope to live up to the billing that he has given me in the job that I have taken on. I paid particular attention to the forum's report in my introductory remarks. I am at pains to explain that the Bill is a result of a progression of thought. A number of bodies have contributed to that progression, and I hope that the Bill will be all the more welcome to the House because it is the result of a process in which many Members have played a significant part. I have no hesitation in paying tribute to the forum's work in that important process.

The Select Committee report was extremely thorough and it made an important contribution to the thinking behind the Bill, as did the work of other bodies. I do not detract from anything that we said in our report on electoral abuse. However, it should not be a criticism of the Bill, or of myself, that it does not implement all of the Committee's recommendations. As I have said, the Bill had to strike the right balance between limiting the opportunity for abuse and putting obstacles in the path of genuine voters.

On closer examination of the Select Committee's report, not all of the measures recommended by it were feasible, nor would they have been effective in the way proposed. For example, the use of the national insurance number as a personal identifier had certain demerits. We considered carefully the idea of making the national insurance number an identifier, as well as the date of birth and signature, as proposed in the Bill. We are not convinced that the national insurance number would add sufficient value to justify its addition as an identifier. Arguably, it would create new difficulties. For a start, most people do not know their national insurance number—certainly, many people do not know it. Would a presiding officer be justified in refusing someone a ballot paper if they could not recall theirs? It is possible to have more than one national insurance number. One can have a temporary national insurance number. There is evidence that people who may not legitimately have a national insurance number have more than one.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): The hon. Gentleman will know from his experience on the Select Committee that that was not the reason why the national insurance number was sought as an identifier—it was so that when registration took place, the chief electoral officer would be able to identify multiple registration.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of that. I will in a few moments come to the other problems with using the national insurance number as an identifer and give our view of how multiple registration should be dealt with.

One of the other reasons why we rejected the idea of using the national insurance number as an identifier was the legal constraints of data protection that would have to be overcome. That would require additional legislation. In any event, the national insurance number was never intended to be an identifier for anything other than fiscal or employment purposes.

It is possible to think of any number of personal identifiers: the number of personal identifiers that one could demand of people may be unlimited. In striking the appropriate balance, we think that it is appropriate to introduce into the system only the personal identifiers that are necessary to achieve the checks to ensure that fraud does not take place. We should not include in the electoral process all the identifiers that are available.

The Select Committee recognised that a smart card, a universally issued electronically read card, for electoral purposes would probably be

"the most effective option for combating electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland".

As we said in the White Paper, our ultimate aim is for every voter to be issued with an electoral smart card bearing a unique identifier, but that is an aspiration. The technology available at the moment, especially with regard to biometrics, is still too young. We would be foolish to rush into a radical new system before we could be confident of the practicalities, but we will consider further when to initiate such a secure electoral identity scheme. Such a scheme would not be introduced without further consultation with all interested parties.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): That is a reasonable position to take, but does the Minister nevertheless agree that Northern Ireland would be a good place to pilot such a scheme, even if over time we need to make at least one update to the specific technology in use in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Governments of both parties have been prepared to do in Northern Ireland what has not been done in Great Britain, so there is no reluctance to introduce a separate system for Northern Ireland. However, there is reluctance to experiment with such an important part of the electoral system and to introduce impractical measures. I do not believe that the Government should test technology on the electoral system. We certainly do not intend to do that. When we are satisfied that the technology is robust, secure and works properly, that will be the time to consider the introduction of the more advanced biometrically based smart card. That is the aspiration, but we will do it in the way in which we have been urged to do all things in this area—carefully and at the appropriate pace, taking not only the political parties of Northern Ireland, but, I hope, the electorate in Northern Ireland with us.

Many of the Select Committee's other recommendations have already been implemented in the measures that I outlined earlier—for example, rolling registration, which came into effect in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the UK, by means of the Representation of the People Act 2000. The electoral office has been provided with funding for additional staff. The information technology system will be replaced over the next few years, and will be capable of responding to the new measures that we are introducing.

Members are aware that voting procedures in Northern Ireland are different from those in the rest of the UK. They reflect the very different circumstances surrounding elections in Northern Ireland. Most significantly, in Northern Ireland there is a legal requirement for a voter to produce one of a number of valid, specified documents at a polling station before being issued with a ballot paper. A person must also be resident in Northern Ireland for three months before qualifying for entry on the electoral register there. Absent voting rules in Northern Ireland are stricter than those in Great Britain, because there is no automatic right to an absent vote.

All those measures are in place because they are necessary. I am sure that all Members regret the circumstances that make them so, but the issues surrounding elections in Northern Ireland demand them. We want election day to be as normal as possible for the voters in Northern Ireland. We do need different measures, but they must be proportionate if we are to avoid putting barriers in the way of the electorate.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the point that the Minister has been trying to make, but may

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

I ask two questions? First, are we not perhaps living in cloud cuckoo land in assuming that there are no problems in Great Britain? It is increasingly obvious that there is electoral fraud there. Secondly, has the Minister considered amending the regulations concerning, for example, driving licences? If a person presents a plastic card that identifies him, giving his date of birth and so on, it is not accepted unless there is also a paper document. There is a growing tendency for people to carry only the plastic documents in their wallets. Voters have been turned away unnecessarily in Northern Ireland because of a rather strict interpretation of the law by our officials. Should that not be changed?

Mr. Browne: I know how much attention the hon. Gentleman pays to this important issue, and I always listen to what he says with respect and care. However, he will not draw me into commenting on matters that are outside my area of responsibility. It has taken me enough time to get to grips with my present responsibility; I do not want to take on responsibility for the rest of the UK's electoral system as well. I therefore shall not comment on whether there is evidence that a degree of personation or fraud is taking place in the rest of the UK; I leave that responsibility to others.

As for the hon. Gentleman's second point, by law the driving licence is the whole document. Because I mislaid my old green licence, I now have a new licence with my photograph on it. When I have to hire a motor vehicle, for instance, I know that I must produce both the part bearing my personal identity and photograph, and the part containing the other information. There is, I understand, evidence to suggest that not all prospective voters in Northern Ireland know about this, and that people have been turned away after failing to produce the appropriate identifiers—but there is a series of other identifiers that they could produce. It is hoped that, in the climate that the Bill will create, the emphasis will be on the photographic aspect of the identification. It may then be appropriate for us to turn our attention to the part of the document that bears the photograph, as opposed to the other information. I suspect, however, that if the Bill is passed there will be a transitional period leading up to photographic identification, which will have to be managed carefully in any event.

I respect the hon. Gentleman's knowledge and his seniority in the House, but I do not think it would be appropriate for the Government to consider any more changes than are absolutely necessary at this stage. No doubt we shall have an opportunity to discuss these matters in detail in Committee.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has raised an issue that causes great annoyance at every polling station across Northern Ireland. Surely it is an absolute nonsense that someone who presents paper documentation without a visual identifier is granted permission to vote, whereas someone who presents a part of his driving licence with a photograph clearly identifying him is denied such permission.

Now is the time to take action on the issue. With all due respect, and although I welcome the Minister to his post, I said in last week's business questions that perhaps the Secretary of State should have attended this debate or the debate should have been deferred for a week. If the Secretary of State were here, perhaps he would have been conciliatory on the issue. I repeat the appeal to the Minister to take on board the point and endeavour to make the relevant changes.

Mr. Browne: Given that the hon. Gentleman and I were members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee—I believe that he continued to be a member of that Committee throughout the previous Parliament—and that we established a good working relationship and friendship there, I shall not take personally his comments on the absence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sure that the House will understand that my right hon. Friend is regrettably unable to attend the debate because of the fluid situation in Northern Ireland. I shall simply say that the political process in Northern Ireland is an important matter.

As it is important to ensure that the electoral system in Northern Ireland is beyond reproach, we judged that it was right to keep the parliamentary slot allotted to the Bill and to consider it today. I am sorry for the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) if he has to put up with me rather than the Secretary of State. However, I shall endeavour to be a little more conciliatory.

The hon. Gentleman's experience seems to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). There is a focus on the photograph as an identifier because of the significant move from identifiers, albeit not exclusively photographic ones, that the current Government have inherited—although that move was supported on both sides of the House. That may give us an opportunity to consider the importance of photographs in the context of this legislation.

As I said, it would not be right to impose unreasonable burdens on the majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland who merely want to exercise their franchise as entitled. The action that we take must be carefully thought through, and we believe that the Bill strikes the correct balance. It provides for a photographic electoral identity card to be issued free of charge to those who are entitled to vote but might not otherwise have satisfactory proof of identity.

It is proposed in due course to replace all the non-photographic identification on the list of specified documents. Thereafter, the electoral identity card, the passport and the driving licence will be the only identification that are acceptable at polling stations. The Bill requires that a canvass form and an application for voter registration be signed by and include the date of birth of each of those to whom the form or application relates. In certain circumstances, it also gives the presiding officer at a polling station the power to ask the date of birth of an elector applying for a ballot paper.

It has always been intended that the measures will be applied to all elections in Northern Ireland. The Bill extends all the measures to parliamentary elections, although subordinate legislation will be needed to amend the local elections rules and the franchise for European elections.

Before I come to the details of the clauses, I should touch on some important issues that were covered in the reports to which I referred and which we discussed in

our subsequent consultations. These are the questions of multiple registration, absent voting and exclusion zones around polling stations.

The Select Committee expressed concern about the level of multiple registration in some parts of Northern Ireland. Some people have a legitimate right to register in more than one place and should, indeed must, be allowed to continue to do so. I am thinking particularly of students and people who have to work away from home. I am registered to vote not only in the city of Westminster, but in my constituency. The Select Committee shared that analysis, recommending that those who were registered more than once should be required to indicate that that was the case and to list all their addresses.

We share the objective of identifying those who are registered more than once, but propose to achieve that in a slightly different way. The collection of additional identifiers—the signature and date of birth—plus enhanced IT capability in the electoral office will mean that the chief electoral officer will be able to identify more effectively where people are registered to vote at more than one address. He will thus be able to ensure that, for parliamentary elections, only one poll card is issued to such an individual and ensure that the privilege of multiple registration is not abused.

On absent voting, the White Paper originally proposed that the date of birth and signature should be required on the application. On reflection, we have decided that a requirement for the signature alone should be sufficient. Throughout the process of developing the proposals, we have been mindful that we must introduce the minimum changes necessary to guarantee effectiveness. That is because any checks—no matter how mundane or minor they may appear—present a potential barrier to the voter. Our guiding principle has been not to set up additional barriers unless we are completely confident that they represent added value.

Of the two identifiers, we believe that the signature is more reliable and easy to use. We appreciate that some people will be unwilling to give their date of birth, but we will already be requiring them to do so—if the House approves these measures—to get on to the electoral register. There is little benefit in requiring them to do so again to receive an absent vote. The signature on the absent vote application will provide a quick and easy visual check for electoral staff. If they have concerns about the authenticity of the application, they may still draw on the date of birth that they have from the register in pursuing their inquiries.

The issue of so-called exclusion zones around polling stations is an important and complex one. We fully acknowledge the seriousness of the issue of intimidation. The Select Committee did so too, and rightly. Like the Government, the Select Committee decided that nevertheless the solution to intimidation, or perceived intimidation, was not an exclusion zone around the polling station. Campaigning around the polling station is a recognised political activity throughout the UK. It is perfectly legitimate, where it is carried out in a fair and proper manner.

We see no reason to end that legitimate practice in Northern Ireland by imposing exclusion zones. We need to be satisfied that we have taken all the necessary steps to ensure that activity around the polling station is not carried out in such a way as to intimidate people into staying away, or coerce them into voting for a particular party. We have examined the existing law carefully and believe that it is sufficient to ensure that, as it stands.

We need to ensure that presiding officers know the law and know their duties and responsibilities and, most importantly, have the confidence to take action where it is necessary, including involving the police. We are committed to ensuring that the chief electoral officer has the necessary resources to achieve that, and we know that he has frequent discussions with the police about the conduct of election day.

As I said earlier, we considered seriously the proposal for an exclusion zone on the lines of the procedures which operate, for example, in the Republic of Ireland. We took advice, including from the police. Their view was that that had the potential to create greater difficulties; it would cause disruption for households inside the zone; it would merely displace the potential confrontation point to outside the polling station; and it would, in fact, create several different points of possible conflict which would all have to be policed. The fact is that no one has said to us that there is a universal problem at polling stations throughout Northern Ireland, but if we went down that route, we would need an exclusion zone around every polling station. Even if we thought an exclusion zone was an effective measure, there clearly would be no reason to impose one in every instance. As I have said, we want election days to be as normal as possible for the voters in Northern Ireland.

Clause 1 enables the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland to collect additional identifying information from registered voters. Electors and those applying for registration will be required to state their date of birth and sign the form for the annual canvass, as well as to state their names and addresses. That information will not appear on the public version of the electoral register, but will be used at the electoral office and at polling stations to make checks against the names of electors when they apply for a postal vote or to vote by proxy, or attend at a polling station to obtain a ballot paper. The chief electoral officer may use his discretion to dispense with the requirement for a voter to supply a signature in certain circumstances, such as physical incapacity or illiteracy.

Clause 2 amends the parliamentary elections rules in relation to Northern Ireland. The changes empower a presiding officer or clerk at a polling station to ask a third statutory question: "What is your date of birth?". If the voter does not answer to the satisfaction of the presiding officer, he can refuse to issue a ballot paper. If the voter does answer to the satisfaction of the presiding officer, the ballot paper must be presented unless a candidate or his election or polling agent accuses the voter of personation.

Clause 3 amends provisions that have effect only in Northern Ireland and relate to absent voting. Applications to vote by post or proxy must be signed and the signature on the application must correspond with the signature provided to the chief electoral officer on registration. The chief electoral officer may refuse to grant an absent vote application if he is not satisfied that the signature on the application corresponds with the signature held on his records. Refusal of an absent vote is not taken lightly. The chief electoral officer may use his discretion, but refusal without good cause would leave his decision subject to judicial review.

[Mr. Browne]

Clause 4 enables a person to apply to be issued with an electoral identity card, in accordance with any requirements prescribed by regulations. The chief electoral officer has the function of determining such an application, and if he is satisfied that the information given by an applicant is correct, he is required to issue an electoral identity card free of charge.

The electoral identity card must show the elector's full name and date of birth, his photograph and the card's expiry date. The chief electoral officer can decide, in accordance with any regulations, that the card should include other information in a particular form. The card will be valid for 10 years and will be added to the list of specified documents that voters may use for the purposes of identification at polling stations in Northern Ireland.

Clause 5 introduces a requirement for voters with disabilities to produce a specified document, in the same way as other voters. That requirement had been inadvertently omitted. Since 1985, it has been a requirement that voters in Northern Ireland should produce evidence of identity in the form of a prescribed document.

Before the Representation of the People Act 2000 came into force, the law required that the presiding officer should not grant a blind voter's application to vote with the assistance of another person unless the voter had produced a prescribed document to identify himself. That was inadvertently repealed by a new rule in the 2000 Act, which extended the right to vote with the assistance of a companion to voters with disabilities such as physical incapacity and illiteracy.

The unforeseen consequence of the new rule was that it removed the requirement for blind and disabled voters in Northern Ireland who were voting with the assistance of a companion to produce a prescribed document. Clause 5 repairs the provision for blind voters and extends the requirement to produce a prescribed document to all those entitled by the 2000 Act to vote with the assistance of a companion. A voter with disabilities who attends at a polling station with a companion to assist him may satisfy the requirement to produce a specified document, even if in fact the documents are produced by, and the ballot paper delivered to, the companion rather than the voter himself.

Clause 6 makes it an offence for a person to sign either a canvass form or an application for registration if the person signing is not the person to whom the form or application relates. A person found guilty of either offence is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or a fine, or both.

Clause 7 provides that clauses 1 to 4 and 6 come into force on days to be specified by the Secretary of State, who may specify different commencement dates for different provisions. Clauses 5 and 7 will come into force on Royal Assent.

The Bill counters electoral abuse directly and at every stage of the electoral process: registration, absent voting and polling. We want to ensure that any loopholes that have been exploited in the past are removed. At the same time, we will not prevent genuine voters from making their voices heard. All our proposals have been examined with that in mind. We intend to implement the measures as soon as is practicable, but we will take all necessary steps to ensure that no one is disenfranchised because of them. Calls for the measures have come from within Northern Ireland itself and from parties across the political spectrum.

People who commit electoral fraud are attacking the fundamental principles of democracy. Governments have a duty to protect the right to free and fair elections. The Bill sends a clear signal that electoral fraud is a crime and that we are determined to combat it. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.40 pm

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): We are grateful to the Minister for setting out the background and the main provisions of this short Bill, and I congratulate him on his debut at the Dispatch Box.

The Bill has the broad support of the Opposition, and we have no intention of dividing the House this evening. It is intriguing that the Government should have chosen to debate electoral fraud in a part of the United Kingdom on the day that the Conservative party is engaged in its first leadership election ballot. I am sure that that is entirely coincidental.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman should not read too much into that coincidence, as the parliamentary Labour party is also voting for its chairman today.

Mr. Taylor: There is an even-handedness and implicit fairness about that that may speed us on our way.

I assure the House that my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) has, in his capacity as our chief electoral officer, put in place strict measures to prevent multiple registration or any form of personation. There have been no reports so far of people voting early and voting often.

Regrettably, that has not always been the case in Northern Ireland. Ever since the franchise was extended in the 19th and early 20th centuries, electoral fraud, the "vote early, vote often" tradition, and problems of personation have been endemic to political life.

It will not surprise the House that I believe that parties representing the republican tradition have been more adept than others at exploiting the system for their electoral advantage. That is certainly true over recent years, although I am told that, in the past, it was not unknown for Unionists to engage in that practice also. Just before the 1987 general election, the distinguished journalist David McKittrick wrote a brilliant article on electoral malpractice, in which he stated:

> "Complicity in these activities went right to the top. One woman campaigner volunteer recalls a former Unionist Prime Minister shaking her by the hand and urging her to 'vote early and vote often'."

The same article describes personation as

> "simply the stuff of normal politics".

It cites stories of people voting 10, 20 and 30 times, and quotes Lord Fitt, who recalled polling stations at which the turnout "bafflingly exceeded 100 per cent." A polling station without personation agents was known as an open box, and Lord Fitt is quoted in the article as saying that every attempt was made to "riddle the box" by pushing in as many personators as possible.

According to McKittrick,

"houses and halls were set aside as 'dressing stations' where personators would sometimes go for a change of clothes."

It was only when Sinn Fein began contesting elections again in the 1980s that the old convention of "doing your own side" was cast aside, and vote stealing from the other side began to take place.

As a result of all that, elections in Northern Ireland, and in particular the identification of voters at polling stations, are already more tightly controlled than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Most recently, the previous Conservative Government passed the Elections (Northern Ireland) Act 1985, which made it compulsory for electors to present specified identity documents before they were given the ballot paper. Despite that, however, I agree with the Government that the Act has failed to stamp out personation and electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. In particular, stories abound about the ease with which some of the documents specified in the Act can be forged, especially those that do not carry a photograph, such as a medical card or a book for the payment of allowances, benefits or pensions.

The current extent of electoral fraud is, of course, difficult to quantify with precise accuracy. By and large, elections pass off without incident. I have no doubt that in the majority of cases the results reflect the wishes of the electorate. I also express my appreciation for the work carried out by the chief electoral officer, his staff and all those involved in the running of elections in Northern Ireland, who do their jobs, often in difficult circumstances.

That said, however, there is enough anecdotal evidence to make it clear that more needs to be done. As the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee concluded in its 1998 report,

"there is sufficient evidence of organised voting theft to indicate that the problem of electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland is serious".

Indeed, rather than declining, the evidence appears to suggest that the problem has been on the increase in recent years. The result of this year's election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone has already been mentioned. Sinn Fein won by only 59 votes and the result is being challenged in the election court in Belfast because of allegations that a polling station was allowed to stay open for some time after the 10 pm close. Fermanagh and South Tyrone is not, of course, without form in the history of electoral malpractice. Anyone conversant with the result in 1955 or the allegations surrounding the by-elections of 1981 will be able to testify to that. We await the court's judgment with interest.

Nor is the problem confined to Westminster elections—at local government and Assembly elections the existence of multi-member constituencies and the single transferable vote increases the potential for fraud. As the then chief electoral officer, Mr. Bradley, in his report for 1998–99, put it:

"The local elections are more susceptible to electoral abuse. A small number of voters can have a significant impact on the election of individual councillors and hence, in the case of marginal councils in determining the overall control of the council."

Electoral fraud has been the subject of a number of studies and debates in recent years at Westminster and in the Northern Ireland Forum and, recently, in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I, too, pay tribute to the work of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee under the chairmanship of my noble Friend, the former Member for the Cities of London and Westminster, Peter Brooke. Its report in 1998 highlighted a number of areas of concern and formed the backdrop to the Government's White Paper "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland", which was the basis for the Bill.

That Select Committee drew attention to problems in the following areas: registration, absent voting, political presence at polling stations, and voter identification. Some of the examples that it mentions in its report are staggering.

On the accuracy of the register in Belfast, West the Select Committee noted evidence provided by the Social Democratic and Labour party of some 18,000 names that appeared more than once on the register for the area, compared with 6,000 on a London register for an area with a large Irish community. It is no wonder that the Select Committee concluded:

"the evidence indicates that there may be a serious level of multiple registration, at least in some parts of Northern Ireland".

The Government's review "Administering Elections in Northern Ireland" concluded:

"there is a level of false registration which is carried out with the express intention of abusing the system".

On the abuse of absent voting, we learn that before the 1997 general election the chief electoral officer received 10,000 applications only hours before the deadline. As the Select Committee noted:

"A large proportion of these were from one political party."

There are no prizes for guessing which one it might have been. An investigation by the chief electoral officer into applications for absent voting uncovered one case in which a doctor had attested that an applicant was unable to leave his home, but another application by the same person for a different election included the statement that the person was a long-distance lorry driver.

As the Select Committee noted, the chief electoral officer was

"satisfied beyond any shadow of a doubt that the problem was extensive".

The Select Committee concluded:

"Absent voting provides a serious threat to the integrity of the electoral system in Northern Ireland."

The Government's review stated that the chief electoral officer believed that up to half of all absent vote applications for the 1997 local government elections were fraudulent.

On the problems of voter identification at polling stations, the Select Committee also drew attention to the weakness of the current system, concluding that

"the present system of relying on party agents to challenge in cases of personation is unrealistic and provides inadequate protection".

Clearly there is a need for action, and we are justified in criticising the Government for their delay in putting legislation before the House. Why did it take three years between the publication of the Select Committee report and the White Paper setting out the Government's own proposals to combat electoral fraud? As the Select Committee, in its first special report of 2000-01, put it:

"When we reported in March 1998, less than a year after the General Election, we had a reasonable expectation that rather more progress might have been made before the next General Election in tackling the serious problem of electoral malpractice than appears likely to be the case".

[Mr. Taylor]

That is rather more diplomatic than the language that I would use to describe the Government's delay in coming up with these proposals. The argument that they lacked parliamentary time is simply unsustainable given that they only got round to publishing their White Paper in March, and given that they regularly make time in the House for much less serious measures than the one before us today.

As a result of the Government's delay, legislation was not in place for the recent general election; nor will it be in place should the Government go down the road of calling fresh Assembly elections if the current impasse continues. That is unacceptable.

Turning briefly to the Bill itself, I do not intend to follow the Minister in describing each of the proposed legislative changes in detail. As far as the changes go, they make practical common sense to the Opposition. We hope that adding the date of birth and a signature, allowing the presiding officer at a polling station to ask for the date of birth of an elector applying for a ballot paper and the introduction of an electoral identity card will have the desired effect in combating what is clearly a problem.

We particularly welcome the move towards phasing out the non-photographic forms of identification at polling stations and the new photographic electoral identity card. We urge the Government to proceed with that as quickly as possible, given that it is estimated that it could take up to 18 months to complete the process after legislation is passed.

Looking to the longer term, the White Paper "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland" identifies the potential for new technology to combat electoral fraud to ensure that in Northern Ireland we have a comprehensive and secure electoral identity system. The White Paper suggests that the ultimate aim should be for every voter to be issued with an electoral smart card bearing a unique identifier. That would prevent anyone from registering twice without the knowledge of the chief electoral officer, and would make it almost impossible for anyone to vote twice.

That surely must be the way forward in Northern Ireland, so it was disappointing to read in the White Paper that, having set out the advantages of such a scheme, the Government consider them to be only "aspirations for the future". Surely the technology exists to begin working on a secure electoral identity scheme now. That is what the Government should be working towards, and with rather more urgency than they have shown with the measure before us today.

5.55 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): It is good when work with which one has been personally associated eventually makes it through the legislative process. That has not happened often in my experience, so I am glad that the Bill has been introduced.

I gave evidence to the committee of the Northern Ireland Forum which, in 1997, published the valuable report on electoral malpractice that was referred to earlier. Like my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and other Members in the Chamber this evening, I served on the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs which, in March 1998, issued a report on electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) was involved in the production of both reports. The work of those committees seems to have pushed the Northern Ireland Office into action, because it started work on its own report shortly after the Select Committee began its investigations. The NIO report was published in October 1998.

The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) cited the Select Committee report published in January 2001 in which concerns were expressed that legislation had not been introduced sooner. Peter Brooke chaired the Select Committee admirably. He had had experience of Northern Ireland as its Secretary of State and enabled us to find a form of words that helped us along the road to the peace process. As one would have expected, his work on the Select Committee always drew on his experience.

The Bill contains a manifest defect, which I shall deal with later. I shall of course support the Bill on Second Reading, but I shall look for opportunities to table amendments at a later stage, especially in relation to the defect that I shall mention.

Although it has been pointed out that the Select Committee report contains many references to problems of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland, the hard quantifiable detail that people might require to demonstrate those problems is not given in the report or elsewhere. It is important to set up investigations such as the one currently under way into marked electoral registers. That investigation will find out which voters in recent elections are not recorded as voting in past elections, and will check whether they really did vote recently or whether their vote had been appropriated by a political party.

As the hon. Member for Solihull noted, there is sufficient evidence in the Select Committee report to support our justified concerns and fears about the operation of elections in Northern Ireland. That is partly because of the strong sectarian attitudes in certain parts of Northern Ireland society. It is felt that the ends justify the means, so the niceties of the electoral game and the commitment of democrats to that game can readily and easily be abused by people for their own ends.

There is a limited commitment to the democratic process in certain areas of party political activity. If Sinn Fein had that commitment, it would certainly take action on issues such as decommissioning, but it does not act according to those principles. The hope is that the more it is involved in the democratic process, the more the process will have an influence on its operations, values and attitudes. However, that is certainly not happening at the moment, and the major electoral fraud that takes place in Northern Ireland is clearly associated with that party.

We are having to make key decisions on the Bill at a time when a clear divide exists in Northern Ireland. Assembly elections, which may be upon us soon, need to take place in the context of our having such legislation tightly in place because, in the nationalist camp, it matters tremendously whether it is Sinn Fein or the Social Democratic and Labour party that achieves the largest number of votes and seats and which of them can rightly claim to speak on behalf of the nationalist community. The same can be said of the Democratic Unionist party and the Ulster Unionist party in relation to that community.

In the case of the DUP, some of us are very worried that the no vote position will hold sway. In the case of the nationalists, if Sinn Fein—a party which had played with the peace process and arranged for people to vote in association with it but clearly did not have the fully fledged commitment to it that should exist—took over, it would be in the driving seat of the nationalist position. Several of us would not like those results; we would like the majorities in favour of the agreement to hold sway politically, but that must happen in the fairest way possible and in accordance with electoral practices.

The methods of vote-stealing are clearly listed in the reports that I have mentioned. The addresses of demolished buildings have been used, although we have heard that action has been taken to ensure that the information is available to returning officers to allow them to determine whether addresses are legitimate. There have been over-subscribed numbers in households. In those cases, a suspiciously unlikely number of people have been registered as living at a house of a certain size.

The high level of multiple registration is also a problem. Rolling registration, which has now been established, reduces the need for multiple registration. Is multiple registration necessary if people can move from one part of the Province to another and relatively quickly establish their new addresses as those from which they will vote? We should be able to operate systems, especially with rolling registration, that get rid of multiple registration, or we should take action to reduce its operation considerably, and I believe that that applies to the whole United Kingdom.

Forged and fraudulently used medical cards, allowance books and so on are another problem. The Select Committee was provided with evidence to show that the Royal Ulster Constabulary had discovered factories that manufactured forged documents, although there had been an attempt to burn those documents. The suggestion that electoral cards, with photographs on them, should be used is partly a response to that problem. That is one avenue that could be used.

The rush of last-minute voter applications has been mentioned, and there has also been abuse of marked registers. The evidence from the electoral returning officer showed that much more common than a vote cast in the name of someone who had died and should no longer appear on the register was a vote cast—clearly by someone who had looked very closely at the marked register—in the name of someone who did not normally exercise their franchise rights.

Intimidation, such as following the postman when postal votes are used, and intimidation involving the electorate more generally are serious matters which might not be dealt with easily by the issue of cards with photographs on them.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The hon. Gentleman mentions intimidation. People are visited and asked for their medical cards, which are taken from them. That is the highest form of intimidation, but it happens regularly in some areas, where two men go to people's doors saying that they are collecting medical cards, and all those votes are then cast in a clandestine and illegal way.

Mr. Barnes: Of course, that problem will be tackled under the Bill, but a similar problem will remain because people may have other forms of identification and their electoral cards taken away from them. That is why returning officers need to check dates of birth at polling stations. The solution suggested in the Bill is that, except in the case of incapacitated and illiterate people, dates of birth and signatures will be required when registration takes place.

As my hon. Friend the Minister has said, the Select Committee and the forum committee suggested that national insurance numbers should also be used. Such a suggestion is not unique in electoral activities throughout the world. Some countries have identity cards and they use them in their electoral systems. I am increasingly of the opinion that identity cards would be fruitful in achieving full and correct registration in the United Kingdom generally.

In Malta, for example, people's identification numbers appear on the electoral register and their dates of birth can be worked out from those numbers. That system functions well in a small country that prides itself on the fact that more than 90 per cent. of its people turn out at elections. Malta operates a system in which cards with photographs on them are issued at each election. People hand in those cards at the polling stations, so those who are found to have old cards did not vote at previous elections.

Presiding officers can now ask people for additional information—their date of birth—when the vote takes place, but why cannot signatures also be used, as they could also be checked at polling stations? Surely if there is any doubt about whether someone has stolen a card and has had the wit to discover the date of birth of the person from whom it was stolen, the signature would constitute an extra factor. In fact, signatures are only being used to check postal and proxy applications. It is right that signatures should be used for those purposes, and the committee of the Northern Ireland Forum made recommendations along those lines. It said:

"In addition, the Committee believes that consideration should also be given to implementing procedures whereby each elector should be required to sign the electoral register and a comparison of the signature on the register and the one which was provided on the registration form, made by the polling station officials before a voting paper is handed over."

That would provide an extra check, and it is a point that we could pursue in Committee.

The election identity card will replace other documents that do not bear a photograph and it could be used in the same way as a passport or driving licence. However, we must be careful not to create two classes of citizens. Some people already have the passports and driving licences that they obtained for other purposes while others will have to search out the electoral identity card that will be freely supplied. When my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) was a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, he pointed out that considerable efforts would be made to ensure that people had electoral registration cards. He said:

"We will have to make enormous efforts to ensure that the obtaining of a voter identity card is as easy as possible, even to the extent of having mobile units go round the streets so that people can step outside their door and make the necessary arrangements."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 29 March 2001; Vol. 366, c. 347WH.]

I welcome such an approach, but why will not everyone be obliged to take part in it?

The White Paper suggests that 400,000 to 600,000 electors in Northern Ireland may need electoral identity cards. They are part of an electorate of 1.2 million, so it

[Mr. Barnes]

is possible that one third or 50 per cent. of the electorate may be involved in the new form of registration. To support the view that there should be an electoral registration card, I cite the views of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. In response to evidence given by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr. Mowlam, it stated:

"The Secretary of State, rightly, expressed dislike for a system which provided for different types of documentation, according to whether a voter drove a car or had travelled abroad. She felt that this was divisive and we agree."

The question that elicited that response from Dr. Mowlam was asked by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and, in reply, she said:

"I do not want a two-tier, two-class system whereby you carry an ID voting card because you do not have anything else . . . I do not want us to have a two-tier system whereby if you do not have a driving licence you have to carry that. That sticks in my throat."

Such a system sticks in my throat for practical democratic reasons. The people who do not have driving licences or passports are likely to be more elderly and poorer and it might be more difficult to persuade them to take up the provisions on offer. They will be much less likely to do so if they do not act together with other people.

I hope that the Bill will be amended so that that defect is overcome and that we operate with a card that is used by everyone. That might lead us to consider seriously whether we should use identity cards as the basis for what takes place at the polling station.

6.15 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I was startled to learn that the first round of the leadership election in the Conservative party coincides with the election of the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party. Surely that is more than a coincidence; or perhaps it is the same election, which would confirm a suspicion that Liberal Democrats have harboured for some time. Let us hope that no electoral fraud is on the go. For the sake of clarification, I point out that I am standing in neither election.

In a way, electoral fraud involves the act of being too eager to vote. Although turnout in the general election overall was down to about 60 per cent., turnout in Northern Ireland can in some circumstances be as high as 200 per cent. The challenge therefore is to get people to vote but to vote only once and without pretending to be someone else.

As we all know, the 1997 general election caused the publication of the several reports that have already been mentioned. Those reports by the Northern Ireland Forum for political dialogue, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the House of Commons and the Secretary of State's Department make the problem clear. They also make it clear that we need some sort of legislative solution because nothing else has worked so far.

In the Westminster Hall debate on 29 March this year, it became clear that there was considerable consensus in the House on this issue. Liberal Democrats form part of that consensus and we accept the need for a Bill. However, as the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) pointed out, it is a shame that it has taken so long for it to come before the House. Had it been debated before the 2001 general election, it is possible that it would have had a material impact on election outcomes in Northern Ireland. Let us hope that there is no further delay and that the Bill is implemented before the next elections in Northern Ireland.

We all know that vote-stealing is prevalent in the Province and takes place to a much greater extent than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Democracy is very much compromised by such activity. Trying to cheat the system is not only very naughty but actually undermines the system for everybody. I also suspect that it is probably damaging to the organisations implicated in illegal activities, because they lose a great deal of credibility with law-abiding citizens who might otherwise be persuaded to vote for them. After all, it is better to vote for an organisation that we do not fully agree with but that we trust than for an organisation that looks like it is willing to pervert the system of democracy in the interest of achieving its ends.

Although it is difficult to quantify the level of abuse taking place during elections in Northern Ireland, it takes place at significant and, at times, possibly election-deciding levels. The report of the elections review "Administering Elections in Northern Ireland" states:

"In the case of the absent vote facility, it is clear from the RUC's investigations, instigated by the Chief Electoral Officer, that there is evidence to show a high level of malpractice. Personation at polling stations has, however, been impossible to quantify . . . However, despite the fact that no-one has come forward with evidence . . . the experience of the RUC officers on duty at polling stations certainly suggests that abuse is taking place."

That quotations makes two things clear. The first is that there is a strong belief within the Royal Ulster Constabulary that such events take place and, secondly, that it is extremely hard under current arrangements to bring about convictions. No one is willing to stand up and face the inevitable intimidation that they would receive for blowing the whistle on these activities. We need legislation to take the responsibility from people who reasonably and understandably do not come forward, and to ensure that the state has the power to impose rightful processes in the place of those that are currently being perverted.

Although it is hard to prove specific cases of electoral fraud, we have a duty to do what we can to stop it. The Bill and the White Paper "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland" have a good chance of doing that if they are implemented correctly.

The basis for all electoral activity in Northern Ireland is the electoral register. Unless it is accurate, the opportunities for malpractice are great. The White Paper, which was published in March, states that the chief electoral officer believes that the register is 91 per cent. complete and 94 per cent. accurate. Those figures are pretty good, but they still allow opportunities for fraud to occur and that can make a real difference. Of the 18 Northern Ireland seats in the general election, two had majorities of fewer than 130 votes and four had majorities of fewer than 1,200. With such close results, we must be sure that no funny business is going on. Electoral fraud is a clear danger because it can significantly alter the balance of outcomes in the Province.

On the Bill's detail, during the registration process it is right to collect signatures and dates of birth as personal identifiers. Indeed, that has been extensively discussed.

It is interesting to know how the information will be gathered and stored. The elections review recommended several ways that could be done—on paper or electronically, each of which has pluses and minuses. Whichever system is used, the electorate must find it user-friendly and it must be accurate. After all, it is vital that the system does not introduce new, unintended inaccuracies because of the methods used to store the information. What thought has been given to storage and gathering techniques? We want to ensure that individuals who are innocent of any wrongdoing and eligible to vote do not fall out of the system because of an error or oversight.

The Bill allows the presiding officer discretionary powers to refuse a ballot paper if he has asked for a voter's date of birth and there is still doubt about the voter's identity, prompted either by the information in the specific document or the apparent age of the voter compared with the date of birth supplied. I welcome that measure. I raised the problem in Westminster Hall on 29 March when I explained that it would be possible for me turn up at a polling station with my grandfather's pension book and say that my date of birth was 1916. I am going grey before my time, but few would believe that I am 85, although some hon. Members might think differently. However, the age gap could be much smaller and the parameters are wide enough to make it possible to vote illegally. So long as the safety measures are watertight before individuals turn up at the polling station, the discretionary powers are a key part of what will make the Bill work.

It has been suggested that the system is most open to abuse through the absent vote procedure. There is a remarkably high rate of absent voting in some areas of Northern Ireland and postal votes are claimed by a larger proportion of people than might be expected given its circumstances. Fraudulent applications are unquestionably made, but we do not know the exact proportion. Getting away with fraud by casting an absent vote in Northern Ireland is probably more straightforward than going to the polling station in person.

Comparing a registered signature with what is on an application for an absent vote will be useful in reducing the chances of fraud, but the White Paper also suggested that forgery could be further reduced by adding a serial number or a bar code to the application form. The Minister also mentioned that. Do the Government intend to redesign the application forms for absent votes in that way? Frankly, I worry that postal vote fraud across the United Kingdom in general is more common than we acknowledge. It is hard to police and if we can find a system that works in Northern Ireland we might want to consider expanding the technique to the rest of the UK. I leave that thought with the Minister.

The Liberal Democrats also welcome the Government's intention to introduce an electoral identity card, although I have some concern about its exact nature. The Minister envisages that in the long term it will be a smart card. By incorporating a computer chip, it will be fairly secure and comprehensive in its content. Although that would be a bit more expensive to produce, it would be much more secure than a plastic or embossed card, which would take us back to square one because it is relatively easy to copy or amend. Someone only has to forge a card with their photograph to put electoral fraud back in business.

Although I welcome what the Minister said about smart cards, we should seriously consider introducing them this time around and accept that we might have to update the technology later. The business sector has extensive experience of smart cards and a model might exist that has been tested in industrial and commercial environments which could be applied to the system in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will think again about introducing a smart card earlier so that we do not risk using a much more forgeable plastic or embossed card, which I fear will be the interim step.

Although the Bill provides for the electoral identity card to be added to the list of specified documents that are needed to obtain a ballot paper, I am worried that there is no provision to remove other documents on the list which are extremely easy to forge, such as the medical card. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) made an important point about that. No one wants to disfranchise honest voters, but the identity card will be more effective and harder to forge if it is produced properly as a smart card. We need to think seriously about that.

If we are making a concerted effort to highlight the existence of an electoral identity card, especially for the elderly and infirm, it is sensible to think about abandoning some documents so that we remove the most obvious forms of forgery and malpractice from the electoral process. The Minister commented on that, but I hope that we will be clearer on the subject in Committee so that we can be confident that we are taking a radical step by eliminating some of the open goals for opportunists.

I hope that the Minister will answer my questions. I trust that he agrees with the need to balance the maintenance of wide access to voting with protecting the fairness of our democracy. We will not eliminate electoral fraud completely, but we can significantly reduce the theft of votes and increase the chances of detection.

To some extent, the proposals infringe on a person's privacy. They require more information than is asked for in elections elsewhere in the UK. I am concerned that we should not set an open-ended precedent. I do not like the way that the state's interference in personal matters is developing in our society. The reach of the state is encroaching ever further on our freedom and privacy. In that context, the Bill is another move in the wrong direction. It is an evil, but the difficulty is that without it a small number of cheats stand to make a huge difference to other people's freedom to have a fair electoral process. I may not like it, but I am willing to live with it because, on balance, it improves the important electoral process in Northern Ireland.

However, let me put down a marker: there must be a limit to how far we go. The Minister agreed with that. If we do not temper the tendency, one day we will look back and discover that there is no way to return to the relative, although diminishing, freedoms in British society. As other hon. Members said, if we push too far, we will create barriers that disfranchise people who cannot be bothered with the complexities of proving their identity by jumping through the hoops before they are allowed to vote.

That said, it is our role to protect the interests of the vast majority of Northern Ireland citizens who respect democracy. The Bill gives us a chance to challenge the people who prefer to cheat the electoral system than to

[Lembit Öpik]

win elections fair and square. Electoral fraud says more about the people who commit it than it does about what they stand for, because they throw their toys out of the pram. I hope that the House will accept that a consensus on the Bill has evolved in our discussions to date, and the Liberal Democrats will certainly support it this evening.

6.30 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate.

May I congratulate the Minister on his first outing at the Dispatch Box? Ulster Unionist Members also have high expectations that he will make a positive contribution to business in Northern Ireland, so he has a lot to live up to.

I apologise for the absence of several of my colleagues. They too are involved in the talks about the Belfast agreement, so duty calls them elsewhere.

I have listened to anecdotal evidence of electoral fraud. Also, I grew up in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, where I frequently heard the words, "Vote early and vote often", so I can tell the House that in those days, which were not long ago, it was easier to identify electoral fraud because the reward for personation was a bottle of Guinness. For those hon. Members who do not understand how powerful a bottle of Guinness is, I should point out that by 10 o'clock in the evening, it was easy to identify those who had benefited from voting early and voting often. I should add that, having been brought up in a strict Presbyterian home, I just voted once.

The Minister has a particular interest in human rights, so I begin my comments on the Bill by reminding him of the Government's obligations to everyone in the United Kingdom, including those of us in Northern Ireland. The Minister will know that under article 3 of the first protocol of the European convention on human rights, which is of course now part and parcel of our domestic law, by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998, the Government have a clear duty: not only must they hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, but they must do so

"under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature."

The Government have a duty to impose conditions that will ensure—not merely try to ensure—the free expression of the people's wishes.

For too many years we in Northern Ireland have had to endure electoral fraud, rather than enjoy conditions that ensure the free expression of people's voting preferences. The White Paper "Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland" was published in March. The title itself encouraged us to believe that, for a change, the Government were serious about eradicating electoral fraud. Our hopes were high when we read that they pledged

"to put in place effective measures to prevent electoral abuse wherever it occurs."

I regret to report that my hopes have been dashed by the Bill. I am bitterly disappointed because it fails fully to implement the proposals in the White Paper, and not being a patient person at the best of times I thought that three years was a long time to wait for it. Having waited for those three years and for a month after the local elections and the general election, we have before us a weak Bill. My list of its various weaknesses will not be exhaustive because I do not want to keep hon. Members here for a long time.

Although the White Paper rightly focused on intimidation at polling stations, the Bill completely ignores it. We have just had an election in which two RUC officers and a bystander were injured at a polling station. Intimidation is a serious problem, and I would like the Government to pay attention to it in Committee.

The Bill is also silent on multiple registration. The Minister has kindly defended multiple registration on the grounds of convenience for students and people who live in different places. However, people have to identify their main residence for the purposes of taxation, and I see no justification for a difference in electoral law. Multiple registration is far too open to abuse, so it should be made illegal. A person should be asked to register and vote where they reside for the majority of the time, and since no one can reside in two places for the majority of the time everyone must choose one residence.

On the new identifiers of dates of birth and signatures, I feel compelled to remind the Government that electoral fraud in Northern Ireland is orchestrated and widespread, and has a significant impact on election results. It devalues the results and undermines the authority of those who are elected. I regret that the Bill fails to give a statutory basis to increased powers and increased staffing for the electoral office investigation teams, which would enable them to scrutinise thoroughly the accuracy of the signatures and dates of birth on the electoral canvass.

Lembit Öpik: Could we not allow multiple registration to continue with the operation of a smart card, which would be able to register whether people had voted? I ask because many people in the United Kingdom as a whole would be compromised if we required them to choose one place or another for their registration, and a smart card would provide an electronic solution to the problem.

Lady Hermon: We are told that Northern Ireland leads the way in so many things, such as policing reform and human rights legislation, so I hope that smart card technology will be introduced to allow us to lead the way in electoral registration.

To include in the Bill an exception to the rule requiring signatures on the electoral canvass will, I fear, prove to be a gift horse to those who are intent on fraud, and people are intent on it. The gift horse comes in the form of the discretion afforded to the chief electoral officer to dispense with the requirement for a signature

"if he is satisfied that it is not reasonably practicable for that person to sign . . . because of any incapacity of his or because he is unable to read."

Forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I sound cynical when I predict an increase in the recorded illiteracy rate in Northern Ireland. It would appear logical and sensible that those who are genuinely incapacitated or unable to read should be able to avail themselves of the new identity card proposed in the Bill. That would close a potential loophole for those who are intent on fraud.

Although Ulster Unionist Members welcome the introduction of the new, voluntary identity cards, we very much regret that the Bill does not end the use of

non-photographic forms of identity, such as medical cards which, as the Minister knows, have enabled fraudulent activities in Northern Ireland to become a growth industry. The fact that there is no firm timetable for phasing out those forms of ID is a severe failing of the Bill, and I ask the Minister to give it his attention in Committee.

There is no denying that absent votes represent a major source of electoral fraud. It is on record that in the 1997 general election, Northern Ireland constituencies had on average twice as many absent voters as constituencies in Great Britain. That cannot be explained simply by the fact that we have more rural constituencies. There is a huge inconsistency in the distribution of absent votes in Northern Ireland.

The most recent election results show that in West Tyrone, which was won by Sinn Fein, there were 5,443 absent votes, and in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which was also taken by Sinn Fein, there were 5,784 absent votes. Let us compare those figures with the 1,200 absent votes in my constituency of North Down, which has an average number of such votes. In Lagan Valley, we had 1,500. Absent votes allow fraud and should be given much more detailed attention in the Bill.

I therefore repeat my introductory remarks to the Government: they have an obligation under the Human Rights Act to ensure that conditions are put in place guaranteeing people free expression of their choice of legislature. It would be distinctly embarrassing for the Government to be taken to task by a voter who said that, in fact, they were breaching their human rights obligations. As I mentioned, in Northern Ireland we are told regularly that we are leading the way on police reform, human rights and the equality agenda. You name it, we have got it and are leading the way. We should lead the way with smart cards and new technology. The technology is out there; it should not be our future but our present. Having waited impatiently for the Bill for three years, I now urge the Minister to follow it quickly with more substantial reform to eradicate, rather than acquiesce in, electoral fraud.

6.41 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): First, I congratulate the Minister and welcome his debut at the Dispatch Box. For some time he was a colleague of mine on the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs where—as I am sure that the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) agrees—he played a constructive role. Unlike many others from the major parties who served on the Select Committee almost as place fillers, he showed a conscientious interest in the matters before him and played a full part in our proceedings. Indeed, I took the trouble to dredge up the Select Committee report on electoral abuse to look at his contribution, and I shall refer later to some of the interesting points that he made. I join him in his tribute to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), with whom many of us had meetings on this subject in Northern Ireland, and who showed an interest in attempting to do something that would stop the electoral abuse about which we all had a growing concern.

The House, I am sure, will give the Bill a broad welcome—at least in general terms. It would hard for it to do otherwise. It is obscene that anyone's vote should be stolen, and that anyone should take more than one vote in their own name. In Northern Ireland, particularly with proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote, the stealing of one vote by one person can deny the rights of thousands of people, because a fraction of one vote in a PR election can determine a seat. That form of cheating must be brought to an end as far as possible.

The Minister made some remarks about the history of interest in the subject. As the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who came as a witness before the Northern Ireland Forum committee on which I served, said, that committee produced the first recent report on the subject. That report was valuable and drew attention to the type of problem faced in elections in Northern Ireland. However, the forum committee, like the Select Committee, felt the same frustration that the Minister expressed in the Select Committee when attempting to quantify the scale of the problem during the cross-examination—I think it is fair to call it that—of Pat Bradley, who was then chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland. Everybody knew that abuse was taking place on a considerable scale, but there did not seem to be any real attempt by the electoral office to quantify it.

Although the Bill is being introduced now, it is still important for the electoral office to conduct an exercise to quantify the level of electoral abuse. Evidence both to the forum committee and to the Select Committee produced a number of examples of considerable electoral abuse, giving us a flavour of the high level of electoral abuse in Northern Ireland and demonstrating the need to take action.

The Select Committee reported in March 1998, but it had to return to the subject by urging—I was going to say "prodding", but it may not be appropriate to use that word about Northern Ireland matters in the House—the Secretary of State to introduce the legislation that had been promised on the subject. I agree with those who have already drawn attention to foot-dragging by Ministers and by the Northern Ireland Office in introducing the Bill.

It therefore came as something of a surprise when, only a few months before parliamentary and local government elections, the then Minister, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East, told us that he was contemplating rushing the legislation through before the end of the last Parliament. For many of us, that would have been the worst of all worlds; we would have had new legislation without ID cards being distributed, and people would start to be disfranchised because of the loss of the usual identifiers—medical cards and benefit books.

Existing methods of identification are fairly well known; there has already been reference to the driving licence. During his speech, the Minister was twice asked to give way by Members wishing to ask about the driving licence. I do not know about the rest of the House, but he certainly did not convince me that it was necessary to have both parts of the driving licence. Indeed, he went on to explain the attributes of the new card. The explanatory notes to the Bill say that the electoral identity card will show

"the elector's full name and date of birth, his photograph, the card's expiry date".

Consistent with that, the Minister said that those would be the features of the identification card.

I have with me the plastic part of the driving licence used in Northern Ireland, and on it is a name—indeed, it goes further, it has an address as well—a date of birth,

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

an expiry date and a photograph, all of which are features that the Minister says his identity card will have. The driving licence has not only the additional feature of an address, but a signature too, so in many ways it is a better identification card than that proposed by the Minister. However, when I look at the part of the driving licence that the Minister tells us it is essential to have along with the plastic card, I see nothing on it that adds in any way to the information required by the presiding officer in any polling station. Indeed, if any part of the present two-part driving licence is easy to forge it is that piece, which, we think, can be discarded.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real problem is that the Minister was speaking as a legalist? He was just interpreting the law, whereas I was asking whether there was an attempt to change the law to give flexibility, as presiding officers act strictly in accordance with the law. All I was asking for was an improvement in the law to provide better identification.

Mr. Robinson: The Under-Secretary always speaks as a lawyer. I believe that the law was his profession in Scotland.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): He speaks from the heart.

Mr. Robinson: Of course he does that too. However, I hope that he will explain what is so essential in the additional sheet of the driving licence that it can serve as an identifier at the polling station. Nothing in the additional sheet qualifies it for that. The card from the driving licence is as effective, if not more effective, than the Under-Secretary's proposal, at least in the interim.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It was interesting that at the last election, the chief electoral officer felt that he had to go on television to tell people that it did not matter if their driving licence had the wrong address, because its purpose was to identify the person, not where they lived.

Mr. Robinson: That emphasises the point. I know from speaking to my workers at polling stations, and to those who work for the chief electoral officer on election day, that there is a recurring problem of people turning up with one part of a driving licence and being sent away. Often, they do not return, sometimes simply because of the inconvenience.

Mr. Barnes: Would not the problem be overcome by using only one card—the electoral card—instead of driving licences and passports? Everyone would be subject to the same arrangements, and the difficulty of determining which bit of the driving licence to hand in would be resolved.

Mr. Robinson: It would if everyone had the card. I shall return to that idea later. However, I am worried that we could disfranchise many people simply because they will not go through the rigmarole necessary to get the card.

Of the three most common methods of electoral abuse, the first is multiple entry. I am not convinced that anyone needs to be registered at more than one address, whether in one constituency or in several. There is no advantage to it, and the generosity of the postal vote arrangements means that people can easily choose their main or preferred address and use a postal vote from wherever they are resident at the time of the election.

Lembit Öpik: On the mainland of the United Kingdom, the electoral register and the council tax system are closely connected. Would not a smart card resolve the problem—not the card that the Under-Secretary mentioned, but a smart card that showed whether a person had voted? That would prevent people from voting more than once even if they had multiple addresses.

Mr. Robinson: It would, and the smart card was the Select Committee's preferred option. However, the Under-Secretary is not offering that, at least not immediately. He is undertaking a study in the Northern Ireland Office to determine progress on the advances in appropriate technology, but the card that he is currently offering would not carry out that function.

The BBC "Spotlight" programme suggested that multiple entry was a considerable problem. It itemised several cases of six and more people being registered at one-bedroom flats—and those people were all voting. Indeed, in some cases, the same six people were voting from each flat. They happened to be the so-called bodyguards of the Member who was elected for the constituency of Belfast, West (Mr. Adams).

Mr. Barnes: There would be no problem in ending multiple registration. This did not apply in Northern Ireland, but when we had the poll tax, we got used to a system whereby a person's main or sole place of residence had to be designated. The system—unfortunately, in that case—operated effectively. We could do the same with electoral registration: people could designate their main or sole place of residence, and their vote would be based there. If they moved, there would be a rolling register, and they could be registered at their new residence.

Mr. Robinson: The position as regards the electoral register is improving, and there is no barrier to getting on to the register in Northern Ireland; I believe that people can get on it in a month. That presents no difficulty. However, as the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) said, the best option is a smart card, which tells a story when it is read at the polling station, and shows whether the person has already voted.

Apart from organised fraud through multiple registration, there is home-grown abuse, whereby mothers or fathers register children who have left the house some years ago because they want to give them the opportunity to vote in Northern Ireland even if they do not return to do so. Some also vote elsewhere, and others do not live in the United Kingdom. Those practices have grown over the years.

Multiple registration applies especially with students who come to Belfast. They get a vote there and influence elections, probably more in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) than anywhere else. They then return to Fermanagh and South Tyrone, West Tyrone or Mid-Ulster to cast their votes there, too. The electoral office could identify multiple registrations through national insurance numbers, but that

will be effective only if the Government are prepared to grasp the nettle and prohibit anyone from being registered at more than one address.

Mr. Browne: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves multiple registration, perhaps he will consider whether someone who is a council tax payer in two areas should have the opportunity of voting in council elections in both areas.

Mr. Robinson: The Under-Secretary forgets the history of the issue in Northern Ireland. He appears to have forgotten the principle of one man, one vote. It was the practice of the Unionist Government to follow what happened in the rest of the United Kingdom, and whoever paid the piper called the tune. People were therefore allowed to vote in an area where they subscribed healthily to the rateable value and contributed to the local council. That meant that in some areas, people had two, three or five votes. That was deemed inappropriate, and the Labour party was most vociferous in its condemnation.

Mr. Browne: I am conscious that I am interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but I suspect that he inadvertently misrepresented my argument. I did not suggest that people who have more than one house in the same council area should be able vote more than once—but when there is no such conflict and people contribute through council tax in separate council areas, how do we overcome the problem of taxation without representation?

Mr. Robinson: It was Labour party policy that what the Under-Secretary describes should not happen in Northern Ireland. There is no great difference between voting more than once in one constituency and influencing the outcome of an election by voting in more than one constituency. It would probably assist Unionism in Northern Ireland if the right outlined by the Under-Secretary existed. However, people in Northern Ireland are currently allowed to vote in only one constituency.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me a third time, but either he misunderstands my point or he is woefully misrepresenting me. I have never suggested that people should be allowed to vote in more than one parliamentary constituency. I merely ask him to consider the simple problem of overcoming the difficulty of taxation without representation for those who pay council tax in two council areas. I do not want to complicate matters by reciting the history of the Northern Ireland electoral system or discussing votes based on houses. I want him to answer my simple point.

Mr. Robinson: The Minister seems to think that there is some great distinction between the ability to vote more than once in a Westminster election and the ability to vote in two council elections. It was in council areas that the main problem in Northern Ireland arose, as it was decided that people should not vote more than once at council level.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman is right that the main objection concerned council areas. It was raised not because a person could vote once in a particular area, but because he could have up to eight or nine individual votes.

Mr. Robinson: Perhaps there is some distinction between electoral law in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, one can vote in only one council area in any election.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I take the point that has been made. There was never a distinction in parliamentary or Stormont elections, but the world got the message of one man, one vote. Only council elections were affected. People who were working and paying rates in one place but living in another were entitled to several votes, but the practice was done away with, largely because of agitation from this House. When the last Government sought to introduce the council tax, or the poll charge, it was not extended to Northern Ireland, as they did not want to recognise that it had been right to maintain the ratepayer's franchise.

Mr. Robinson: I live in the council area of Castlereagh and I am entitled to vote there. I have several offices in Belfast, but I am not entitled to vote there.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am beginning to wonder whether I have failed to understand the franchise system, or whether the Northern Ireland system is completely distinct. Will the hon. Gentleman provide some clarification? Let us forget about his business premises. If he happened to have one home in Belfast and another in a different council area, would not he be entitled to vote in council elections in both places?

Mr. Robinson: No, I would not have such an entitlement, as this House changed the law to ensure that I could not vote in two places. One of the front runners on the issue happened to be the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who argued that people should have only one vote, no matter what the circumstances in Northern Ireland. To that extent, Northern Ireland differs from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Lembit Öpik: At the core of this debate is the question whether one should be able to register to vote in more than one place. I agree with the Minister that people should be entitled properly to register. Do not his words point to the inescapable fact that the only way forward is to introduce a mechanism such as a smart card to ensure that nobody cheats the system?

Mr. Robinson: The Minister's words showed that he had been taking his decisions on multiple registration on the assumption that people were entitled to vote in more than one constituency at local government level. The basis on which he built his approach has now been taken from beneath him, so he has no argument left regarding multiple registration.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The only benefit that a person gets by registering in two places is that he can nominate someone as a councillor or even a Member of Parliament. He cannot, however, vote in two places.

Mr. Robinson: There are some other advantages in having one's name on an electoral register, such as in

[Mr. Robinson]

respect of mortgages and some commercial aims. None the less, the Minister must face up to the issue of multiple entry in the register. I hope that the Government do not discriminate against my party as they did with the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. If they give us some representation on the Committee that will consider the Bill, we will have the opportunity to scrutinise the matter in more detail.

Multiple registration was only the first of three aspects of electoral abuse about which I wanted to speak. Indeed, it was the smallest of the three, as far as my notes were concerned. I shall now move on to personation, which is a key factor. Hon. Members have referred to the early custom of going to a house where alternative clothes were available and changing in order to vote again. Sometimes, vans would be driving around and people would go into them to change their clothes. I do not want to cause any embarrassment to my colleagues along the Bench, but I point out that the practice was carried out in a fulsome way by the Ulster Unionist party in earlier days. The then Republican Clubs party followed on in West Belfast, and there has been some reference to Lord Fitt's confessions on the matter.

Even in my earliest days in politics, when people who had been in the Ulster Unionist party suggested that we should make such an addition to our campaign tactics, I had to tell them that if they used the same energy in going to houses, pulling people out and getting them to the polling stations, they would probably end up with more votes. Even before the law on identification changed, the truth of that argument was realised and that method of stealing votes seemed to dissipate considerably.

The whole picture was changed by the entry into the political process of what was effectively a paramilitary army that had all the discipline and numbers that were required to organise major vote theft. There can be no doubt that Sinn Fein organised the stealing of votes from those whom it might have deemed to be its supporters. It also arranged, perhaps more enthusiastically, to steal the votes of people whom it knew to be opponents. We were given ample evidence that Sinn Fein did that by using the medical card in particular. For example, there was evidence that the Royal Ulster Constabulary had raided a property—I think that it was in Londonderry—where it found the burnt remains of medical cards that had been printed and were being used for vote stealing.

My colleagues in various parts of the Province told us how medical cards were distributed from car boots outside polling stations to willing people who came along to take the votes of others. It is difficult to quantify the scale of such abuse but it seems to have been a considerable problem, and it still is. The removal of the medical card and benefit books will assist in tackling the abuse only if there is a substitute to ensure that decent people who want to exercise their vote will not be disfranchised because they do not have one of the remaining identification documents. For example, driving licences and passports are not significantly used by senior citizens. Of course, some of them will have one or both of those documents, but our studies have overwhelmingly shown that about 70 per cent. of the people who use identification at the polling stations use either the medical card or benefit books. They do so because those are the most readily available documents.

I want to help the Minister and I hope that he will consider a suggestion. He probably knows that in Northern Ireland, as a result of good, sound Democratic Unionist party policy, free fares have come to fruition. Senior citizens of 65 and above will be able to travel for free in Northern Ireland on the production of a pass. That indicates that a new photographic pass will be produced over the coming months. It will bear a name and all the features that the Minister has identified as necessary for his identification card. One benefit of including the new bus pass as a document suitable for identification may be that there will be an incentive for a large section of the community to obtain the pass.

Many of my colleagues might think the fact that people will be able to vote for them incentive enough to obtain an identification card. They might find that there is an even greater incentive if a section of the community can have free travel throughout Northern Ireland and, if it is wished, into the Irish Republic, on the ground of having an identification card in the name of the Department for Regional Development.

If the Minister is not prepared to recognise such a pass as an acceptable document, he could at least piggy-back his scheme when the passes are being handed out. There is no reason why two passes could not be secured at the same time. I am sure that if his office were to make contact with the Department for Regional Development and Translink, it would be possible for the two documents to be handed out at the one photo session. That would perhaps ensure a greater uptake from the section of the community that I think will be the most difficult to get registered under the new scheme.

I hope that the Minister will consider that. Like the Select Committee, I recognise the validity of his argument that an identity card without a photograph would not be of much value in a polling station. Members of the security forces were outraged that people could enter a polling station with a medical card bearing no photograph and little verification, yet they could produce a police warrant or an Royal Irish Regiment document, which would not be acceptable. The Minister might want to consider in Committee whether a document is acceptable as long as it is a photo-identity card that is issued by government, in whatever form.

The remedy in the Bill for personation is date of birth. It is a help, but it will not be significant in assisting polling station personnel. It is difficult even to come close in determining the ages of some individuals. I am not sure how brave the staff in polling stations will be in questioning people, especially those of the fair gender, about their age, particularly if there has to be an assumption that they are older than they are claiming to be on the register, which contains their date of birth.

I am not sure to what extent the inclusion of date of birth will be a help. With the exception of the financial restrictions that might be applied, I cannot understand why signature was not brought forward as a possible way of confirming the identity of a person in a polling station. I think that the Minister was sold on that idea when he was a member of the Select Committee. The Committee recognised that equipment would be available digitally to compare the signature given at a polling station with that on the special electoral register available to the polling clerks at the station. A significant amount of equipment

would have to be purchased for the polling stations, but it would provide a fairly secure mechanism to ensure that personation did not occur.

Mr. Grieve: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's point about signatures. My professional experience as a barrister is that comparing signatures digitally is far-fetched. People's signatures can vary widely depending on whether they write fast or slowly. For example, the signature that one produces as a specimen often bears little relationship to the scrawl that is appended, perfectly legitimately, to the bottom of documents.

Mr. Robinson: I do not want to question the experience that the hon. Gentleman may have. However, the evidence that the Select Committee received was that the equipment available could judge a comparator on many points. The argument was advanced to the Committee that it was possible and reliable to use such equipment. I am sure that the Minister will require such equipment to be used in the electoral office when a signature is being used as a comparator for signatures on postal vote applications. It is the Government's intention that there should be a signature on the registration document for each person who is applying to be entitled to a vote. In the context of absent voting, signatures can be examined to ensure that there is no forgery and that no invalid applications are being made.

It appears that those who are abusing the system concentrate on absent voting, for obvious reasons. It is the area where it is the most difficult for them to be caught. They do not present themselves in front of someone, so they cannot be nabbed. They can abuse the system at a distance in anonymity and hope to get away with it.

Sufficient examples have been given during the debate of the number of postal votes in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) dealt with the extent of absent voting in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and West Tyrone, for example, where almost 10 per cent. of those entitled to vote voted by postal vote or by proxy. That must be an indication of the great need for medical services there or a signal of electoral abuse. It cannot be justified by comparison with any other constituency in the United Kingdom.

In the Select Committee and the forum committee, we heard from the chief electoral officer at the time of examples of abuse of the system. At one election, an individual applied for a postal vote because he was having his legs amputated, but when the next election came round, he was going on a skiing holiday. I am sure that it is possible for someone who has had his legs amputated to go skiing, but it would be sufficient to alert me to the possibility of electoral abuse.

The electoral office receives about 10,000 applications only days before it must distribute postal vote documents. There is little opportunity for it to engage in the necessary scrutiny. The evidence that the Select Committee received showed that the only scrutiny undertaken was to ensure that the forms had been completed properly, with names, addresses and doctors' signatures. When the forms were scrutinised more fully after the election, it was discovered that the same doctors' names appeared over and over again. In some instances they appeared on hundreds of applications, and related to people who were not their patients. The forms indicated that these people had an incapacity and could not attend the polling station.

There must be a penalty for doctors who are prepared to engage in such electoral abuse. They have no knowledge of the patient, yet they are willing to sign that the person is incapable of going to the polling station to register his vote. Given the volume of applications in certain areas of the Province, it is abundantly clear that there is fraudulent use of the absent voter system.

Of course, electoral fraud is committed with more sophistication now. Sinn Fein-IRA purchase copies of the marked register, from which they can determine who has not voted in a series of elections. They know that if they take those votes, it will not come to the attention of the electoral office. They provide themselves with absent voter application forms for those people. They intercept the forms from the Post Office—again, there was evidence of that happening. Alternatively, they go to the house and take the application form before the person who is receiving it ever has the opportunity to vote; in some cases, they do so before that person has had the opportunity even to open the envelope. That is how it is done: it is a sophisticated operation by those who are intent on abusing the electoral system.

The signature will assist only if there is sufficient time to carry out the investigations. If the Minister wants to tackle that issue, the electoral office must be provided with the necessary resources. A significant number of people must be put in during the run-up to an election to ensure that the investigations are carried out and that there is proper scrutiny of all the postal and proxy vote applications that come to the office. There are clear resource implications. The Government cannot simply put the legislation through and hope that everything will work out in the electoral office. I trust that the Government are prepared to fund the necessary increase in staff and support at the office.

I shall describe some of the provisions that the Government should have included in the legislation and that I hope that we can introduce in Committee. To avoid abuse, it is essential that something is done about intimidation. The Minister talked about an exclusion zone, cordon sanitaire, or whatever term the House wishes to use. I agree with him in that I do not believe that that will solve the problem, but unless new powers are given to staff inside the polling station, and to the RUC officers outside it, intimidation will still happen.

It is not always a question of the intimidation of voters. Indeed, it is difficult to intimidate voters because they can have the last laugh: ultimately, they go into the box and very few people will know what they have done there. It is the intimidation of other political parties' staff and workers in the polling station that gives an advantage to one political group. There must be some cognisance of the fact that additional powers need to be given to the police and to the presiding officer and his staff, so that they can tackle that problem.

Attention must be paid to access for the disabled. It is all right saying that we will deal with people who defraud votes, but if one stops people who are entitled to vote getting to the polling station, it has the same effect. In my constituency, people have not been able to gain access to a polling station because of steps or because they could not get their wheelchairs through the gates. I am sure that the same tale could be told in other constituencies. There are many different reasons why disabled people cannot gain access. A number of polling stations are not disability-friendly. That problem must be looked at.

[Mr. Robinson]

There should not be a hue and cry simply at the time of the election. I hope that the Minister will instruct the electoral officer to ensure access for the disabled at polling stations.

There is one further factor that I hope to be able to raise in Committee, if the amendments are selected: bogus opinion polls, which are a method of bending the minds of voters. I say "bogus" because that is precisely what I mean. It was known that the opinion polls that were printed by the newspapers were bogus; the companies that carried them out must have known. I have seen the detail of how one opinion poll was carried out and I know that it was bogus. I am talking about the main opinion poll that was carried out for the *Belfast Telegraph* by Ulster Marketing Surveys in the run-up to the two elections on 7 June. UMS deliberately chose areas where my party was not standing as the sampling point.

David Burnside: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that the opinion poll had no impact on the result in any of the constituencies to which he refers? Although it might have been alarming, it had no impact on the results.

Mr. Robinson: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is saying that he thinks that it had no impact because my party did so well and his so badly, but no one could say that it did not have any impact. I assume that since the election, he has not spoken to everyone who voted to find out whether it had any impact on them. As everyone knows, the reality is that he would not put statements into newspapers in Northern Ireland in the run-up to elections if he did not believe that they had some influence on the people who read them. *[Interruption.]* I can see that I will be called to order soon, so I shall wrap the subject up quickly. There must be some prohibition on people who knowingly carry out an opinion poll in such a way as to produce a result that is in no way a reflection of the support in the country for the political parties involved.

In general, I welcome the legislation. It can certainly be improved in Committee. I hope that we have the opportunity to do that.

7.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). It is obvious from his remarks and the thought that he has given to the subject that he has an enormous contribution to make when the Bill goes into Committee.

In general terms, I welcome the thrust of the Bill, although areas of it could be improved and strengthened. Like other hon. Members who have spoken, I believe that it is long overdue. The Select Committee report of March 1998 said that this was an urgent and important issue. Indeed, that report followed the report by the Northern Ireland Forum, which has been referred to by several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). As a member of the Northern Ireland Forum committee, I remember hearing him give evidence. I am delighted that he continues to take a close interest in electoral law and reform in Northern Ireland. Some of his suggestions are constructive and I hope that the Minister will take them on board.

We have had four elections in Northern Ireland since the Select Committee report was published: the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 1998; the European elections; and the Westminster and the local government elections, which were held on the same day recently. Three elections were held under the proportional representation system, one under the first-past-the-post system. As has been said, with elections held under the proportional representation system, at times only a relatively small number of votes may be needed to determine who stays in and who goes out of a particular contest, and therefore who ultimately gets elected. Therefore, a significant number of fraudulent votes can have a major impact on the outcome of elections, particularly in local government.

We debated that issue in the Northern Ireland Forum in 1997. I do not think that any members of the forum believed that we would have another local government election before legislation was introduced in the House to combat electoral fraud—especially when, as has been pointed out, half the postal votes in the 1997 local government elections were fraudulent. That speaks for itself.

In passing, I make the point that one of the purposes of the legislation is to ensure that those entitled to vote are not disfranchised.

Recently, there were two elections on the same day in Northern Ireland, one for Members of the House of Commons and one for members of local government. I hope that the experiment was a one-off. Many people in Northern Ireland, noting the number of spoiled papers in both elections, concluded that the holding of two elections on one day under two different voting systems—proportional representation in the local government election, and first past the post in the Westminster election—disfranchised more voters than were disfranchised by fraud. I hope the Minister will take that on board.

I support what has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East and others about the various bits of documentation that must be produced by those wishing to obtain a ballot paper, especially a driving licence. The issue has already been highlighted so I shall not say much more about it. However, I have often seen voters emerge from polling stations disgusted by the fact that they have not been allowed to vote despite having photographic identification—bus passes or works passes, for example. Meanwhile, they have seen others being given ballot papers following the production of medical cards or benefit books—rightly, under the current legislation—with no photographic identification being required. I am thinking especially of those who produce the part of a driving licence that contains a photograph, but do not produce the part that is necessary for them to obtain a ballot paper. That point should be considered in Committee.

I am glad that in future there will be an identification card with a photograph that will entitle people to vote. That, I think, is widely welcomed. I suggest to the Minister, however, that the phasing out of other identification documents, such as benefit books and medical cards, should not happen too quickly. As has been said, it will take time to persuade people to apply. We do not want people to be disfranchised because they have no passport or no driving licence, but have not been able to apply—or have not got around to applying—for a

photo-identification electoral card. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire—or it may have been the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik)—said that the phasing-out should take place speedily, but I think that we should proceed with caution.

Rolling registration has been widely welcomed in Northern Ireland, and it is working reasonably well. It was a major step forward in terms of electoral law in Northern Ireland, greatly reducing the need for multiple registration. There were exchanges between, for instance, my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East and the Minister about whether it should be possible for voters to register in two places, thus being able to choose where to vote in local government elections. It would be relatively easy to make the same choice under the rolling registration system. For example, those who wanted to vote in a particular council area because they owned property there could simply register to do so.

I agree with those who oppose the idea of an exclusion zone. I do not think that it would be practical to place such a cordon sanitaire around polling stations. Effectively, however, there is already an exclusion zone at certain polling stations for some voters on both sides of the Northern Ireland community. I know from my practical experience as a candidate that in some areas, where an overwhelming majority of nationalists and only a tiny proportion of Unionists would vote, Unionists are being forced to cast their votes. They feel intimidated by that: they are so put off by having to walk past all the Sinn Fein workers and polling agents that they do not want to vote at all.

Nationalist voters feel the same. They have to come to an overwhelmingly Unionist polling station in my constituency, in the Ardoyne area, and they may likewise feel intimidated. Some thought should be given to the best way to designate polling stations to allay such fears.

I agree with what has been said about the entitlement of those with disabilities to vote. After the recent elections, constituents told me that they could not vote at, for instance, Currie primary school in Limestone road because it was necessary to negotiate two sets of steps. That puts off elderly people and makes it out of the question for those with disabilities to vote. On a number of occasions the ballot box was taken out to people so that they could vote—under supervision. That should not be tolerated in a civilised society. People should have the right to proper access to polling stations.

It is essential for the chief electoral officer, his staff and local electoral officers to have the funds that will enable them to run their operations efficiently and to combat fraud and abuse. I was amazed to discover that, while it was deemed permissible for parties and candidates to have copies of the electoral roll—they could buy it in order to address labels and so on for election purposes—they were told, when they asked whether they could have the information on a computer disk, that that was possible but that no computer in Northern Ireland would be able to read it because the software was so antiquated.

That is the sort of system that the chief electoral officer must tackle and funds are urgently needed to deal with the problems.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I know that the Minister will receive a message telling him that plans are already afoot to spend money on that, but that funding will not be available until 2003. That is no use: the money and the equipment must be made available more readily. Even the computer department at Queen's university could not transfer the data on the chief electoral officer's machine to machines that would be used by any of the rest of us.

Mr. Dodds: I am sure that the Minister heard that and will accept that speedy action is necessary.

The former chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland used to say repeatedly that if we wanted to ensure that people had the right to vote and were not deprived of it by fraudulent means, it would cost money. The House and the Government will have to ensure that that money is made available. There is nothing more precious than the right to vote, and nothing makes people angrier than turning up on election day and finding that their votes have been stolen from them. It is incumbent on us to ensure that whatever resources are necessary to enable the electoral office to operate efficiently are provided.

I welcome the broad thrust of the Bill. We will give it a fair wind, but we hope that a number of points that have been raised will be addressed in Committee. The legislation may not be completed by the end of August or by September, when the next Northern Ireland elections will be held, if the Secretary of State is to be believed—and, indeed, if the law is followed through and there is no fancy footwork in the electoral process—but we hope that it will be enacted at the earliest opportunity.

7.40 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I should first like to apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister, to the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) and to other hon. Members for the fact that I was not here when the debate started. As I explained in a letter to Mr. Speaker, I was asked some time ago to chair a meeting in Portcullis House on the working of the Human Rights Commissions in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and it was not an obligation that I could get out of. Consequently, I had not planned to seek to speak in this debate.

My hon. Friends in the Social Democratic and Labour party have not been able to attend the debate because they are with the Prime Minister, as are the leaders of the Ulster Unionist party, trying to find a peaceful solution to the problems of Northern Ireland and specifically to address the four issues that are besetting the peace process. The points that I shall make are essentially those that they would have made if they were not with the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach and the leaders of the other pro-agreement parties.

The SDLP has identified three main types of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. The first is multiple registration and voting whereby voters are registered at various addresses—perhaps their parents' and friends' addresses—as well as at their own. Currently there is very little that can be done to identify or prevent that practice.

Personation of electors, particularly of those who do not usually use their vote, is the second type of fraud. It is committed with the assistance of forged identification, and medical cards are often used as they are simple in design and carry no photograph. Today, we have heard one anecdote after another about how that type of fraud has been committed. The need very strongly to address that issue is widely recognised.

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

The third type of fraud is the fraudulent application for postal and proxy votes. It, too, is often committed by using the names of non-voters or by using false registrations for uninhabited houses. However, the list of those in receipt of postal votes is and must remain available to the public. The date of issue of postal votes is also known. Consequently, people are able to go round and collect those postal votes and use them fraudulently.

An equally important sub-category of fraud occurs in cases in which people have properly applied for a postal vote, or have been persuaded to apply for one, after which people visit their house and intimidate them or threaten them and take it from them. We know that that happens on both sides of the community divide.

The worst thing that can possibly happen to a person is that someone take his vote from him and use it wrongly. That is stealing that person's identity, personality and most basic stake in democratic society. That is why we should take the matter very seriously regardless of where it occurs, whether in Northern Ireland or Great Britain. The right to vote is sacred to people and vital to their individuality and dignity. We must always treat seriously cases in which an attempt is made to remove someone's vote by fraud, threat or intimidation.

The SDLP feels that Ministers have gone some way towards achieving proper prevention of some of the fraud. However, like other hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, SDLP Members feel that the measures do not go far enough and that other measures could have been introduced to deal with the problem. We have already heard exchanges on the possible benefits of smart cards, which may be introduced. However, certainly the most depressing feature of the Bill is that it does not contain a timetable on removing the right to use non-photographic evidence. We do not welcome the fact that some forms of identification that are subject to fraud will still be accepted. The Bill could, as an indication of the Government's intention, provide for regulation and statutory instruments to do away with non-positive means of identification.

SDLP Members also believe that it would have been far better to include a requirement for voters to present a national insurance number, as each national insurance number is individual and distinct to every member of society. Everyone over 16 in Northern Ireland has a national insurance number. If those seeking to vote were required to provide their date of birth and national insurance number, it would be quite simple to use computers to check for multiple registrations and the fraudulent use of those numbers. The computer system would know how many national insurance numbers were extant in Northern Ireland at a particular time.

Mr. Grieve: I am very interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments on the subject, and we may hear more about it from the Minister. However, my understanding of the issue, is that, unfortunately, there are far more national insurance numbers floating around the United Kingdom than there are heads of population. My experience as prosecuting counsel in benefit fraud cases for the then Department of Social Security was certainly that numbers could be obtained with ease and that some individuals possessed enormous multiples of numbers. I therefore wonder whether national insurance numbers really provide the protection that the hon. Gentleman is seeking.

Mr. McNamara: Northern Ireland's population is much smaller than that of Great Britain and there are specific Northern Ireland national insurance numbers. They could therefore assist in creating a system to deal with the problem.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman is arguing. Even in Northern Ireland, however, it is amazing how people are able to obtain multiple national insurance numbers. One of my constituents was convicted of theft after manufacturing 25 national insurance numbers for 25 ghost customers.

Mr. McNamara: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. It is perhaps unfortunate that his constituent was discovered before he drew his old age pension as he would have had a reasonably large pension.

As I said, SDLP Members believe that national insurance numbers could be used with computers as an effective means of quickly and effectively checking identities. They also believe that we have to have a timetable to stop using non-photographic identity.

SDLP Members also believe that the Bill should contain other provisions. Although some other hon. Members may not agree with them, they believe that there should be a 100-metre limit on canvassing, posting and other party political activity around all polling stations, primarily to allay voters' anxieties and to reassure people that the polling station is a neutral zone. They believe that the withdrawal of partisan posters and active canvassing for 100 yards or so will help people to avoid the intimidation to which the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) referred. They see that as useful in preventing electoral fraud.

My SDLP colleagues believe that we should address the powers of the personnel involved with election-day procedures. They have given the example of one of the few instances in which a police officer can observe a crime being committed but be powerless to take action because he is in a difficult situation. If he proceeded to take action, it would probably lead to a considerable breach of the peace and, perhaps, the closure of the polling station because of a riot ensuing. My hon. Friends would like to see a cordon sanitaire and more powers to prevent crimes such as personation.

Mr. Grieve: What does the hon. Gentleman think about tellers? In Great Britain, parties put tellers into polling stations to note who has voted. Telling is what I might call almost a village fair occupation, with people having pleasant conversations and exchanging information. That is certainly the case in my constituency. If the restrictions that the hon. Gentleman proposes were to be introduced, that would prevent telling from taking place. That might be seen as an infringement of a legitimate right of people to inquire as to who is voting.

Mr. McNamara: As I understand from my visits to polling stations in Northern Ireland, telling agents are inside, rather than outside, the stations. Some presiding officers in the UK insist that the tellers are outside the

polling station and, in my constituency, tellers have not been allowed in when the weather has been inclement. The situation is somewhat different in Northern Ireland.

My SDLP colleagues would like the Bill to contain provisions to examine the training and resources given to the electoral officer to ensure that the reforms, when passed by this House, can be implemented quickly and efficiently. It is one thing to vote for a scheme, and another to provide the money and training to enable it to take place. The sooner that that is done, the sooner many of the Government's wishes can be carried through.

My hon. Friends in the SDLP disagree to a limited extent with some of the comments made by members of the DUP concerning multiple constituency representation and proportional representation. My hon. Friends find it anomalous that, of all the elections in Northern Ireland, it is only the election for the UK Parliament that remains first past the post. They believe that there would be far fairer representation under multiple constituency representation—fairer for all the factions present in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP also believes that if such a system of proportional representation were introduced, much of the impetus that is given to some organisations to resort to illegal practices would be gone because they would get fair representation. That would overcome the problem to which the hon. Member for Belfast, North referred when he said that a fraction of fraudulent votes could swing a seat one way or the other. SDLP Members believe that multiple representation within Westminster elections would work the other way from that outlined by the hon. Member for Belfast, North.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman might argue on behalf of his friends in the SDLP about how many seats the party would win under proportional representation. However, proportional representation is used throughout Northern Ireland for the European elections and it makes no difference whatever. We were told that proportional representation might lead to the election of Sinn Fein or the SDLP, but it was the DUP which topped the polls, with the Ulster Unionists and the representative of the nationalists. If that was the case then, I do not know how the SDLP can say so confidently that things would fall in their favour if proportional representation were used for Westminster elections.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) replies, I should point out that I do not want this to develop into a debate about proportional representation.

Mr. McNamara: Indeed, but the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has made a big error. The SDLP was arguing not that proportional representation would be for its benefit but that it would be for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland. The real problem for the hon. Gentleman is that, much though he represents his party, he does not represent the whole of Northern Ireland. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nor does the SDLP."] Nor does the SDLP; nor does the DUP, the UUP, the PUP or any other acronym one can come up with.

The purpose of the Bill—to get rid of electoral fraud—should unite all parties in this House. The Bill is important and I hope that the Government take on board proposals from all parts of the House that show a unanimity of view that they can go further. Even if the Government feel that they cannot move as many would wish, they could at least include within the Bill a provision to introduce changes without the need to come back to this House in future with primary legislation.

7.56 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) reminded me of a situation years ago, when I was performing a wedding. The bridegroom had a difficulty with his speech and asked me to reply on behalf of the bride, so I was speaking on behalf of the bride, just as the hon. Gentleman was speaking on behalf of the SDLP.

The points made by the hon. Gentleman were useful and helpful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am glad that you brought him back to the centre of the debate, which is how to deal with electoral fraud. I appreciated the Minister's kind words, but I have a sense of revulsion when I listen to people in this House talking as if there were no electoral fraud in Great Britain and it were normal in Northern Ireland. We are beginning to realise that the people of England, Wales and Scotland are no better than the people of Northern Ireland and that electoral fraud is practised elsewhere, including in Lib-Lab deals in some councils.

I regret that the Bill does not apply to the United Kingdom as a whole because, according to European legislation, the same franchise and standards should be applicable throughout the UK. When the Government argue about the seamless robe of government, it would be worthwhile asking for the Bill to apply throughout the UK.

I wish to refer to disability. I welcome the improvements that have been made in terms of access to polling stations. However, it is not enough for the electoral office and the Government in Northern Ireland to provide access to a school via the outside steps when nothing can be done inside, as it is the responsibility of the Education Department or the Education and Library Board. It is time that schools were so equipped that people with disabilities could have a normal education and then grow up to vote in those schools without any hindrances.

I remember an earlier debate when the Government of the day introduced legislation to try to deal with electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. At the end of that debate, Enoch Powell rose in his place to draw the Speaker's attention to the fact that the Minister handling the debate had voted in both Lobbies, to show how easy it was to have multiple votes. We live in a fascinating world. The tragedy was that that Government did not listen to our arguments on that occasion, which is why we have to re-examine the question.

I plead with the Minister to bear in mind in Committee the points of detail that we have made today. All of us would accept the principle of the Bill, but the details of how we apply that principle are important. In proceedings on the earlier legislation, it was even suggested that a rent book would be an acceptable identity document, until we advised the civil servants and Ministers concerned that there were people in Belfast who would be glad to give their rent book to anybody. Civil servants do a remarkably good job, but sometimes streetwise people are needed to guide Ministers and inject some realism into the proceedings.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

There is a weakness in the system of rolling registration and postal voting. The new chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland, Mr. Stanley, said that he could not guarantee the integrity of the election because he was dependent on the Post Office delivering the forms correctly. Many people in the last election in Northern Ireland did not get a postal vote even though they had applied in good time. In some cases in my area, the form was sent by return from the electoral office, but was postmarked five days later. Votes do not go missing through fraud alone.

I plead with the Government to listen to us. Sometimes Northern Ireland Members have not been listened to because of the attitude that mother or auntie knows best. It was obvious today that hon. Members did not know what they had inflicted on Northern Ireland in relation to voting patterns. I plead with them to listen to the plea made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson): until we get proper smart cards, let pensioner IDs be acceptable. It would not be difficult in this new legislation to add them to the list of acceptable documents.

The law says that both parts of a driving licence are needed, but they are not. We should change the law to say that the plastic part is acceptable on its own. The law also says that the driving licence or passport must be current. Some people did not send their driving licence away to be renewed because they wanted it as an ID, but were then told that it was not acceptable as it was not current, even though their faces and even addresses had not changed.

Returning officers do a magnificent job by and large, but they stick strictly to the law. There was an outlandish case in Lagan Valley. A man and wife went to vote. The man had both parts of his driving licence with him, but the lady, like many another, had brought the wrong handbag and discovered that her driving licence was not in it. She was not allowed to vote. The husband said, "But surely a man can recognise his own wife and vouch for her identity." The electoral officer said no, that was not the law. Finally, in exasperation, the woman said, "Sure you know who I am. You had supper in our house last night."

Now it seems that we are in for a gay old time, as human rights legislation will give people a right to sue if they brought identification that they thought was acceptable but were denied the right to vote because of a strict application of the law. That is how barristers make a living—they keep arguing over technicalities. The Government may have some wonderful days ahead. I plead for the removal of some of the strict legalistic interpretation by removing the requirement for passports and driving licences to be current and for the two parts of the licence to be produced.

I happen to believe in the smart card. I believe that it would be better to have a multipurpose smart card. It could be a proper medical card, carrying information about medical problems requiring particular care. The cards would certainly be useful as ID in elections—Northern Ireland is the most elected place going, and people are dizzy with going backwards and forwards to vote—but we are all human, and is there anyone here today who has not put something in a safe place and then forgotten where they left it? If we tie ourselves down to the one smart card for voting, we may face genuine difficulties with people who cannot remember where they left it.

We need to consider the matter not with the view of the civil libertarians who are against anything that might infringe their liberties, no matter who might become a victim whose vote might be stolen, or whether a presiding officer is browbeaten. We are here to provide good legislation for the conduct of our elections in Northern Ireland, and I plead with the Minister to be a little more flexible on the detail, to get the best results for us all.

8.10 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): This has been a fascinating and highly educational debate. I shall listen to the Minister with great interest when he responds on matters such as the extent of the franchise in Northern Ireland for local government elections. It may be that he and I will have learned something this evening of which we were not previously aware.

In my earlier intervention, I pointed out that in local government elections in Great Britain, it is possible to vote in two places on the same day. The Minister seemed to assume that that was also possible in Northern Ireland, so this evening's opportunity to look into such matters has been very educational.

I also join other hon. Members in welcoming the Minister to his Front-Bench post, and to this debate. I know from experience his long-standing interest in Northern Ireland and its problems, so it is a special pleasure to see him holding office as a Northern Ireland Minister.

The debate has been conducted on the important premise that electoral fraud must be eliminated. Some of the manifestations of fraud are humorous and have been the subject for comedy for many years, but fraud is a serious matter. We have heard much about paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland obtaining power by means of the Armalite and the ballot box at the same time. The problem is even worse when we realise that the system being employed is that of the Armalite and the stuffed ballot box.

Like the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), I believe that there is ample evidence that the degree of personation and fraud in elections on the mainland of Great Britain is a growing problem. I suspect that the House will have to tackle that problem in the near future, and I shall be interested to discover what the Electoral Commission has to say about the distribution of postal votes at the last general election. The enormous rise in their use in certain locations may suggest that many people are legitimately taking advantage of a right that they have been given—but a more sinister interpretation may be appropriate.

It is clear that the House is united in its view that electoral fraud is a serious matter, and that it must be stopped. Our aim must be to ensure as far as possible that one person has one vote, and that people who vote do so legitimately.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) said that he thought that that legitimacy would be in everyone's interest. I wish that that were true, but my impression of the development of politics in Northern

Ireland over the past 20 years is that certain parties there do not seem to agree. They appear to have reaped the advantages of participation in the democratic process despite clear evidence that they have abused the system. Moreover, they do not seem to have experienced many downsides as a result.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, and as recently as in the 2001 general election, the parties to which he refers may have derived genuine advantage from playing the system. However, I am sure that mainland voters would not take kindly to the discovery that a major party on the mainland had broken the democratic franchise. Further normalisation in Northern Ireland could mean that those who cheat the system there would suffer the same fate.

Mr. Grieve: I certainly hope so. If the Bill leads to the revelation that more personation is taking place—

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman mean less personation?

Mr. Grieve: No. I mean that the Bill may lead to more personation being detected, and as a result public opinion may come to oppose the practice. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree with the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), who said that there was something strange about the fact that different constituencies in Northern Ireland register absent voters in different ways. For example, one wonders where the many absent voters who are registered in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and in West Tyrone come from.

I turn now to some specific points arising from the debate. I do not want to take up too much of the House's time, so I hope that I shall be forgiven if I do not comment on all the speeches that have been made.

The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) proposed the use of national insurance numbers to prevent fraud. That possibility is not provided for in the Bill, but I shall risk repeating myself by pointing out that the usefulness of national insurance numbers for that purpose would be very limited. The Minister mentioned the matter in passing in his opening speech, and I should be interested to hear more.

I do not want my remarks to become too anecdotal, but from my experience of prosecuting people for benefit fraud it became apparent to me that national insurance numbers were two a penny. They are readily obtainable by a variety of means, and anyone who lays hands on a benefit book containing a national insurance number can start exploiting that number. I prosecuted one case in which paramilitary groups were funding themselves through the United Kingdom taxpayer. They had obtained large quantities of new benefit books, and those books carried national insurance numbers. I therefore have serious doubts about the possibility of using national insurance numbers to curtail electoral fraud.

Moreover, as the Minister noted, people could get muddled by a system that depended on national insurance numbers. Most people do not know their number and would be unable to state it to an electoral officer if they did not have it written down.

Another proposal was that signatures could be used as proof of identity. I did not attend the meetings of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, so there may be something about that proposal that I have missed. After all, banks require us to sign cheques, and bank staff make a visual comparison between the signature on the cheque and the specimen signature on the bank card. However, on many occasions it has been doubted that my signature on a cheque is the same as the signature on my card.

The signature is a very old fashioned means of identification, and I wonder how accurate it can be. That is not to say that the Bill is wrong in requiring signatures. I have no difficulty with that, but the hon. Member for Belfast, South suggested that signatures could be used more widely, and I am not sure that that would be as useful as he believes.

The Minister may say that the digital methods that have been floated before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee are now so accurate that a signature's particular characteristics can be detected. None the less, even if similarities can be determined between the very clear example that I might put on a bank card and the scrawl that appears when I sign a document at a funny angle, I am not sure that signatures would be very effective in the role that has been proposed.

That brings us to the nub of the debate, and to the key matters that must be grappled with. One of the key aspects of the Bill is whether we are moving towards smart cards for voting. Clearly, the provision in the Bill for such cards should be an exceptionally powerful deterrent against fraud.

One subject that we have to debate, and frequently do, is reconciling the liberty of the individual, and the tradition of turning our backs on any form of identification card, with the growing pressure for the use of such cards in a wide variety of situations. I do not want to become involved in too wide a discussion this evening, but voting is undoubtedly a right. As the hon. Member for North Down said, it is a right enshrined under the Human Rights Act 1998. At the same time, it is also a privilege. I would not expect to be allowed to vote if there were some doubt as to my identity.

In those circumstances, we are probably moving inexorably, not only in Northern Ireland but in mainland United Kingdom, towards some sort of smart card identification—I hope that it will not be an identity card, with all the connotations that that has—for situations in which one's identity has to be properly established, and voting is one of those.

I hope that the Minister will not take it amiss when I say that I worry a little about the two-tier nature of the system that seems to be creeping in under this legislation. I appreciate the conservatism of the Government on this matter and have no dispute about the principles that underlie it. In an effort to provide a number of ways in which people can identify themselves when they go to the polling station, the Minister is leaving open the possibility that some people will identify themselves with those cards and others will use other methods of identification. It has been pointed out that those at the more deprived end of society may be forced to have the smart cards, as they do not use the other forms of identification. That worries me because such people may feel that a burden and a responsibility are being placed on them, and they will have the legitimate complaint that others are using forms of identification that may be much less accurate. I hope that the Minister will keep that aspect of the matter under review.

[Mr. Grieve]

Furthermore, if we are moving progressively towards more accurate forms of identification, and as there is widespread agreement in the House on the direction in which we should be going, it is surprising—the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) picked this up—that we are not providing in the Bill for the removal by statutory instrument of certain forms of identification, when they have passed their sell-by date and the new systems have come into operation.

As the Minister will know, I do not usually favour legislation by statutory instrument. Indeed, I have on occasion—probably, indeed, on occasions too numerous to mention—spoken out against it. None the less, this is one area in which we ought to be capable of using the provisions of statutory instruments creatively, without resorting to subsequent complex debates in the Chamber, which take up time. It is precisely because they take time that such matters do not come before the House. To be kind to the Government, I am prepared to accept that one reason why we have waited so long for this Bill is that, notwithstanding the report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, there has not been Government time for it.

The one area that will merit careful consideration in Committee is whether we can streamline and move towards a simplified smart card system. I appreciate that that will not be done overnight, but if Northern Ireland voting is carried out entirely by smart card at the end of the process, our civil liberties will not have been infringed. They certainly will not have been half as infringed as they are by the present system, under which people may legitimately doubt whether the outcome of a particular election in a particular constituency really reflects the principle of one person, one vote.

I do not wish to take any more time. As the Minister knows, the Opposition welcome the measure and will not seek to divide the House. We appreciate what the Government are doing, and they have our support. I hope that the Minister will take on board the matters that we have raised, and also that in his reply he will be able to touch on the anxieties raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House so as to ensure, in due course, that fraud is prevented and Northern Ireland has a much better system.

8.25 pm

Mr. Browne: With the leave of the House, I will reply to this Second Reading debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss electoral fraud in Northern Ireland and for the many well informed contributions. Some of them were better informed than I was, but I will return to that.

In the words of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), I am also grateful to those hon. Members who shared their street wisdom with me. I assure them that it will inform debates in Committee. In any event, I do not think that I am known as someone who is far removed from street wisdom.

The problems of electoral abuse in Northern Ireland have repeatedly exercised Governments. The matter has been raised by the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland and his staff, by party officials across the community and by the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs and other committees. Together with those bodies, the Government have examined the problem and the possible solutions with great thoroughness. The Bill makes clear our commitment to finding proposals that will really work, while not imposing unreasonable burdens on the electorate, the chief electoral officer and his staff or the political parties.

I take this opportunity to express the Government's appreciation of the work done by the chief electoral officer and his staff and their dedication in ensuring that elections in Northern Ireland are carried out properly in what we all acknowledge are sometimes difficult circumstances.

The measures must strike a balance between limiting the opportunity for abuse and putting obstacles in the path of genuine voters. I will endeavour to answer as many questions as I can in the time given and I undertake to write to any hon. Members whose questions I do not answer.

I welcome the support for the measure from both sides of the House, even though it is qualified in some instances. I am grateful to the official Opposition, especially the hon. Members for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), for their support. The hon. Member for Solihull and other hon. Members raised an issue that I endeavoured to address in my opening speech: the timing of the legislation and the reason that it has taken so long for it to appear. I do not propose to repeat myself, but I point out in defence of the Government that the time taken to consider and agree workable proposals was not entirely wasted and that other things were done.

I remind the House that the following new measures are already in place. We now have rolling registration. The chief electoral officer has a statutory right to inspect the records kept by a number of public authorities, some of which I identified. Absent vote applications are being dealt with locally, which has improved their processing. The electoral office has been provided with more funding for additional staff and with new IT systems to facilitate changes. I shall return to that point.

It has always been our intention that the provisions of the Bill would be in place for the Assembly elections scheduled for May 2003. The hon. Members for North Down (Lady Hermon), for Solihull and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) asked about multiple registration. For some Members, the discussion of that point may have been the most interesting part of the debate. It appears to have generated a request from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield that I enlighten the House as to precisely what the franchise is.

If this is the worst mistake that I make as a Minister, it will not be the worst ever made by one, but I do not think that the hon. Member for Belfast, East is correct. Unfortunately, the legal advice available to me at the moment is not precise enough for me to be able to check that point and I do not have access to the documentation, so I shall write to him to set out the position. I shall clearly set out what we propose. On that basis, we can hold an informed debate on multiple registration in the Standing Committee.

Mr. John Taylor: I am grateful to the Minister, not least for his great candour, for which he is to be commended. However, even going along with the analysis part of the way, I would bet far more money than I would care to lose that the position in England is that one may

vote only once in a parliamentary election and only once in a European election even if one is multiply registered, and that it is an offence to vote more than once for Westminster or Europe. However, if one is twice registered for local government purposes, with two bona fide residences, one may vote twice in those circumstances. That is my understanding.

Mr. Browne: Given my track record on the subject, I undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman when I have checked whether his contribution is accurate. Several hon. Members commented on my interest in Northern Ireland and on my contribution to Northern Ireland matters when I was a Back Bencher in the previous Parliament. It is true that I have some knowledge of Northern Ireland affairs, but today's debate has taught me what I have already told all my officials: a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. I tell them that they should remember that although I know some things, they should tell me regularly when I do not know.

Rev. Martin Smyth: When the Minister investigates local government voting will he check whether in Northern Ireland one is even entitled to register at two distinct places? My understanding is that as it is not always possible to guarantee that people do not register twice, the offence occurs when people vote twice. In Northern Ireland, it is my understanding that one can register only in one place at one time.

Mr. Browne: I am not in the mood to bow to anybody's wisdom at the moment, so I shall undertake to check all those matters. The hon. Members who raised them will be written to with a clear exposition of the legal situation. That will inform the debate in Committee.

The hon. Member for Solihull and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) referred to the pressure put on electoral officers by the last-minute presentation of large numbers of absent vote applications. Measures have already been taken to improve the system for absent vote applications. They are now processed at local electoral offices instead of by the chief electoral officer as was the case when the Select Committee examined the issue.

Absent vote applications are already checked for authenticity and the electoral office devotes much of its resources into clearing the large number of such applications that arrive at the last minute. To be able to compare the signature on the application with the one on the database should assist in the quick identification of suspect applications, despite the reservations expressed by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield. However, the eventual introduction of automated absent vote processing will also help in making efficient use of resources.

The hon. Members for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and for Solihull, among others, asked why we do not move over to smart-card technology right now. As we said in the White Paper, the ultimate aim is for every voter to be issued with an electoral smart card bearing a unique identifier. I have already told the House that that is an aspiration for the future. I have been accused of setting my ambitions too low in that respect, but the fact is that the technology currently available is still young.

As I said in my opening speech, I am concerned that we should not use the electoral system to develop the technology. Such a comprehensive scheme would need to be wholly secure before it could be introduced in such a sensitive and important matter as electoral administration. The cost of introducing and maintaining such a system would be great. In the light of the American experience in Florida, it is worth noting that technology must not be used for the benefit of the electoral office if it is to the cost of the electorate. Our view is that we would be foolish to rush into a radical new scheme before being confident of the practicalities.

Lembit Öpik: I have been holding back congratulating the Minister on his new post until I found out how he performed. Having seen how he has performed, I have unbridled admiration for his honest and humble presentation so far. Does he accept that we have two options: a smart card, which could help us to police the voting process; or a dumb card, which could easily be replicated? Does he accept that in the specific case of Northern Ireland, although the cost per head may be high, the absolute cost will be low because we are not dealing with very many people? Does he also accept that the overwhelming view on both sides of the House and among all parties is that we should trust what the financial industry has already tested for us: the smart-card technology, which must surely be effective if the financial industry trusts it?

Mr. Browne: As usual, I am grateful for all compliments or observations to my credit, but hon. Members will no doubt move well away from making them after this maiden appearance at the Dispatch Box. Perhaps I should make this speech last as long as possible and enjoy it while I can.

I repeat that the contribution of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire has been helpful, as have all the contributions; they will inform the Bill's progress. Cost is not the reason why we do not propose to adopt the smart-card technology now. In the meantime, we do not propose to introduce a dumb card; we shall use the best card available to us. We are not introducing the smart card now because we are not satisfied that the biometric technology that underpins it is as yet mature enough to be used at elections.

Mr. Barnes: The House should accept the Minister's arguments for not introducing the smart card, which everyone wants in the end, but if the electoral identity card is the best available, why cannot it be universal, as it would then feed into the smart-card provisions later? If everyone had an electoral identity card, we would move down the road towards the smart card.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking us forward; I had intended to address what has been described as the introduction of a two-tier system, involving photographic identity cards for elections and driving licences and passports otherwise. I repeat that a smart card for everyone remains an ultimate goal, but the technological difficulties have to be resolved first.

I believe that no stigma is attached to receiving an electoral ID card. Indeed, for many people, it would be far better than having to show their benefit books as a method of identification. The ID card will be freely and widely available to those who require it. It represents the quickest way to create a situation in which we can remove the medical card and the other non-photographic ID cards

[Mr. Browne]

from use. Although I constantly caution that we must move steadily and that we must take the parties and the electorate with us, we have to take action as quickly as is reasonable. If introducing the ID card, as a stepping stone towards the smart card, allows us to act more quickly, that is what we should do, and it is what we will do. That is why we shall take advantage of the fact that other people can use forms of identification, such as the driving licence with a photograph and passports, that cannot easily be forged.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East suggested using the travelcards that, I understand, will shortly be issued to all people in Northern Ireland over the age of 65. [HON. MEMBERS: "Over 60."] I may be wrong; it may be 60. In any event, we will not accept a travel pass because such a document is not designed to high enough a security specification for it to be a reliable identifier for electoral purposes. However, he made the sensible suggestion that we should take advantage of the fact that the cards are being issued to piggy-back on them to encourage people to apply for electoral identity cards. Although following that sensible suggestion will require discussion with the devolved authorities, I will explore it further and examine whether it can be pursued.

Several hon. Members sensibly raised the issue of the two parts of the driving licence. In my evolving response to interventions on my opening speech, I suggested that we would consider the possibility of treating that part of the driving licence with a photograph as sufficient for identification purposes. There may be downsides to consider and work through. For example, driving licences can be stolen. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the part with the photograph will not be used by anyone who does not look like the person on the photograph. Therefore, that problem may not be as big as was first thought. I undertake to consider the issue.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I welcome the Minister's willingness to reconsider the issue of driving licences.

On the senior citizens bus pass, the Minister cannot argue that the design does not suit. The only design that he can be aware of is the design of the present concessionary pass, and that is to be changed for a free fares bus pass. The design work has not been done yet, so the pass could incorporate whatever mechanisms he requires for it to be used for electoral identification purposes.

Mr. Browne: I shall consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. However, it is not a question of the design or content of the card, but one of its security specifications and whether it can be produced fraudulently. That is one of the main concerns with the current documents used for identification purposes.

Mr. McNamara: Will my hon. Friend the Minister respond to the point made from both sides of the House that the Bill does not contain provision for getting rid of non-photographic identification documents? To achieve change in that regard, we shall require further primary legislation. If we could deal with that problem by regulation, we could get rid of it when it is opportune to do so.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I was intending to come to it and, if he bears with me, I shall work through some of the issues that have been raised and attempt to conclude the debate within a reasonable time.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire welcomed the research that is taking place into the electoral system in Northern Ireland and he asked for details on it. The preliminary results will be available by August and the final report is due in September, which is quite soon. The research has been commissioned to investigate all aspects of operations at recent elections and includes possible electoral malpractice. It is designed to investigate every stage of the electoral process and will involve the general public, presiding officers and counting staff. Anecdotal evidence suggests that electoral abuse is widespread in Northern Ireland. We hope that the research will better inform us of the extent of abuse and the form that it takes so that we can tackle the problem.

My hon. Friend also referred to signatures. We could ask for voters' signatures at the polling station, but we must implement only essential measures that do not create unnecessary barriers. We believe that the collection of a person's date of birth and signature on registration and the use of the date of birth and photographic identification at the polling station are sufficient. We have no intention of putting more barriers in front of voters than are necessary to tackle the problem.

The support of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire is also welcome. I am acutely aware of the balance that is necessary when we legislate to place restrictions on the electoral process. His speech was a model of how to walk that tightrope; he argued for immediate implementation of a smart card and then exposed the dangers of the creeping introduction of identification cards.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we will redesign the form for absent vote applications. We shall discuss how best to improve it with the chief electoral officer, including the use of bar coding and serial numbers on forms, which we believe are valuable. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the need to improve the register's accuracy and suggested that that should be a priority. The Northern Ireland register is 94 per cent. accurate, which is high, as he acknowledged. Rolling registration, the chief electoral officer's powers to examine other databases and improved information technology in the electoral office will enhance that further.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire and my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) asked why we do not legislate to remove the medical card and other non-photographic forms of identification from the list of specified documents. It is clear that we will need to give people a reasonable amount time to obtain a specified form of photographic identification, such as electoral ID, and to get used to using it. We cannot disfranchise voters in our haste to legislate.

We have always intended to get the measures in place in time for the scheduled Assembly elections in 2003 and we propose to remove the non-photographic ID from the list of specified documents by subordinate legislation when we are able to.

Lembit Öpik: Will the Minister at least commit the Government to listening sincerely to our concerns when we raise them in Committee where it will be more appropriate to cover them in detail?

Mr. Browne: That is implicit in my remarks. Today's debate will inform discussions in Committee where we will be able to consider the issues raised.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Down for reminding me of the human rights implications of electoral law. I expected her to do that and was not disappointed. She raised serious concerns that will engage us in Committee. I am sure that she will forgive me for not responding to them now, but they will be addressed.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East made a characteristically analytical speech. He was correct to remind me of my contribution to the Select Committee's work. He and other hon. Members mentioned the important issue of disabled access to polling stations. I am acutely aware of the need for such access, and I am proud of my constituency, which has complete access for disabled persons to all polling stations. I am sure that I am not alone in that. I take very seriously the issue of access for all to polling places.

I know that the chief electoral officer is looking carefully at locations and endeavouring to ensure that there is access for all. Hon. Members mentioned some of the constraints, such as the age of buildings. Many old school buildings, in particular, are inaccessible. I know that the chief electoral officer takes very seriously his obligations to ensure equality of access, and I hope, during my term as Minister, to make significant progress on that.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East emphasised the need for computer systems. The replacement of the IT system at the electoral office is already under way. The new system will come into effect in July 2002 and will have the capacity to cope with changes to the electoral system envisaged by the Bill.

Although we live in a democratic society, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to eradicate electoral fraud, but these proposals will make fundamental changes and give the chief electoral officer significant additional powers to combat fraud. Personation at the polling station will be made much more difficult by the requirement for all voters to provide a specified form of photographic identification. The chief electoral officer will be able to collect the signature and date of birth of every elector in Northern Ireland, and that will facilitate the process of checking absent vote applications and verifying identity at the polling station.

The measures will tackle electoral abuse effectively without disadvantaging honest voters. We intend to implement them as soon as is practicable, but we will take all necessary steps to ensure that no one is disfranchised because of them. The Government alone cannot eradicate electoral fraud. We must continue to work in partnership with the electoral office, the police and political parties to tackle electoral fraud in all its forms. I ask hon. Members who are opposed to electoral fraud, and who want to protect the democratic exercise of the franchise, to take the appropriate action by supporting the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

ELECTORAL FRAUD (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3.—(1) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 18th October 2001.

(2) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(2) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—[*Mr. Stringer.*]

The House divided: Ayes 281, Noes 90.

Division No. 17] **[8.52 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair

Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mclsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oliner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Barker, Greg
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brooke, Annette
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roaindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew

NOES

Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Waldinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

ELECTORAL FRAUD (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Special Educational Needs

9.6 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move,

That the draft Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

The draft code of practice is designed to replace the current code of practice on the identification and assessment of educational needs, which was introduced in September 1994. The code of practice puts flesh on the provisions of part IV of the Education Act 1996, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. The intention to revise the code was signalled in the Green Paper "Excellence for all Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs", which was published in 1997. The draft reflects the concerns expressed in the Green Paper and subsequent developments, especially under the new Act.

Regulations made under the 1996 Act and laid before Parliament on 19 June provide the detail of the statutory requirements for assessments, statements and reviews of statements of special educational needs in England. They will replace the 1994 regulations. Separate regulations, which were laid on the same day, set out information that local authorities must provide about their arrangements for special educational needs. Amendment regulations were laid on 10 July to ensure that the six-week time limit within which LEAs must respond to a parental request for an assessment also applies to requests for assessments by schools and other responsible bodies.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I thank the Minister for giving way so early. Given the Government's intention to bring in private sector companies to run many schools and local authorities, would a private sector company be regarded as one of the other responsible bodies?

Mr. Timms: The school will be regarded as the body, with the local education authority. If some partnership involving the private sector were to affect the LEA, the provisions would apply as to an LEA in any other circumstances. I do not think that the involvement that the hon. Gentleman has in mind would change either the code or the regulatory position.

Mr. Willis: What would happen if a private company such as Nord Anglia were to take over the running of a school or group of schools? As a private sector company that is trading on the stock market, would it be regarded as a responsible body?

Mr. Timms: The code of practice would apply to the school and local education authority in precisely the same way. The duties set out in the 1996 Act, the regulations and the code of practice requirements would have to be met in the normal way. I do not think that the situation that the hon. Gentleman envisages would change that. I hope that I have managed to make that point clear.

Section 314 of the Education Act 1996 provides for the Secretary of State to revise the code of practice from time to time, and where she proposes to do so, to consult upon a draft, consider any representations made and modify that draft as she sees fit. The Secretary of State, in those

[Mr. Timms]

circumstances, must bring a revised draft to Parliament for approval under the affirmative procedure, which is what we are doing.

The current code of practice has undoubtedly done much to improve the identification and assessment of special educational needs. Ofsted reports on the implementation of the code of practice have shown that it has helped schools considerably in identifying children with special educational needs and matching appropriate provision to their needs.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): A number of my constituents have taken a close interest in the development of the new code. That interest is borne out of battles that they have had with the local education authority, past and present, over the provision of special needs for their children. When the parents have won, the battles have shown them to be right.

The current code provides that

"a statement should normally be specific, detailed and quantified"—

I stress "quantified"—

"in terms, for example, of hours of ancillary or specialist teaching support."

During the development of the new code, Ministers at various times have said that provision should be quantified as appropriate, or have said that the new code will advise LEAs that there may often be a need for statements to say how much help a child should need. Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to clarify that in the new code LEAs should normally be expected to quantify special educational provision in statements of special need?

Mr. Timms: Many people have been following the debate closely and I know that they have been in touch with their Members about it. I know also that my hon. Friend has taken a close interest in the matter.

The phrase that appears in the draft code is "quantified as necessary". I shall set out the thinking behind that, and my hon. Friend may want to come back to me on the important point that he has raised.

The network of special educational needs regional partnerships, which my Department is supporting, adds an important new dimension to the SEN framework by encouraging collaborative working and sharing of good practice among schools, parents, local education and health services and voluntary agencies.

The draft code of practice is about removing barriers to participation and learning and raising the attainment of all children. Providing effective support for children with special educational needs is an essential feature of an effective school. In some instances, children with special educational needs may not be seen as a great catch by some schools. We need to maintain our focus on high expectations and high standards. At the same time, we must find ways of celebrating the impressive achievements of schools which succeed with pupils who have special educational needs, of which there are many. The work that we are doing on value-added performance tables can play an important role.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Before the Minister departs too far from his answer to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), I shall ask him about quantifying where necessary. It is vital to understand that for parents who have real concerns, a statement is no good unless accompanying it is a properly signed up and agreed quantity of special care or special education that will go with it as support. If the Minister is to leave the provision as vague as quantifying where necessary, the code will be seen as not being worth the paper on which it is written. The issue needs to be probed and clearer answers should be given.

Mr. Timms: I intend to devote some time to the issue in recognition of its importance and the fact that many people have raised concerns about it. In a few minutes, I shall give the matter ample attention.

I want to set out some of the background to our thinking on the new draft code of practice. It places greater emphasis—this has been widely welcomed—on early identification of children's special educational needs, including a new chapter on the early years. We are supporting that greater emphasis through the £25 million that we are making available over the next three years to help LEAs and their early years development and child care partnerships to improve local provision for young children with SEN, and through the multi-agency working party that we are setting up to consider the needs of children under two with SEN and disabilities and the needs of their families. That will help us to produce guidance for health and education practitioners on early identification and help for those children.

Early identification is not just relevant to the early years. Children can have special educational needs at different stages of their school career. We have therefore developed the guidance in the draft code of practice on school-based intervention to focus less on procedures and more on improving teaching and learning. We have given proper recognition to the role that class and subject teachers play in identifying children's SEN and in tailoring their approaches to address those needs. We have reduced the number of school-based elements from three to two and cut the paperwork on individual education plans to free up time for teachers to concentrate on helping children to learn.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is still the enormous problem of schools, parents and medical practitioners not recognising conditions such as dyslexia? The children often develop all kinds of behavioural and other problems because it is not recognised. It becomes expensive for everyone later. There is little incentive for a school seriously to assist with identifying dyslexia. Often, it is expensive for the school. That worsens the problem, rather than mitigating against it.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is in response to concerns of that sort that there is the new focus on early identification in the new draft code. We hope that that will help to deal with precisely that sort of difficulty.

The role of education and other professionals is central to the SEN framework, but the child has a unique and important perspective to offer on his or her own needs, so the draft code places the voice of the child at the heart of the provision. There is a new chapter on pupil

participation, which carries an expectation that schools and LEAs will seek and take account of the views and wishes of children with SEN throughout their school lives.

Partnership with parents is given fresh impetus with the guidance in the draft code on the new duties on LEAs under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 to provide parent partnership services and a means of resolving disagreements between parents, the LEA and schools. The draft code makes it clear that those services in no way affect the rights of parents to appeal to the SEN tribunal.

The key principles of the new statutory framework for inclusion introduced by the 2001 Act are also set out in the draft code of practice. Inclusion can improve the education experience of all children—those with special educational needs and disabilities and their peers. It helps children to recognise that they are good at different things.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Minister is talking about inclusion, but does he recognise that many parents who have children with special educational needs feel that a mainstream school is not the right environment for their children? Many in my constituency have talked to me about the particular problems that their children face. They feel that their education is being held back by their presence in mainstream schools. Indeed, I have been the governor of a first school where an entire class suffered because of the problems faced by one child, who should not have been in a mainstream school. Does he therefore recognise that, although in some senses—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a new Member and I try to do my best, but his intervention is far too long. I shall allow the Minister to reply to the point that he has raised.

Mr. Timms: The key thing is that the needs of the child be met in the best way for that child. That is the principle that underpins the measure. That is what we are taking forward with the new draft code of practice.

When we consulted on changes to the current code of practice, teachers and local education authorities said that it was too bureaucratic and did not focus enough on teaching and learning. We have addressed those concerns in the draft code. We consulted extensively. We sent out more than 30,000 copies of the consultation draft of the revised code between July and October 2000, and received more than 1,000 responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals. Officials took part in many conferences and meetings to listen to people's views. Most favoured the main changes that we proposed. They liked the focus on identifying special educational needs early, and the focus on stronger school-based provision to meet those needs. They liked the reductions in paperwork for teachers, and the emphasis on involving children with SEN in decisions about their education.

A number of other issues were raised during consultation. We listened to people's views very carefully, and have made changes to the draft in response. In chapter 1 we have brought together the strategic planning functions of school governing bodies and LEAs in regard to SEN, to make it easier for parents and others to know who is responsible for doing what.

We have referred to the requirement for LEAs, through the Special Educational Needs (Provision of Information by Local Education Authorities) Regulations 2001, to publish a range of information on their policies for special educational needs, any development plans, and their arrangements for monitoring services for SEN and keeping them under review. That will include details of what LEAs would expect schools to provide for children with SEN during the "school action" and "school action plus" phases—school-based SEN provision in the draft code—and what LEAs themselves would expect to provide by way of support. LEAs will need to work closely in partnership with their schools to draw up the information, which will mean better information for parents on how support is provided locally.

We have provided fuller guidance for LEAs on the services that they are expected to provide for parents through parent partnerships, and on resolving disagreements with schools and parents. We have strengthened the guidance on seeking and taking account of the views of children. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the draft code give stronger support to the role of the SEN co-ordinator in helping school governing bodies and head teachers to raise standards of achievement for children with SEN, and recognise their need for support in schools.

The guidance on assessments in chapter 7 has been strengthened by clarification of the terms on which LEAs should seek advice, and making it clear that they should seek the views of the child. We have enhanced the guidance on specifying provision for individual pupils in their statements, and highlighted the accountability that schools and LEAs share for children with statements when funds are delegated. That is in chapter 8. We have been able to address issues raised during the consultation, and have improved the existing code of practice in the process.

Many people expressed particular concerns about the section on specifying special educational provision in children's statements in the consultation draft. They feared that it could be read as weakening the position of children with statements. It has been suggested that the draft code is unlawful in what it says about specifying provision in statements. I do not believe that it is. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), formerly Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), formerly Under-Secretary of State, described the changes that we planned to make to the consultation draft. Let me explain how we want them to work.

The draft code makes it clear that a statement should describe all a child's special educational needs clearly and in full, set out the main objectives that the special educational provision aims to meet, specify clearly and in detail the provision required to meet each of the child's needs, and describe arrangements for setting shorter-term objectives for the child and any special arrangements for the annual review of the statement.

The code stresses the importance of the school monitoring and evaluating the child's progress during the year, and places a new emphasis on the importance of the child's progress towards identified outcomes being monitored by the LEA with the school.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) said a few moments ago, the current code of practice advises that provision in a child's statement should

"normally be specific, detailed and quantified".

[Mr. Timms]

The draft code that we are considering today advises that appropriate provision for each identified need should always be specified in terms that are clear, specific and detailed. It advises that provision should be quantified as necessary, and explains that that means according to the needs and circumstances of each individual child and that, in detailing appropriate provision, local education authorities may often need to quantify it.

The draft code is consistent with the law and does not deny help to children who need it. Provision in children's statements must relate to their individual needs and the context in which they may be taught, as that will be part of the provision. We want statements to be clear about what is to be provided, how it is to be provided and for what purpose. That is why we have emphasised in the draft code that statements should set out the arrangements for monitoring the child's progress towards identified outcomes, to check the effectiveness of the provision over time.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Do Ministers intend to issue to schools further detailed guidance, with examples if necessary, on quantifying the support that has been identified as necessary to meet the child's specified needs?

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who I know follows these matters very closely. I confirm that our intention is to issue guidance dealing with those matters.

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): Will the guidance notes include references to mechanical aids and other teaching aids that may be considered necessary but might be expensive? Computer programmes, for example, can be extremely helpful to children suffering from dyslexia.

Mr. Timms: I am sure that it will contain references to those matters. However, my hon. Friend will have to wait to see the actual document to see how that will happen. I shall make a couple of points on that in just a moment.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I need to make a little more headway, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me, but I will then gladly give way to him. This is a very important subject about which many questions have been asked and I should like to explain the Government's thinking on it.

The Government believe, and I think that hon. Members will agree, that the quality of provision and its effectiveness are of prime importance. When a child's special educational needs and circumstances are such that provision must be quantified to meet those needs, we expect that to happen. That is the basis of the guidance in the draft code of practice. It may help if I give some examples to illustrate our thinking.

A child in a mainstream school with severe language difficulties might, for example, require a daily or weekly period of time to be provided by school staff to deliver an individual language programme. I would anticipate that, in most such circumstances, the amount of time would be quantified.

Let us, however, take another possible example, involving a visually impaired child in a mainstream school. That child or his school may require advice or help from a specialist teacher of the visually impaired, which is specified in the statement, but it may make no sense to specify the number of hours in the statement, or a minimum number may suffice as the time required may fluctuate with the changing needs of the child or his teachers for support.

The child may also need the type of aids described by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best), such as low vision aids or computing equipment. As the child matures or curriculum requirements change, such aids become out of date and the specialist teacher at the school will identify more appropriate ones. It therefore makes sense to be flexible about how they are specified in the statement. The new code seeks to avoid undue rigidity, which was a risk when interpreting the wording of the old code.

Mr. Laws: What effect does the Minister expect the change in wording to have on the provision of special educational assistance in schools? In particular, can he sum up in a sentence the reason he believes that the wording will be in the interests of our constituents as opposed to the old wording, which many feel is more in the interests of children in schools?

Mr. Timms: We are seeking to achieve a focus on quality, rather than just quantity. There are instances where flexibility is needed in the best interests of the child. We do not want to take people automatically down the route of quantification if the best interests of the child can be expressed more effectively in another way. That is why the code refers to quantification where necessary.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I remain deeply concerned about the quantification aspects of the proposal because my local authority is trying to close a school in a cost-cutting exercise, saying that the school is too expensive to run. With respect to preventing and resolving disagreements, we all want to ensure that all children receive the same quality of service, wherever they reside in the UK. How will the Minister ensure that each authority deals with disputes in an equitable manner? Is there any intention to take reports from each authority to ascertain how effective the dispute forums are?

Mr. Timms: I hope that the dispute forums are effective; that is our intention. The provision made in particular schools for particular children with particular kinds of support needs may well differ depending on the circumstances that prevail. We need that flexibility to ensure that the best support is provided. It is important that the dispute mechanism to which my hon. Friend refers is addressed. I want to assure her and the House that we are anxious that this should be done correctly and that the code should allow the most appropriate provision for children in every part of the country.

The draft code is designed to ensure that, as the law requires, local education authorities consider each child's needs on an individual basis and specify the right sort of

help in their statements. That is why, for the first time, we are making it absolutely clear that LEAs must not, in any circumstances, have blanket policies never to quantify provision in statements. That advance has been widely welcomed. It is also why we are supporting the guidance on specifying provision in statements with changes elsewhere in the draft code to the guidance on assessments.

Following helpful interventions during the debates on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 in another place, we have now made it clear that professionals giving advice can comment on the amount of provision that they consider appropriate for a child and that LEAs must not have blanket policies preventing that. Again, that has been welcomed.

Mr. Hancock: The issue of the quantity of care is vital. Would parents have grounds for objecting to a statement if the quality of care was acceptable, but the quantity was not? As the measure is worded, I sense that parents would not have the right to object on those grounds. That might make it easier for an LEA to avoid spending the right amount of money on a child who might have to go to a special school, perhaps even out of his area. Without the quantification criteria being addressed properly, the LEA would find it easy to do that.

Mr. Timms: The form of words in the code is "quantification where necessary". Those who draw up the statement will decide and parents and, indeed, the children themselves will have the opportunity to make a contribution to the process. If parents are unhappy, they can appeal to the SEN tribunal.

The draft code of practice will, I believe, help significantly to improve provision for children with special educational needs. The changes reflect changes in education since the original code was introduced and will allow for better attention to be given to children's needs. I commend the draft code to the House.

9.36 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): It is important to say at the outset that the discussion thus far has been conducted in a constructive and co-operative way. The Bill that became the Special Needs and Disability Act 2001 was dealt with constructively in Committee in both the Lords and the Commons. We all want to do our best by children with special educational needs.

This is not a party political matter. There are differing views across all parties. There are, however, important differences between myself and the Minister and between my party's and the Government's position. The debate in Committee focused essentially on the importance that we placed, both here and in the other place, on the individual, specific needs of the child. We tabled amendments that the Government rejected. We feared that unless those specific needs were written into the Bill they would be lost at a later stage. I have to say, more in sorrow than in anger, that that is what we are seeing tonight.

Ministers assured us time and again that the code of practice would reinforce the individual, specific needs of the child—but it does not. If anything, it weakens the interests of the child by being increasingly imprecise about those needs and failing to specify and quantify what is needed in a way that would be the guarantor of decent provision by local education authorities.

That stands in stark contrast to the assurances given by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment on Second Reading of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill. He said:

> "We shall make it clear that education authorities are required to specify provision in statements, as they always have been. We shall retain the requirement in the regulations for provision to be specified, matching the terms of the duty on education authorities set out in the Education Act 1996. The code will state clearly that statements should
>
> 'describe clearly all the child's special educational needs in full; set out the main objectives that the special educational provision aims to meet; specify clearly and in detail the provision required to meet each of the child's needs; describe the arrangements for setting shorter term objectives for the child; describe any special arrangements for the annual review of the statement . . . '"—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 218.]

In the Lords, we were told by Baroness Blackstone that the code would reinforce the specification and quantification of needs, and Lord Davies of Oldham said:

> "In the revised code of practice, we shall insist that the child's statement should describe clearly all the child's special educational needs in full; set out the main objectives that the special educational provision aims to meet; specify clearly, and quantify as necessary, the provision required".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 January 2001; Vol. 621, c. CWH 92.]

Those assurances were given to quell some of the disquiet felt about these matters by Conservative Members, some Labour Members and many people outside Parliament. Those people were alarmed in the first place by the infamous Green Paper published by the Government in 1997, which was described by one Labour Member as a green light for the closure of special schools. The aim was to weaken and dilute the statement, which has been an important guarantee of the interests of special needs children and their parents.

Thankfully, that Green Paper has been consigned to history, if not the rubbish bin, and we came to believe that its proposals would not be implemented—until we read this new code of practice. I shall set out some of our specific concerns. The Independent Panel for Special Education Advice has stated:

> "Our view is that children's best interests would be served if Parliament refused to approved the new code. By failing to quantify provision as expected, it weakens the position of children with special educational needs."

I shall give some examples of that. The code omits to give guidance to local education authorities on how to fulfil their duties, it omits to tell them how to identify children who have special educational needs, and it omits to mention that they should undertake assessments of children with medical problems that constitute a barrier to them being able to access education provision.

As the Minister rightly said, in the current statement it is required that a child's needs are stated clearly and in detail, and that they should be quantified and specific. However, the new code suggests that the statement should quantify provision "as necessary". Frankly, that is an open invitation to those LEAs that do not take seriously their responsibility for statementing to act in a way that is not in the interests of children or parents.

We should acknowledge that the performance of LEAs in respect of statementing is patchy. As the Minister knows, some authorities are slow to statement children,

[Mr. John Hayes]

and some are resistant to the very principle of statementing. I am not making a party political point, as the problem with the LEAs to which I am referring crosses party boundaries. If the Minister gives those LEAs any opportunity to weaken provision, we must conclude that some will take that opportunity—yet that is precisely what the code does.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I confirm that it can be an enormous struggle to get children statemented. Until recently, my LEA was dominated by Labour. Parents who do not know their rights and who do not contact their Member of Parliament have no hope of securing a statement for a child. Giving LEAs more room to stall and prevaricate will make the problem much worse for some of the most vulnerable children in the system.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. There are two problems: some LEAs are inefficient when it comes to statementing, and some are resistant to issuing statements at all. An analysis of the number of children statemented by LEAs, and of the time that that process takes, shows that the performance of LEAs is enormously variable across the country. There is no consistency in the approach of LEAs to the matter of statementing, which is very much left to local choice and judgment. In some cases, that judgment is not all that it might be. Again, I make no party-political point when I say that, as the LEAs to which I refer are run by all parties.

The Independent Panel for Special Education Advice has tested the matter with lawyers. It has taken legal advice that suggests that the new code will be unlawful. Its barrister has said that the code will be challenged on the grounds that it is reducing the requirement for quantification and provision. That will reduce the protection for children and encourage vague statements, and so achieve exactly what the Department for Education and Skills says it is trying not to achieve.

The Department for Education and Skills has told the public that it does not want to weaken the position of special needs children. Ministers in this and the other place have told us repeatedly that their intention in bringing more children into mainstream education is not to dilute the quality of education that they receive but simply to alter the place where it is provided. The code however, with its lack of specification and quantification, would damage the provision for special needs children.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are already many examples of cases where provision is not specified sufficiently clearly? If the new code exacerbates the situation, pupils with special educational needs will lose out even more.

Mr. Hayes: As has been said, performance is patchy throughout the country. I want to strengthen the position of those who require special education and their carers, not weaken it. That was my position long before I came to the House when I was a member of a local education authority and was heavily involved in such matters. It has been my position outside of my responsibilities on the Conservative Front Bench, as co-chairman of the all-party group on disablement, and it is my position in the role that I am performing now.

I said that I did not think that this matter was party political. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) and agreed with every word he said in his brief intervention. I have also listened carefully to other Labour Members who have intervened from the Back Benches. Their comments clearly reflect the widespread concern about the matter. That causes us some difficulty, as we do not want to frustrate the good intentions behind the code and the legislation. There is much in the code and in the legislation that it attempts to put into practice with which we agree. On the other hand, we would be failing in our duty to the children concerned and their carers if we did not point out that we have these fundamental concerns.

Another example of where the Government have gone wrong is that the original consultation version of the code contained a section that talked of children's best interests being fulfilled by giving LEAs a

"duty to gather information from schools about registered pupils who live in the LEA's area for whom schools are intervening through School Action Plus. LEAs should also be aware of children of statutory school age who are not attending schools, whether they are excluded, educated otherwise at school or educated at home."

In other words, the draft code was particular about the responsibilities of LEAs, whereas those responsibilities have been made woollier, weaker and more vague as a result of the amendments to and the omissions from the original draft. That is surprising in the light of the consultation exercise. The people consulted did not take a collective decision that LEAs should be given less clear instructions, nor did the organisations consulted suggest that. If anything, it was suggested that they should be given clearer instructions—more specificity and more obligations to provide their services equitably.

While I do not want to delay the House tonight, there is profound concern on both sides of the Chamber about the weakness of the code. In good faith and in the spirit in which this matter has been conducted thus far, during the debate on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill and in the Standing Committee that dealt with it, I must warn the Minister that unless he comes up with firm answers to some of the queries raised from those on the Conservative Front Bench and other parts of the House before the matter is debated in the other place, I suspect that my hon. Friends there and many others will want to consider the code critically and may not be able to bring themselves to support it.

9.49 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall be brief as there is only an hour and a half for the debate and many Members want to speak. I hope that the Minister for School Standards will have the chance to reply to the debate and that he will seriously address many of the concerns expressed on both sides of the House.

People in my constituency have expressed concern that the draft code of practice was only published on 22 June, and we are already debating it. I suspect that if our debate had been delayed, more Members would have wanted to contribute. Indeed, more organisations might also have expressed concern.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) referred to local education authorities, whose role is extremely important. The Minister might reflect on the trends in education policy that have often served to

reduce and undermine the role of LEAs in favour of direct funding to schools. LEAs are crucial. They are the only line to ensure that children with special needs—with disabilities and all that goes with them—receive what they require. If that is left to individual schools, without an LEA to enforce national policy, it will not happen.

In an earlier intervention I mentioned dyslexia, a condition experienced by many people. During the previous Parliament, I tabled several questions about what happens to people whose dyslexia is not identified and who do not receive the obvious special help that is necessary. A disproportionately large number of such people do not achieve in education. They may end up in prison or have many problems, simply because a basic need was not identified at an early stage when help could have been given. People with dyslexia can achieve just as much as anyone else and, in many cases, much more. It is a question of identification.

If there is a financial system that militates against the school identifying the problem because it costs the school money and there is an endless rigmarole of delay before the LEA responds to a request from the school, we are clearly failing to give children what they need. Will the Minister reflect on that point in his reply?

There are many parents in my constituency for whom English is not their first language. Indeed, many of them barely understand any English at all. Their children often have special needs. The children of refugees are often extremely traumatised and suffer from stress. If there are no translation facilities so that those parents can understand what is going on, many of the children lose out. I realise that this point is not necessarily part of this debate, but I hope that the Minister will be aware that because of the effects of housing policies, some asylum-seeking children have to move house, hostel or bed-and-breakfast accommodation so often and change schools so often that they drop out of the education system altogether. They have no opportunity for full-time education.

Will the Minister address the transitional arrangements for school students with special needs of any sort after the age of 14? The draft code does not seem to include a specific requirement for either local education authorities or individual schools to follow up such pupils, who might end up by dropping out of the system altogether. Will the Minister deal with that point?

Will the Minister also comment on fixed time limits for requests for statementing? Unless such limits are laid down for local education authorities to reply both to parents and schools on statementing needs, the lack of resources or the unwillingness of LEAs to identify such needs means that they will not be met. I hope that specific timetables will be included in any changes to the code.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings noted that LEAs would be allowed to quantify as necessary. We cannot allow such latitude. If we do so, the resources will not be made available and as a result children with definite special needs will lose out. Everyone is aware that the standards of treatment of special educational needs differ greatly between local authorities.

I understand what people are trying to do with the code of practice; they are trying to introduce some uniformity across the country. Obviously, I welcome that approach, but I have been advised by many of those involved, and I am afraid that the draft code of practice contains too many loopholes. I hope that the Minister will address those points in his reply and that he will promise us that there will be an opportunity for a greater tightening up of such matters than has been demonstrated hitherto.

9.55 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): This is an important issue, and I regret that we are spending an hour and a half on it late at night, given that many hon. Members would have liked a full debate. That is important.

I have been involved with this issue since the enactment of the Education Act 1981. It is interesting that 250,000 pupils in England and Wales now have statements. That is a huge number of young people. It is also interesting that local authorities and schools spend £1.3 billion on supporting special needs, so this is a big issue and it is rather sad to rush the code of practice through when there are so many uncertainties. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that, as well as on the debate, before the code of practice goes to the House of Lords on Thursday.

There are obvious concerns, and hon. Members have commented on the closure of special schools. The reality is that, in the past 20 years, special schools have not closed in the numbers that people think. There are still roughly 100,000 youngsters in special schools—the same figure as 100 years ago. The great success of the education system since 1981 is that many more youngsters who would have gone into special schools have, in fact, been educated with their peers. That is important.

The hon. Members for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) raised an important issue, which the Government have tried to address in the code of practice. A great fault is that, since 1981, if a school has recognised that a statement is needed but a parent has not agreed, for whatever reason, it has been impossible for the school to go ahead with the provision, so the child has missed out. I have worked in communities with children from 26 nationalities, and it has sometimes been very difficult to persuade parents that their children have had special needs because they have thought it a stigma to be avoided. The perverse fact is that middle class parents are now knocking on school doors saying that their sons and daughters need statements because they recognise that the system involves additional resources.

We welcome a great deal of what the code of practice involves. We particularly welcome the involvement of parents and students. We also welcome the increased amount of information that will be available. In particular, as my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) has said, there is an opportunity to resolve conflicts under the regulations, to which the Minister did not refer, but which is very important. Conflicts need to be resolved before they go before the tribunal. I am also pleased that the role of SEN co-ordinators is recognised in the code. Far too often, SENCOs have to do their job, with all the bureaucracy that that involves, in no time at all. Many of them also have full teaching timetables. I hope that the Minister will go further than simply providing advice about time by ensuring that time is actually allocated.

Mr. Hayes: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about the need to involve parents in conflict resolution at

[Mr. Hayes]

an early stage. He will know that the new terms refer to the need to express the provision in terms of hours, equipment or personnel, but does he agree that the failure clearly to quantify the required provision will lead to greater conflict with parents, who can, at present, usually expect statements to be absolutely clear about the explicit terms of the provision?

Mr. Willis: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, and agree with him wholeheartedly. That is one of the reasons why we might vote against the code. We are uneasy about it and particularly about those provisions. I shall come to them shortly.

Several provisions in the code must be strengthened. Although we welcome chapter 10 on "Working in partnership with other agencies", the language in it is so loose that it beggars belief. For example, paragraph 10.16 contains the ideas that Connexions should be involved with young people particularly from key stage 4 onwards, and no one would disagree with that. However, schools and local authorities have no control over Connexions and, in this paragraph, the Government optimistically say that the Learning and Skills Council and local education authorities should work together. Frankly, the council, which the Government set up, and the LEAs are at odds with each other and, unless the code clarifies how the council and LEAs will work together to provide for youngsters aged between 14 and 19, those youngsters will fall through the bottom again as they have done for so long.

I come to a point made by the hon. Member for Islington, North. One of the key issues in getting the provision right is for LEAs to have some control over admission rights. The comments of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings, who speaks for the Conservative party, were a bit rich because his party went into the last election saying that it wanted 24,000 separate admission arrangements. Each school would have been able to deny access to children with special needs if it so wished. It is sad that Conservative Members have not admitted that that was a huge mistake although I accept that the hon. Gentleman has distanced himself from that policy by supporting an appropriate candidate.

Controlling admission levels is important. It appears that the White Paper will allow private companies to take over schools, private schools to take over state schools and companies for profit to take over schools, so how will we be able to control admission arrangements then? How will be able to ensure that the code of practice is binding on all those organisations? The Minister did not respond to that point adequately earlier, but I hope that he will clarify the position. At the moment, everything is up in the air. If we are saying that only bog standard schools will have to admit children with special needs, we are going back 20 years and before these arguments were even raised.

Liberal Democrats welcome the enhanced roles for LEAs. We are delighted that the code of practice clearly states their responsibilities. We are also delighted that the Minister has made it clear in the code that individual education plans should be crisp. In the school that I came from 400 youngsters were on the special needs register. If every one of them had had an individual education plan for 10 subjects that would have meant that 4,000 pieces of paper were circulating round the school all the time. The Minister must consider the whole issue of individual education plans.

Paragraphs 8.36 and 8.37 are the key to the code of practice. It is totally unacceptable to produce a new code saying that we do not need to quantify what is in the statements. The key issue in the past 20 years has been that successive Governments have said, "This is what your child needs as a special needs statement, but we will not quantify what they will actually receive." A statement may say that a child needs language therapy, but it does not have to make it clear whether it will be given for one week, every week, every month or once a year. The position is never clarified in that sense. The previous Secretary of State, now the Home Secretary, made it clear on Second Reading of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill that quantification would be clarified, and it is a betrayal of the House and of youngsters that that has not happened. There is much about the code of practice that we support. There is also much that we want to support, but the key issue of quantification has not been addressed and for that reason we will vote against the motion.

10.5 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate.

At the beginning of this Parliament, I viewed this occasion as one to be planned without due haste and decided to absorb some of the customs and practices of this place before embarking on my 10-minute voyage. However, such has been the quality of the maiden speeches by my new colleagues, who now have that first notch on their guns, that I decided that the absorption of customs and procedures I have managed to achieve so far would have to be enough. I shall therefore proceed without further delay, lest a bravura performance by another colleague prove impossible to follow.

Before addressing the substance of the debate, I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, Keith Darvill. During the past four years, when he was the first Labour Member of Parliament for Upminster, he worked assiduously on behalf of his constituents and was held in high regard and affection by all sections of the community. The election campaign was fought, as it should be, on policies rather than personalities and with courtesy and good humour. The fact that we are able to serve on the same school governing body illustrates the spirit in which the campaign was conducted and I wish him and his family well.

Before that, from 1982 until 1997, Upminster was represented by Sir Nicholas Bonsor. He was Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and a distinguished former Army officer who earned a formidable reputation in both capacities during the war in Bosnia. His was a familiar face on our television screens in news bulletins at that time.

For the benefit of hon. Members who are not familiar with Upminster it is, famously, at the end of the District line, at the eastern boundary of Greater London and the county of Essex. In fact, Havering, of which Upminster forms a part, is 50 per cent. green belt, and in that respect has more in common with Essex than with inner-London boroughs.

Upminster is special in that it is a constituency of great contrasts. Its outer-lying areas are very rural, with scattered properties and farms. Indeed, one of the earliest cases of foot and mouth disease in the current epidemic was identified on an Upminster farm only 1 mile away from the abattoir at Little Warley where the disease was first discovered. Several other farms were also slaughtered out as a result. Hon. Members will be all too aware of the distressing circumstances and the long-term anxiety caused to farmers who are worried about their livelihoods as that crisis continues.

The village of North Ockendon has an important claim to fame in that a 17th-century inhabitant, William Coys, created modern beer by using hops instead of malt and water, which made the earlier drink known as wort. I imagine there are many who have cause to thank him for that discovery—going out for a wort and curry on a Friday night would not have the same popular appeal.

In the north of the constituency lies a large post-war housing estate, Harold Hill, which is well designed with plenty of green space and trees. Despite various regeneration projects in the past decade, much more remains to be done in the more deprived parts of Harold Hill to increase employment opportunities and improve living standards.

The loss of one third of their uniformed constables over the past four years has not helped the police in their task of protecting the law-abiding majority from the effects of crime in the area. I have lost count of how many local people have told me that they want a strong visible police presence in their neighbourhood, and I shall miss no opportunity to call for a substantial increase in police numbers so that they can respond to the demands made upon them.

Upminster also comprises the town of Cranham, where Sir James Oglethorpe MP lived in the hall. He became an important 18th-century celebrity when his attempts at penal reform for debtors led him to be involved in the founding of the state of Georgia, USA. The town of Upminster is mentioned in the Domesday book as having 39 inhabitants, rather fewer than the current figure. It now boasts as one of its town centre landmarks a fine example of a smock mill, which is currently in need of funding for its restoration. Emerson Park is the most prosperous part of the constituency and has many large, desirable properties. Harold Wood grew from a small halt on the Great Eastern railway into a large, pleasant residential area, which now includes the only hospital in the constituency.

Its proximity to London and the M25 make Upminster ideal commuter territory. The local economy also relies on 5,000 shops and small businesses. They compete successfully, despite the burden of over-regulation, with the larger neighbouring centres of Romford and Lakeside. Council tax has increased by almost 50 per cent. over the last four years, and Upminster has had the third highest increase in the country this year. The formula used to calculate Government grant does not favour Upminster. It includes such factors as the number of houses in multiple occupation, the number of ethnic minorities and unemployment levels. None of those features very prominently and, as a result, the widening gap between grant and spending requirements has to be bridged annually by ever higher council tax. Upminster residents are being bled white.

The schools in Upminster are popular and attract many families, including my own, to live there. The only complaints about education that I received while campaigning were from parents who were unable to find a place for their children at the school of their choice. Many are over-subscribed, including comprehensive, single-sex, denominational and grant-aided schools, and two excellent special schools, Ravensbourne and Corbets Tey. That demonstrates the demand by parents for choice in education, including special education.

Having spent 12 years working in a special school, I know that it is impossible to generalise about special needs pupils. The school catered for physically handicapped and delicate children—terms that have long since fallen out of use, but which in the 1970s and 1980s covered a wide spectrum of need. Some of those pupils, with medical problems such as diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions and even asthma and eczema, would probably have benefited from mainstream education, with the appropriate support. They certainly flourished in the small classes and protected environment that the school provided.

There were, however, others with very disabling conditions, some quite rare, who I think would have experienced extreme difficulty in mainstream schooling, and whose families would have missed the support mechanism that a special school is able to provide. I recall one pupil who arrived, aged five, in his mother's arms, in baby clothes, with a dummy in his mouth. He had Freeman Sheldon syndrome, a rare condition of multiple skeletal deformities, and was not expected to walk or achieve any degree of independence. He quickly developed into a child of cheerful disposition, with high intelligence and a wry sense of humour, who went on not just to walk but at 21 to gain a degree in computer science at London university—a tribute, I believe, to the special school that was able to cater for his needs.

Of course, inclusion has merit for many special needs pupils—those who are able to participate and achieve in, and enjoy, that environment—but we cannot have total inclusion. The need for special schools will continue for those pupils who, for a variety of reasons, need the protected environment and specialist provision that only a special school can provide. I had to look pretty hard in the code of practice for references to special schools, and there were not many. Their role should not be underestimated, and I hope that they may rely on inclusion in the choices made available to special needs pupils.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) for drawing to my attention the concerns of the Wiltshire Dyslexia Society on two counts. The first is the failure of the code of practice to require statemented pupils' special needs to be quantified, which has already been mentioned by several speakers. That leads to the obvious concern that adequate funding will not be provided to meet those unquantified needs, which may influence mainstream schools' willingness to accept those pupils.

Secondly, the code of practice requires individual education plans to focus on only three to four targets. Given that some pupils have complex needs, that limitation could lead to some important needs being overlooked. I would have much more confidence in the capacity of the code of practice to make proper provision

[Angela Watkinson]

for all special needs pupils if both those points were addressed, together with a strengthening of the role of special schools in the spectrum of special needs provision.

10.15 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson). It is obvious from her contribution that she will make many more assured and expert speeches on issues in education, particularly special education in which she clearly has a great deal of experience. I also thank her for her kind tribute to our old colleague Keith Darvill who, unfortunately for us, is not back in the House. However, the campaign in Upminster was undoubtedly conducted in a generous spirit, and Keith made his mark even if he could not win the seat a second time—who knows, we may well see him here in the not too distant future. It is plain that the hon. Lady is committed to Upminster; she lives in the community and is committed to it, especially to its special education and the children involved. Her concerns are shared by Members on both sides of the House.

As there is only an hour and a half to debate the draft code of practice, it is all too easy to focus on the areas about which we are concerned. I preface my concerns by pointing out that the code of practice has a number of pluses, including more concentration and focus on working with parents when preparing statements of special educational needs and preparing to provide help and support for children with special educational needs. The code also puts an emphasis on encouraging pupil participation—trying to get pupils more involved in the development of special educational programmes and whatever is felt to be necessary to help them in diagnosing and meeting their needs.

The code also includes welcome guidance on early years settings, which are incredibly important; in fact, they are vital. The earlier that special needs are identified, the more likely it is that the education of children with special educational needs will have a successful outcome and that that will be achieved effectively, not only for the child but for the school and the local education authority. By meeting needs with appropriate expenditure at an early stage, it is possible to avoid what can often be heavy expenditure later.

I shall not dwell on all my concerns, some of which have already been raised today. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will provide further reassurance that the special educational needs guidance to be issued by his Department will meet all our concerns about issues surrounding the word "quantification". I do not really like the word because, as has been said. the quality of provision is also important. Nevertheless we should not duck the question of specific, detailed descriptions of the provision that children need.

The draft code focuses a great deal on children's needs and the ability to identify them properly. It is therefore disappointing that it does not make stronger reference to identifying the specific provision required to meet those needs. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure me on special needs guidance.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman made a valuable and important contribution to the Committee stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Does he accept that referring to quantification "as necessary" is weak? "As necessary" is a euphemism, which usually means "when you fancy" or "as you like".

Mr. Griffiths: I do not totally agree with that. Words such as "reasonable" have been used by Governments of all shades of political opinion throughout the years. If we apply a tight definition to "necessary" in the context of all that is said about the need to identify a child's specific educational requirements, we could argue that the word means that those requirements should be properly reflected. I agree that we could have avoided a semantic argument if more had been said about the need for detailed provision. I place great faith in my hon. Friend the Minister in respect of the Department's guidance.

I shall speak about only one other matter because I agree with much that has been said on both sides of the House. I raised mobility and independence training during the Report stage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill, as the Royal National Institute for the Blind brief conveniently points out to all hon. Members who have been able to read it. That organisation expresses anxiety because its report "Shaping the Future" shows that few children who need mobility and independence training get it.

My hon. Friend the Minister responded by saying that the Government supported a multi-agency approach to the problem. I hope that he will reassure me that the SEN guidance that will be issued to schools and local authorities provides some clarity about the requirements for giving children a fair chance in school and in life so that they can live full lives and, when possible, make a positive contribution to society. I hope that he will provide positive information on the guidance's contents in respect of the specific provision that children need.

10.23 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I shall be brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on an impressive maiden speech, which was delivered with impeccable clarity. I enjoyed her tribute to her predecessor, and I found the image of two candidates spending many months on the campaign trail, and attending the same governing body meeting, charming. I am sure that those meetings were of the usual high quality.

I have never taken the District line all the way to Upminster, but many years ago, before the M25 was built, I drove from Kent to East Anglia, and had to wend my way through the Ockendons after forcing my way through the Dartford tunnel. I therefore have some memories of the hon. Lady's constituency.

I want to return briefly to what has become known as quantification. I am grateful for the further explanation provided by my hon. Friend the Minister, and I know that my constituents will welcome the examples that he has given, which will partly reassure them, but I should like to explain why they will still view the phrase "as necessary" with some concern. Their unease derives from the battles that I mentioned earlier in an intervention. Many parents have battled with LEAs over many years to try to get the special needs provision that they feel their children deserve and need. They feel that LEAs will use whatever opportunities they can to try to make as little

provision as possible. That background suspicion of LEAs is what makes them concerned about the phrase "as necessary".

Will my hon. Friend complete the process of reassurance and tell us that he does not expect the number of cases in which quantification is necessary to be significantly smaller under the new code than under the existing code? Will he send out a signal by giving that assurance, or by telling us that quantification will normally be necessary? If the guidance sent out to schools reflects that message, I am sure that the parents in my constituency who take a close interest in this matter will be reassured and feel grateful to the Government for polishing up a code of practice that is otherwise very good.

10.26 pm

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): First I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for being present for this rather important debate. I thought that you might not be in the Chair after the many debates that have taken place today, but I am sure that you decided to pay attention because this one is so important.

The code of practice contains several good ideas, but unfortunately, other aspects suffer in comparison with the current code. I have three areas of concern. The current code advises local education authorities that

"the provision (in Part 3 of the Statement) should normally be specific, detailed and quantified (in terms, for example, of hours of ancillary or specialist teaching support)".

However, the code laid before Parliament on 20 June advises LEAs in the following terms:

"The statement should . . . quantify provision as necessary".

It also states:

"there may often be a need to express it in terms of hours, equipment or personnel."

In other words, the concept of the norm is now ambiguous. There is no guidance on the criteria that are to be used when deciding quantification of provision. That is not an improvement; it is worse.

The Independent Panel for Special Education Advice, from which most of my information comes, has obtained counsel's opinion on the wording of the new code. In short, the opinion is that the guidance on quantification in the code is unlawful. The panel believes that Parliament should withhold approval of the code unless paragraph 8:37 is redrafted. The view of David Wolfe, a barrister from Matrix chambers, is that broadly speaking, the code is unlawful and will be read as reducing the requirements for quantification of provision, thus reducing protection for children. He believes that it will encourage vague statements and achieve exactly what the Department for Education and Skills says that it is not trying to achieve.

I also want to deal with two more matters. There are questions concerning the removal of guidance on the duty to identify children with special educational needs. The Education Act 1996 gives LEAs the duty to identify children with such needs and the existing code of practice advises LEAs that in order to fulfil that duty, they should gather information from maintained schools about children living in their area who have special educational needs at stage 3.

The consultation draft of the new code, which was issued in July, brought the guidance into line with the new proposal on Action/Action Plus. In other words, it required local education authorities to collect information on children at Action Plus. It strengthened the guidance by advising LEAs to be aware of the need to identify children with special educational needs among those who were excluded from school and/or being educated at home.

The final version of the guidance excludes most of those provisions, and they should be brought back. They should be part of the guidance.

There is also a terrible omission in the code of practice—guidance when an assessment of a child with medical needs is necessary. I know that you have referred to that. I liked your maiden speech and I congratulate you on it.

The Education Act 1996 suggested that children with medical needs that do not give rise to learning difficulties, but which prevent or hinder them from making use of education facilities of the sort generally provided, are entitled to be considered for statutory assessment. That is broadly speaking what you said. I am most grateful that you mentioned in your maiden speech—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman was not in this place when I made my maiden speech.

Dr. Vis: That is right, Mr. Speaker. I am talking about the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson). You are younger than me, Mr. Speaker, so I could have been in the Chamber when you made your maiden speech, but I was not.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is my hon. Friend advocating that we should vote against the motion? There are many of us who, like me, have not studied the provisions in detail but are concerned because we have received briefings from bodies such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which are concerned because some of the provisions will be detrimental. Does my hon. Friend support the provisions in the code of practice, or does he not?

Dr. Vis: I am grateful for that intervention. I am sorry to say that I will not vote for the motion. I believe that the old code was superior in a number of ways to the draft code of practice. If the vote goes against the Government we shall still have the old code, and we shall be better off. I shall vote against the motion, and I hope that my side will win. I hope that there will then be a reinvestigation of the three areas that I wished to mention.

It is necessary for children with medical needs to be treated—but I shall finish with that, because one of the Government Whips is signalling to me that I should, although I have a great deal to say about these matters. It seems that the code does not pay sufficient attention to the treatment of children with medical needs.

10.34 pm

Mr. Timms: With the leave of the House, I shall reply.

We have had a thoughtful debate, and I know that many people who follow these matters with great interest will be pleased by the care with which Members have considered the issues.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) on her maiden speech, which the House much enjoyed. I appreciated her tribute to her predecessor,

[Mr. Timms]

Keith Darvill, whom I know well. We particularly enjoyed her account of her constituency. It is interesting to know the significance of South Ockendon in the history of beer, which was a new discovery for me. On the basis of the contribution that she has made tonight, the House will look forward to hearing from her on many occasions.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) raised three particular concerns: quantification, the obligations of local education authorities and the treatment of medical conditions. A number of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members have expressed concern about quantification. I will reflect on the points that have been made on that subject. I emphasise that the assurances given by my right hon. and hon. Friends in debates on the matter have all been fully reflected in the draft code that is before us. I refer hon. Members to paragraph 8:35 and those that follow. It is important that we permit flexibility in order to ensure that the needs of children with special educational needs can be met in the best way. We do not want always to have an over-rigid quantitative approach to meeting those needs, as another approach may be more appropriate.

On the other two issues—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or European Union documents).*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 11 July, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

Motion made,

That, for the purposes of their approval under section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2001–02, and the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 2001–02 shall be treated as if they were instruments subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together motions 6 to 12.

Hon. Members: No.

POLICE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Drug Testing of Persons in Police Detention) (Prescribed Persons) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft International Criminal Court (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Specialised Agencies of the United Nations (Immunities and Privileges of UNESCO) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

POSTAL SERVICES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Sub-Post Office Start-Up Capital Subsidy Scheme Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 22nd June 2001, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 11 July, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001].

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 11 July, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001].

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 3rd July, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 June],

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.—[Mr. Caplin.]

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE

Motion made,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. David Chaytor, Brian Cotter, John Cryer, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Paul Goodman, Andy King, Dr Ashok Kumar, Mr. Andrew Love, John McDonnell, Mr. Denis Murphy, Dr Doug Naysmith, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Andrew Rosindell, Mr. Anthony Steen, Ian Stewart and Brian White be members of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform.

Hon. Members: Object.

School Sports (Health and Safety)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.39 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss such an important topic. Before launching into the debate, however, let me say that the ballot for end-of-day Adjournment debates this week seems to have thrown up something unusual. Yesterday's debate was initiated by the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend), and tomorrow's will be initiated by my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). It seems to be central Berkshire week.

Tonight's debate concerns health and safety in school sports events. Let me begin by stressing the importance to me of the involvement of pupils in sport. We often hear nowadays of the increasing obesity of younger people. In 1999, the Department of Health revealed that obesity had risen dramatically in the previous five years. In 1999, 17 per cent. of men were obese, compared with 13 per cent. in 1993, while nearly 20 per cent. of women were obese, compared with 16 per cent. in 1993.

Similarly, the report "The Health of Young People '95-97" showed that among young people aged between two and 15, 29 per cent. of girls and 44 per cent. of boys did not participate in physical activity lasting at least 30 minutes in any given week, excluding activities at school.

There are public health concerns about problems being stored up for the future health of our nation. As a result of those concerns, the Department of Health launched a number of initiatives aimed at nutritional standards for school meals, the promotion of healthy travel to school, including cycling and walking, and the promotion of more exercise for children—for example, an hour's exercise every day.

School sport obviously has a key part to play in encouraging pupils to be active. Active children are more likely to be active adults. Involvement in sport through school offers young people the chance to get exercise, and to do good to their health. Sport in schools offers much more as well: learning about team work, learning about and achieving personal excellence, and the discipline that is needed for pupils to do well. For those and many other reasons, I believe that it is important for school sports to happen and for pupils to be offered a chance to take part in them.

I do not want children to be wrapped in cotton wool and prevented from gaining the benefits of sport that I have described. I had rather a robust view of safety when bringing up my own children. I believe that children learn through experience about the boundaries of what they can do safely. If they are cut off from that experience, they will not learn about those boundaries, and may put themselves at risk in their future lives. The obvious counter-argument is that we do not want to encourage reckless behaviour. We want to make sure that, where possible, risks are reduced.

That brings me to my purpose in seeking the debate. Before I describe the situation, let me repeat that I do not want it to be seen as providing an excuse for pupils not to engage in sports.

[Jane Griffiths]

At my first advice surgery after the general election, in Woodley library, I was visited by Alison Mendes, a resident of east Reading. She had come to see me because she was concerned about what had happened to her daughter. She felt very uninformed about what had really happened.

On 14 May, Mrs. Mendes's daughter, Bianca Halliburton, took part in an inter-school athletics event representing her school, the Blessed Hugh Faringdon Roman Catholic school in Reading. Bianca had volunteered to fill a vacancy in the school hurdling team. According to the school, she had received no training in hurdling this year. The school says that she had represented the school athletics team the previous year, and had previously competed in a hurdles race. I have not been able to discover whether she was trained in hurdling the previous year, before taking part in a race. The fact is, however, that on 14 May Bianca took part in a hurdling event, and fell. She broke both legs very badly, and Mrs. Mendes wants to know why.

The school is keen to stress that Bianca was not pressurised into taking part in the event. It is also keen to state that she had not been training this year. If the fact that Bianca had not been training is not relevant to what happened, why mention it? If it is relevant, there are serious questions to be asked about why the school put her forward for the event.

I had not intended to go into any detail about the correspondence that I have had with the school—I did not think it necessary—but it happens that today the school wrote to another of my constituency neighbours, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), in whose constituency it is situated. I should point out that the incident happened in my constituency, not at the school itself. The school told him that it might well experience "detrimental effects" as a result of this debate. The school is concerned that its position may be misrepresented.

Consequently, I have decided that I will share with the House the school's representations to me, so that there can be no misunderstanding or misrepresentation. The school has been clear that Bianca volunteered to participate in the event, that she had not been in training and that it felt that the event in which she participated and broke both her legs was conducted correctly.

My constituency neighbour has written to me on the matter and undertaken, as I understand it from his letter, to ensure that the Minister replying to this debate is fully briefed. Such an approach to an Adjournment debate is rather interesting, and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, may wish to offer some guidance on it. We have had some very helpful guidance from Mr. Speaker on the conduct of Adjournment debates.

Reading borough council, which runs the sports stadium where the accident happened, has investigated the matter. That investigation shows that the hurdles for the race were set at the correct low level and were facing the right way. Having formerly, as a Reading borough councillor and chair of the arts and leisure committee, been responsible for the council's sports service, I would be surprised if the answer were any different. It is a professional and well-run service.

The fact that the hurdles were set out correctly is backed up by the astonishing photograph in today's Reading *Evening Post*, which shows Bianca as she falls towards the athletics track. Behind Bianca one sees a hurdle in the next lane beginning to fall over, and one sees the hurdle in Bianca's lane beginning to fall over. It is not possible to see from the picture whether Bianca has already had the accident that hurt her so badly, whether it is in the process of happening or whether it is still to happen. However, that still does not answer Mrs. Mendes's question about what happened to Bianca on 14 May.

I could not get an answer from the council on the matter other than on how the hurdles were set out. I have been told that the papers of the officer who investigated the accident were now with the council's insurer, Zurich Municipal, and that it was not possible to find out anything more about what had happened.

I then spoke to Zurich Municipal. It said that it had been notified of an event at which a child—Bianca Halliburton is 12 years old—was injured and that it has asked an inspector to investigate the matter. As the investigation has not yet started and no claim has yet been lodged, I have not been able to obtain a clear answer about what happened to Bianca. However, I have established that an internal Reading borough council report has stated that the hurdles were set out correctly.

Has Mrs. Mendes had more luck than I have in obtaining an answer? When she came to see me, she said that she had spoken to the school, but that she felt that she had not been told what had happened. It seems that no one at the sporting event saw what really happened. The starter of the race did not see what happened because he had just turned away to put down the starting pistol. Other pupils from the school could not see what happened because they were on the other side of the stadium from where the accident occurred. Mrs. Mendes has, however, managed to find the brother of someone taking part who might have seen something. He said that he thought that Bianca staggered or hesitated just before the hurdle, but he could not say much more.

Mrs. Mendes then found a teacher from another school who was present at the event. She said that Bianca was about to jump the hurdle and fell. That version seems to fit in with the picture in today's local newspaper. However, the remainder of that teacher's comments are worrying. It is of course essential for a first aider to be present at any such sports event. After Bianca had her accident, the first aider asked her to try to stand up. However, it was only when it became clear that she could not stand up that an ambulance was called. It is fortunate for Bianca that, as the doctor who saw her said later, the treatment that she received from the first aider did not worsen her condition.

Bianca was off school from the date of the accident, 14 May, until yesterday, 9 July, and had to use a wheelchair for most of that time. I am very pleased to say, however, that her school put in place measures to assist her in returning to school. She is now getting on with her life. I hope that this awful thing that has happened to her will not have a lasting impact.

At 12, one is growing very fast, and it is important to be able to be active at that age. I hope that Bianca grows up fit and healthy and able to take part in sport in the future. I know that Mrs. Mendes is not seeking to blame anyone and is not seeking retribution. I do not respect the

culture of blame, retribution and compensation, and it is important to campaign positively for better outcomes. But Mrs. Mendes wants to know what happened to Bianca and that it will not happen to anyone else's daughter.

As I have said, I have not been able to identify exactly what happened to Bianca on 14 May, or why it happened. The Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 require reports of such incidents, a proportion of which are then investigated. That applies to workplaces, but it is not clear whether it applies to sports venues such as Palmer park stadium in east Reading, where the accident occurred.

The Health and Safety Executive told me that it had not had a report under the regulations and that it was not clear that there was a requirement for such a report. In talking to a number of bodies such as Sport England, the Youth Sports Trust and the Health and Safety Executive, I have been pointed to one source for guidelines on safety in sport. There is what is considered to be standard guidance, issued by the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education. The guidance covers many matters: the setting up of hurdles; the correct spacing; that they must be facing the right way; that they are not too high; and that they are correctly weighted. I have referred to all those matters.

The guidance also states that someone taking part in such an event should have had previous progressive practice. That means that people should have become used to the stride in, the height and the technique necessary for hurdling. It also states that people competing should have previous experience and, on the day, should have the appropriate attitude and be warmed up. In this case, the school states that Bianca had had previous experience in competing in hurdles. I do not know what training she had had; there appears to have been none this year. In itself, this leaves me uneasy. I remain to be convinced that someone should be allowed to take part in an event that they have not taken part in for a year without at least some refresher training.

My approach is a positive one, to try to get everyone working together. It is clearly important that we find out what happened to Bianca so that we can find out if we can prevent it from happening to anyone else's son or daughter. I would like to get everyone together locally from the council, the school, people present at the event and anyone else concerned to try to establish what happened—a summit meeting.

I would also like to see the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education invited, as it is used to giving expert witness. The aim of the summit would be to identify everything that is known about what happened on 14 May and to try to work out what happened. That should establish whether anything can be done to prevent it from happening again.

If that is not possible, I will search with Mrs. Mendes for a way to establish an independent inquiry to do the same. Either way, I hope that we will learn more about what happened to Bianca Halliburton on 14 May. That is where the Government come in. If anything comes up that requires Government action—I wonder whether some further regulation of school sports might be necessary—I would like to be able to feed that to my hon. Friend the Minister. I also hope that the Minister will undertake to try to find ways of creating greater awareness of the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education guidance and more rigour in implementing and interpreting it.

As I began by saying, school sport has an important part to play in our society. We must not let what happened to Bianca Halliburton prevent people from taking part in school sports, but we must learn from it and find if anything can be done to prevent it from happening to anyone else.

10.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on securing this debate. It is an honour to be allowed to participate in what appears to be central Berkshire week. I will not take personally her references to obese men. I appreciate the responsible way in which she put her concerns about this incident in context, especially in relation to the importance of young people participating in sport at school.

Let me clarify where the responsibility lies for the health and safety of pupils taking part in sports days or in any other school activity. The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and its associated regulations place a general duty on employers to protect the health and safety not only of employees but of others affected by the activities of their organisation, so the responsibility for the health and safety of school pupils rests either with the local authority, for community and voluntary-controlled schools; with the governors, for foundation and voluntary-aided schools; or with the proprietor, for independent schools.

The employer is required by the regulations to conduct an assessment of the possible risks arising from the school's activities and to introduce measures to minimise those risks. We expect the relevant personnel to discharge that responsibility professionally and in accordance with statute and good practice.

That is not to say, as my hon. Friend said, that we should wrap our children in cotton wool. There are risks in many things that we do in life, and we cannot deny our children opportunities that will enrich their lives, nor can we ban every sporting activity for the fear that it carries some risk of injury. It would also be wrong to give any impression that teachers are to blame in advance of a full investigation of any individual incident.

Naturally, in this case my sympathies go out to Bianca, who must have suffered a great deal of pain from the injuries that she sustained, especially to her legs. My officials have spoken to her head teacher and I am happy to learn that she has now returned to school, albeit on crutches, to resume her education. I wish her a speedy recovery.

I understand that the event at which the injury occurred was organised by Reading borough council. The council's lawyers are currently investigating the incident, so my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot at this stage comment further on it specifically, but I have asked my officials to liaise with officers in Reading, and we must consider whether any lessons can be learned.

Bianca's mother, Mrs. Mendes, certainly has a right to know the truth about the incident, and my hon. Friend, as the Member concerned, has a right to be involved in that

[Mr. Ivan Lewis]

process, representing Mrs. Mendes in accordance with her wishes. I hope that my hon. Friend will find that reassuring.

I further assure my hon. Friend that if she feels, as a consequence of further investigations into the incident, or because it has brought to her attention issues in which she was not fully involved before, that Ministers should be aware of implications or lessons, I will be pleased to hear from her at an appropriate time.

I take this opportunity to express my sadness at the recent deaths of Bunmi Shagaya, who drowned on a school visit to France, and Yusun Moolla, who drowned on a school visit in Warwickshire. My thoughts, and I am sure those of the House, are with their families, friends and teachers as they struggle to come to terms with their terrible loss.

Inevitably, many parents will be worried about whether they should allow their children to take part in school trips. When things go so tragically wrong, it is a natural reaction to want to cocoon our children and prevent them from participating in school trips or extracurricular activities of any kind. Of course we must reflect on what went wrong, the lessons to be learned and any action that the Government can take further to reduce risk. However, we are not prepared to engage in a kneejerk reaction or to rush to judgment. That often leads to wrong decisions being made for the wrong reasons, and to bad legislation and bad guidance.

Millions of pupils in this country participate in incident-free school visits every year. They derive tremendous benefit from taking part. The educational and personal development opportunities that such visits present are an integral part of the learning experience that we offer our young people. There is no justification for suggesting to parents that they should prevent their children from participating in such activities.

What is vital is that the adults who organise the visits plan their itineraries carefully, assess what might go wrong, and take steps to minimise the likelihood that it will go wrong. That process of assessment should continue throughout the visit, so that any changes in plans are similarly assessed and action taken. The steps to take are set out in a guide produced by the Department called "Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits", which is free to all schools, and to parents too if they want a copy. It is also available on the Department's website.

The guide was drawn up with the assistance of health and safety experts, teachers, tour operators and activity providers, the police and rescue services. It is regarded as robust, and it draws together a lot of good advice. In the context of the debate that has taken place after the recent tragedies, it is reassuring that the guidance has received significant praise from the media and from people in the education system. They consider that it offers a high-quality framework.

I hope that parents will retain confidence in a system that sets out to ensure that pupils can reap the benefits of school visits without coming to harm. It goes without saying that my officials will look carefully at the findings of the inquiries that have been set up, and that we will update our guidance if we find that there are lessons to learn.

On the specific subject of school sports days, I wish to refer to the excellent work carried out by the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education. Its booklet, "Safe Practice in Physical Education", contains a wealth of helpful advice to schools about how to ensure that children can take part in all forms of physical education safely. The advice is based on accepted good practice arising from experience in the field, and I know that physical education teachers all over the country find it helpful and informative.

Another good practice guide produced by the Department for Education and Skills provides comprehensive guidance on the design of school grounds—a matter that may be relevant in this case. The guidance includes planning advice for sports facilities, and covers issues such as cordoning-off areas for field events that involve throwing, and providing safety cages for hammer and discus events. All measures should be designed to enable activities to take place in a safe and secure environment, but without placing unnecessary restrictions on participation.

My hon. Friend highlighted a number of important issues in her contribution to this debate. I hope that she feels that the Government take such concerns seriously. As I have said throughout, we are committed to learning all relevant lessons from specific incidents that result in injury, or worse, to young people. I should be grateful for any contribution that my hon. Friend feels she can make to ensure that we learn the lessons from the incident that she has described, and from more general concerns.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 July 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the dutiful and loyal expression of your thanks for the speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREENHAM AND COOKHAM COMMONS BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill which originated in this House in the last Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present session of Parliament; and the petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable to it shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office no later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the Bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the Bill presented in this House in the last Parliament;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the Bill on the Table of the House;

That in the present session of Parliament the Bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it had passed in the last Parliament, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

To be further considered on Wednesday 18 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State was asked—

Better Regulation Task Force

1. **Paul Clark** (Gillingham): What plans he has for the future operation of the better regulation task force. [1869]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Deputy Prime Minister has asked me to apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for his absence today. I know that he has written to you and to the hon. Members for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). He is currently undertaking a series of meetings abroad on climate change on behalf of the Prime Minister and is today meeting the Japanese Prime Minister.

We are determined that regulation should be necessary and fair and should impose the minimum burden on business. The better regulation task force will continue to provide Government with high quality, independent advice on how to achieve this aim.

Paul Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for her response and welcome her and the Parliamentary Secretary to their new posts on the Front Bench and wish them all the best. I draw her attention particularly to regulations that impact on public services. She will know from visiting schools and the police service in her constituency the common and justifiable complaints about the burden of form filling, paperwork and unnecessary bureaucracy. What steps does she plan to take, and when, to reduce that burden on the teachers in our classrooms, the nurses on our wards and the bobbies on the beat?

Mrs. Roche: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words of welcome; we are very pleased to be here. When we talk about regulation, we do not discuss frequently enough its impact on public services. That is why the Government have responded positively to the task force report on the effect of red tape on head teachers, for example. The public sector team in the Cabinet Office has produced real cuts in public sector paperwork and bureaucracy that will save GP hours. It will save 200 hours a year in a typical school and will save the police 187,000 hours a year. It is very important that we reduce the burden of form filling on our police, our teachers and our doctors, enabling them to deliver the service that all our constituents need.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I, too, congratulate the hon. Lady and her ministerial colleague on their new appointments. Although nobody can accuse the Deputy Prime Minister of discourtesy to the House this afternoon, it is a pity that he did not reorganise his priorities because it is the prime duty of a senior Minister

of the Crown to be in this House and respond to questions. What is the precise target for the reduction of regulations? What figure does the Minister have in mind?

Mrs. Roche: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, of course my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister takes very seriously the absolute duty to be accountable to the House, as do all members of the Government. The opportunity to meet the Japanese Prime Minister came up at the last moment. The Opposition and Mr. Speaker were informed and, given the importance of climate change, it was felt that the House would understand why the meeting was necessary.

As for targets, we aim to reduce regulation where we can and to make sure that there is a proper framework for business so that it can remain competitive. Of course, a very good benchmark of that is today's announcement that inward investment into this country is at record high levels.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I add my congratulations to the Ministers on their new posts.

I am glad to hear that the task force is to continue its work. Recently, a small business in my constituency complained that it could not take on graduates and give them the necessary training because of the stifling effect of regulations. I seek an assurance that the task force will investigate that and ensure that it does not happen in future.

Mrs. Roche: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Small businesses are the life-blood of this country. I was formerly the Minister responsible for the small business sector and I retain an active interest in it. Small businesses now employ a record number of people and we must give them every support. It is very important for them to be able to recruit highly skilled, highly motivated graduates, and I will certainly bring that to the attention of the task force and the unit.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Government regulations over the past five years cost businesses about £10 billion. Is the Minister in a position to say that the figure will come down in the coming five years?

Mrs. Roche: I have seen many very different figures from different organisations, so I would dispute that figure. Most regulation does not add to the burden—quite a lot of it is there to ease administration. It is important to scrutinise every extra piece of legislation to ensure that it is helpful. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not criticising some of the measures that we introduced to improve people's pay and working conditions, such as the minimum wage.

Government Policy (Co-ordination)

2. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What initiatives are being taken by Government offices for the regions to improve the co-ordination of Government policy. [1871]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Government offices bring together in the regions the activities and interests of many different Departments. They work with a wide range of local organisations involved in regeneration, competitiveness and social inclusion.

Hugh Bayley: York suffered major problems during the flooding last November, but a major catastrophe of water breaking through the defences was avoided because of good planning by the local authority and excellent leadership by the police of the Silver command, which brought together the local authority, the emergency services, the Army and other bodies involved in York's flood defences. I pay tribute to the role that the Deputy Prime Minister himself played, coming to York twice in those 10 days and responding within an hour at the weekend to my phone call asking for more sandbags—he arranged for 50,000 extra sandbags to be delivered.

Will my hon. Friend ensure that the Yorkshire regional office uses York's success in averting catastrophe as a case study of what planning and the good co-ordination of Government and private agencies can achieve, and further ensure that those lessons are learned and used by others facing major disasters?

Mrs. Roche: I am certainly aware of the effects that the winter floods had on York, and I absolutely agree that Government offices throughout the country have a very important role to play in coping with emergencies. Co-ordination between local authorities and the police is extremely important.

I thank my hon. Friend for the support that he gave to the defence team. It is very important, when emergency workers are dealing with such situations on the ground, that local Members of Parliament—I know that this applies right across the House—take part and provide support. That is why we are spending a further £51 million on flood defence aid. We definitely need to see what lessons can be learned, as my hon. Friend said, to see how we react and to spread good practice through the rest of the Government offices and other agencies as well.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I, too, welcome the Minister to her new responsibilities.

The regional context of policy is of course set by the Government's intentions in relation to regional government, and throughout the last Parliament the Government had a manifesto commitment to legislate on referendums for directly elected regional government but at no stage timetabled any such referendum or introduced any associated legislation. Is it the Government's intention to legislate for referendums on directly elected regional government in this Parliament?

Mrs. Roche: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in welcoming my appointment and that of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Front Bench. That is greatly appreciated. The hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister answered a written question on 2 July, saying that a White Paper would be produced on this issue.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the Minister, and I have seen that reply, but it does not even tell us whether the Government intend to repeat their commitment from the 1997 manifesto, which was to legislate for

referendums on directly elected regional government. Perhaps the hon. Lady will answer that point. Further to that, the Government said in the manifesto that referendums should go ahead in regions where people supported directly elected regional government or where predominantly unitary local government was established. Does she know where the latter requirement has been met? Are there any regions, in her view, where predominantly unitary local government has been established? If not, where is she proposing to make changes in local government to make that so?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman raises genuinely interesting questions about issues that will be the subject of the White Paper. They will need to be addressed, but the purpose of having a White Paper is to ensure that issues are considered and, in due course, presented to the House for consideration.

Teenage Pregnancies

3. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): If he will make a statement on the recent social exclusion unit report on teenage pregnancies. [1872]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The social exclusion unit report published in June 1999 set out our plan to halve the number of teenage pregnancies and help more teenage parents into education, training and employment. Implementation is progressing well. The latest figures show a 7 per cent. fall in pregnancies among girls under 16.

Helen Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and add my welcome to her to her new post. Can I assume from her answer that she agrees that one of the keys to breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage associated with teenage pregnancies is education, and that the current situation, where many young mothers get only a few hours of home tuition a week, is not satisfactory? Will she ensure that there is some joined-up government on this issue so that we have proper education and child care policies in place to keep teenage mothers in education and to allow them to move into work, which will benefit them and their children?

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend is right to say that this is a key issue. The best possible way of breaking the cycle of deprivation and helping those young women is to get them either into work or into education. We are making good progress. I do not pretend that it is an easy matter or that there is some magic solution, but there are a number of things that we can do. For example, we are testing how best to provide child care for teenage parents to help them return to education or work. We are also targeting the 48 local education authorities with the highest teenage pregnancy rates in order to enable young mothers to get back into education. Currently, 31 per cent. of teenage mothers are in education, employment or training, compared with only 16 per cent. in 1997.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The Government accept that the teenage pregnancy strategy will have to operate alongside the strategies on HIV and sexual health. However, the HIV strategy was announced in 1998 for publication the following year, and the sexual health strategy was announced in a press release in 1999 for publication the following year. The proposal to integrate them was announced last year, with a view to publishing something in the spring of this year, but nothing has emerged. The Department is responsible for joined-up government and delivery, but unless it gets a move on, the deliveries in terms of teenage pregnancy are not those that any of us in this House would want.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. He will be pleased to know that the strategy is going out for consultation.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue of teenage pregnancy too often focuses on teenage girls, and that we ought to focus also on teenage boys and the part that they play? If we want to tackle teenage pregnancy, we have to encourage greater responsibility among not only teenage girls but boys who too often just walk away from their responsibility.

Mrs. Roche: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is a serious matter. One issue is the role models that we present to young women and young men to show them the need to care for themselves, their partners and their families. We need to present a model that young boys can look up to and respect, and that is part of the strategy that we are adopting.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Surely the report underlines the failure of sex education, which has perhaps focused too much on the mechanics instead of engaging young people of both sexes in a dialogue, giving them valid reasons for postponing sexual activity and concentrating on the importance of stability in relationships. Will the Minister consider the reasons why Holland has been more successful in its sex education policy, admittedly against a background of greater family stability? Does she agree that parents have responsibilities and need to be involved in that?

Mrs. Roche: Of course, and I will certainly look at the information to which the hon. Lady refers. Parents have an absolute responsibility in that regard and should be fully involved. However, the stakes are high indeed, and factors of poverty and inequality are also involved. The risk of becoming a teenage mother is almost 10 times higher for girls from the poorest backgrounds than for girls from the richest backgrounds. That should give us all pause for thought and I am sure it will be common ground across the House that it is time to act now.

Departmental Services

4. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If he will review the way in which Government Departments publicise their services. [1873]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Ministers are responsible for the information output of their Departments. The Government are constantly looking at ways of improving the overall information strategy for the public.

Helen Jackson: I am sure that the very welcome new boy to the Cabinet Office will agree that Government

achievements are so satisfactory that they need no spin. Will he, with the new Information Commissioner, institute a new drive to ensure the growth of a culture of openness in every Department about the information it puts out? That information should be freely and easily accessible to the public, as well as easy to read and simple to understand.

Mr. Leslie: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind comments. It is nice that so many people have turned up for my first Question Time. I agree with my hon. Friend about the principle of freedom of information, and that is why the Government have introduced for the first time a statutory right of access to information held by all public authorities. However, there is a wider principle involving the need to promote proactively the rights and benefits that Government policies have introduced, including the pensioners minimum income guarantee, the working families tax credit and the national minimum wage.

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I congratulate the Minister and endorse the question asked by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), but I ask the Government to be much more modest in their claims. I congratulate the Government on failing to produce their annual report this year. In areas such as mine—the Minister of State will know this because she cut her political teeth there in 1984 fighting in a by-election with me—one in 10 people now wait more than a year for in-patient care, the schools are warned that they will have to move to a four-day week and we have the lowest police funding in the country. The spin and rhetoric lead to great disappointment. Is the Minister aware that in areas such as Surrey we see public squalor amid private affluence?

Mr. Leslie: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments. She might not have noticed that we have just had a general election, which probably rendered publication of an annual report this year something of a duplication. She mentioned several other matters, of which some at least were a little subjective. It is important to have good, independent and audited information, and that is what the Government Information and Communication Service is all about.

e-government

5. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What assessment has been made of the potential for using the JANET project in the e-government project. [1874]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government are making good progress in getting services online, and with 42 per cent. already available electronically we are on track to meet our target of having all potential services online by 2005.

The joint academic computer network, known as the JANET project, connects higher and further education institutions across the UK, and is a good example of how modern broadband technology can improve co-operative research.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and commend him for his swift learning curve. I know that he has read the submission to the former Department for Education and Employment on the use of JANET. The network stretches from the south-west of England to the university of the Highlands and Islands, and is already reaching into the community in places such as Telford and Wrekin. The use of broadband technology is expected to grow this year, and the United Kingdom Education and Research Networking Association recommended that we should consider that technology as the natural platform for services such as the People's Network or the NHS Net. Should we not be thinking about using the highway to expand existing services, rather than trying to reinvent an e-government highway that already exists?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend makes a number of important points. The university and college broadband network could be employed by other services, and we are considering that. There are clear practical and logistical problems with broadband that must be resolved, but perhaps it would be more useful if I were to write to my hon. Friend on this matter

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I welcome a fellow Yorkshireman to the Government Front Bench, but does he agree that, when he speaks about the percentage of Government services that are available online, he should recognise that many of those services are online only to the extent that they involve a telephone, rather than the internet? The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) spoke about fast broadband access, and I urge the Minister to take on board what he said. Such access is vital if Government services are to be properly available via the internet, 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman makes some important points about broadband, but I believe that the UK is doing reasonably well in that respect. As for getting Government services online, what is important is to ensure that services are available to the public in the easiest way possible, regardless of the technology involved. However, we must keep bearing down on all Government Departments to ensure that they modernise their services. In that way, we will fulfil the promise that all services will be online by 2005.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I add my congratulations to my Front-Bench colleagues on their appointments, and draw their attention to early-day motion 85, which relates to the Post Office. It is very good that the Government are addressing the digital divide, but the local sub-post office will still be the main source of information—Government leaflets and so on—for the vast majority of people. Will my hon. Friend ensure that more attention is given to that fact, and that we are not caught up by too much talk of Government online?

Mr. Leslie: I thank my hon. Friend. The Post Office network is, of course, extremely important, which is why my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced, in the previous Parliament, measures to protect and enhance it. We are not putting services online for the sake of it; we are trying to make sure that we are responsive to consumers and to the public at large.

Regulatory Reform

6. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): How many draft regulatory reform orders have been published since the passage of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001; and if he will made a statement. [1875]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The first proposal in the form of a draft order was laid before Parliament for scrutiny on 28 June. It will relax licensing in pubs and clubs for the forthcoming new year's eve.

During the passage of the Regulatory Reform Bill, the Government also published six consultation documents on other proposals for regulatory reform orders. There are more to follow.

Mr. Bercow: I shall not get too excited about that, but I warmly congratulate the Minister on her appointment. Will she confirm that, of the seven proposals made by the Government so far, only the one relating to gaming is deregulatory? Does she not understand the widespread suspicion and anxiety that much of the Government's activity in relation to the 2001 Act will be not deregulatory but re-regulatory? When will the Minister do her homework and study in detail the Regulatory Flexibility Act 1980 and the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act 1996, both of which were passed by the Government of our good friends the United States of America?

Mrs. Roche: It is always good to hear from the hon. Gentleman. We would make a lot more progress if the hon. Gentleman's colleagues were not blocking the establishment of the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee. Our record on regulatory reform, particularly with regard to small business, compares very favourably with that of the last Government.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [1899] **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 11 July.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I have been asked to reply. [Hon. Members: "Why?"] My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is currently engaged in the talks about Northern Ireland in Shropshire. I know that the whole House—with few exceptions—will want to support the Prime Minister in his efforts to find a way forward at this critical time.

Mr. Brady: Will the Leader of the House guarantee that all AS-level results will be published on 16 August?

Mr. Cook: I am not in a position to give such a guarantee. However, the review by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has concluded that the new changes have been warmly welcomed and should be supported. There is support throughout schools for the principles of the new changes. The new system has also encouraged a retention rate among pupils. On that basis, we can conclude that we have introduced a system that tackled a problem that was ignored by the last Government. For generations, people have complained that post-16 education is too narrow. We have tackled that. It is a shame that the Conservative party did not do so in its 18 years in office.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a new state-of-the-art private finance initiative hospital has opened recently in my constituency? Apart from the main worry that there may not be enough beds, is he aware that patients, staff and visitors to the hospital have to pay high parking charges, resulting in mayhem in the surrounding streets? Is he also aware that patients are being ripped off by the consortium, with extortionate charges being made for television and telephone usage, and that they even have to hire vases for flowers? Unbelievably, many patients suffer the indignity of having to walk from their ward to the theatre for their operation, because the private consortium charges £30 for a portering service. Is that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think I will let the Leader of the House answer.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful question. Of course I understand the concern that some charges cause. I have seen the same happen in my constituency, where car parking charges have been introduced by a hospital that has nothing to do with the private finance initiative. I would have hoped that my hon. Friend and his constituents welcomed the fact that they have a new hospital. Half a dozen other towns in Britain also have a new hospital, built in record time, as a result of the PFI. Owing to the involvement of private finance, we are now in a position to offer the NHS the largest hospital building programme in its history, and of that we are proud.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): We all wish the Prime Minister well with the talks on Northern Ireland.

Are the Government happy in principle to see the United States withdraw from the anti-ballistic missile treaty if that is what its missile defence plans require? Yes or no?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that we invited the United States Administration to enter into dialogue with Russia on the future of the anti-ballistic missile treaty. She will be aware that both presidents met recently in Slovenia and have started discussions on a new strategic framework. Our own view has always been that there may be a way forward, but that it is a way forward that should be sought by agreement between the two who are parties to the anti-ballistic treaty—as we of course are not.

Mrs. Browning: But now that Poland, Spain, Italy and the CDU in Germany have given their support to the American plans, is it not time the Government published the Ministry of Defence threat assessment in respect of

both the deployment of British troops and the UK mainland? Is it not true that the Government's position is that they continue to sit on the fence? In one week alone, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Gentleman have faced a series of hostile questions from the Benches behind them. Indeed, 197 Labour MPs have now signed early-day motion 23 opposing the American scheme, so the Government do not dare take a firm position.

The Prime Minister's press secretary said that the president's plans were broadly a good idea. Does the Leader of the House think that they are broadly a good idea?

Mr. Cook: It is impossible for the Government to express support for plans that do not exist; nor could those countries express support for plans that do not exist. At present, the only specific proposal is to provide missile interceptors and radar in Alaska—that is a long way from our ministerial responsibilities.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the views of the overwhelming majority of my constituents about Finningley airport and its development? The majority are not NIMBYs but YIMBYs—yes in my backyard, please. Can we hope for a fast-track public inquiry on behalf of the YIMBYs in my constituency and on behalf of the regeneration of the area and the aviation industry generally?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is considering measures that can be taken to expedite the public inquiry. My hon. Friend will understand that we have to go through the full procedures, and as the Government will act in a quasi-judicial capacity I cannot comment on the case at present. I assure him, however, that the Department is considering how we can hold a public inquiry as soon as possible in order that my hon. Friend and his constituents can make their views known.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Prime Minister has the support and good wishes of my party in seeking a satisfactory outcome to the Northern Ireland talks?

To refer back to the question put by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), does the Leader of the House agree that when the Government consider the role of the private sector in public services, especially the private finance initiative, they must look at the full range of evidence so that no individual PFI ends up costing the public more than a publicly funded alternative?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell the right hon. Gentleman that value for money is one of the two major aspects that are examined when any scheme is considered. All schemes are evaluated against that. One of the issues that has introduced risk and unpredictability to the cost of hospitals is the time in which they are delivered. So far, all six PFI hospitals that have been constructed have been delivered on time, within time, and thus without the risk of the additional costs that have previously caused problems in the health service.

Mr. Beith: Is the Leader of the House aware that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has apologised to my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) for appearing to cite in a written answer a non-existent report by the National Audit Office and a selective appraisal of PFI projects in order to try to put a better case than actually exists for the funding of those projects? Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that that illustrates the danger that, when Governments become committed to a policy such as PFI, the Government machine starts to put before Parliament and Ministers only those facts that fit the policy? Will the right hon. Gentleman make it his business as Leader of the House to ensure that Parliament can get at all the facts that it needs to scrutinise the Executive, so that we do not get hospitals and schools that cost more than they should, or other policy disasters?

Mr. Cook: I am all in favour of Parliament having access to all the information and all the facts. Indeed, it is my broad impression as Leader of the House that the PFI is not an issue that has gone unexplored and unventilated in the Chamber. On the specific point to which the right hon. Gentleman refers—the answer from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—it is true that there was not one NAO report that led to those figures but seven different ones. The figures quoted were absolutely accurate.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I tell my right hon. Friend what immense personal pleasure it gives me to see him in his new role? Does he agree that our instruction to deliver from the people of the north-east, including high standards in schools and health, also involves full employment, revisiting the Barnett formula and a directly elected regional assembly?

Mr. Cook: I am sorry to disappoint my right hon. Friend, but my current role expires in 20 minutes' time. I hope that he will give me a pass mark if I can agree with him on only two of the three points that he put to me. We have no plans to revisit the Barnett formula, but on the other two matters I fully agree with him. Unemployment is the lowest it has been for a generation, with 1 million more people in work than at the previous general election, and we have put forward proposals by which regions such as the north-east can have their own regional assembly, which will enable local people to decide how best to deliver local services.

Q2. [1900] **Dr. Bob Spink** (Castle Point): May I say, but with great sincerity, what a great pleasure it is to see the Leader of the House in his new role? Will he join me in congratulating all who work in or raise funds for hospices, particularly the children's hospice movement? There are 24 children's hospices in this country and they get an average of about 5 per cent. Government funding, but the children's hospice, Littlehaven, in Castle Point, receives only 2 per cent. Government funding.

I make no political point in this at all. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Sincerely, I ask simply that we can work together to review the funding mechanisms for all hospices so that we can get the balance right between voluntary sector funding and Government funding.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman in the tone and spirit in which he asked his question, and fully to acknowledge and recognise the excellent work that is done by the hospice movement,

which is able to provide care and attention not just to patients but to relatives at a very difficult time. I believe that the whole House shares my admiration for that patient work.

On funding, we have made a commitment that we shall look to support the hospice movement in the course of our NHS plan. In the particular case of the hon. Gentleman's health authority, it is for it to decide how much to provide to Littlehaven hospice. We believe that it is right that local decisions should be taken by the local health authorities, which is why we shall carry forward a programme of further decentralisation within health service funding. However, I would record for the hon. Gentleman and the House the fact that, this year, his health authority has had an increase in funding of over 8 per cent., and I hope that that will enable it to meet the demand to which he refers.

Q3. [1901] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): Would my right hon. Friend ask the Prime Minister to look again at the proposal in the Queen's Speech to legislate to allow positive action such as all-women shortlists in parliamentary selections? Would he consider extending that provision more widely to include other selections, and would not that have the merit of allowing the Conservative party to have an all-women shortlist instead of an all-loser shortlist?

Mr. Cook: I share my hon. Friend's concern to see more women on shortlists, and that is why we shall seek to bring forward legislation as soon as we can. In the context of the current election, I do hope that it is not too late for the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) to come to the aid of her party. I see that the press have been comparing the Tory leadership elections to "Big Brother". That, I think, is unfair—to "Big Brother". At least when they have a vote in "Big Brother", someone gets kicked out.

Q4. [1902] **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): Could the right hon. Gentleman explain why, when I try to raise the issues of falling police numbers, low police morale and poor detection rates in Sussex in the House, I am fobbed off by Ministers with the assertion that it is a matter not for them, but for the chief constable, yet only a few days ago his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary took it upon himself, in effect, to sack the chief constable of Sussex by means of a press release?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to answer. The fact of the matter is that, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware and as I am pleased to report and repeat to the House, police numbers in England and Wales have gone up by more than 1,300 in the past year. I am also pleased to say that we can expect even larger increases in future years, as in the past year the number of those entering police training is up by no less than 75 per cent.

Q5. [1903] **Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): The PFI developers in this country are quite rightly under attack for renegotiating the loans associated with building schools and new hospitals and for getting cheaper loans and taking the profits. I fully support the PFI, but I do object to those large companies making a substantial profit on the back of public sector investment. Will the Minister take this opportunity to renegotiate the PFI guidelines to ensure that, if profits are being made, they are redistributed to the public sector which financed those initiatives in the first place?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a valid concern. There are only a few cases where there have been refinancing deals, but I am pleased to say that we have changed the rules so that 30 per cent. of any gain will return to the health service. Let us also not lose sight of the fact that we would not be able to sustain our present hospital building programme if we had not shown innovation and imagination in involving more private finance. The previous Government, under the Conservatives, spent £30 million examining private finance initiatives and never launched a single one.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Last week the Prime Minister told us that he made no apology for the Government's proposed changes to incapacity benefit. Are not vulnerable people being caused unnecessary anxiety in this country because of the bungled, bureaucratic way in which the Government currently manage incapacity benefit applications? Are not the Government really responsible for that? The Government should tidy up and improve the systems that they use, not force vulnerable people to be subject, every three years, to a medical assessment.

Mr. Cook: As I told the right hon. Lady last Thursday—I am very happy to repeat it again on this occasion as I obviously failed to convey my meaning clearly—the new scheme will not apply to present claimants. Therefore, none of those currently claiming incapacity benefit need have any anxiety on that score; nor need new claimants, as it is a clear commitment of this Government that we will help those who can work into work and provide security for those who cannot work. That has to be the right principle, and I rather wish that it had been the principle followed by the Conservative party in office; its current leader introduced the medical tests for incapacity benefit, as a result of which thousands of our constituents lost their incapacity benefit.

Mrs. Browning: It is not the principle of medical testing someone's application for incapacity benefit, but the way this Government administer it that is the problem. In a report that does exist—it was published in March this year—the National Audit Office shows very clearly that the Government's incompetence is causing public money to be misused in incapacity benefit applications. It said that £12 million could be saved for every week that the process was speeded up, but the Government pay the money, the medical assessment takes place months later and the money is never reclaimed by the Government if the person concerned does not qualify. Because of that incompetence, the Government will now force sick people to be subject to yet more tests, with more bureaucracy and more problems for people who will have to keep reapplying to justify the fact that they are disabled or have an incapacity. That is where the problem lies—not with sick people.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is looking for

ways to speed up the system. It is a bit rich to express concern about alarm among claimants and then suggest that it is regrettable that the Government do not pursue current claimants when the benefit is removed. I can think of nothing that is more likely to alarm and dismay claimants. Her Government used incapacity benefit as a means of disguising the high levels of unemployment. Now that we have got unemployment down to its lowest level for a generation, we can ensure that we target disability benefits on the disabled so that they get the security they need.

Mrs. Browning: The problem is the way in which the Government administer the scheme. If the right hon. Gentleman will not take my word for it, what does he think of the words of Lord Ashley of Stoke, who knows a bit about disability? In a letter in *The Times* today, he says:

"The Government has the power to repeatedly reassess if it wishes, and it undoubtedly uses it. The proposed changes are unnecessary."

Mr. Cook: The test was introduced by the leader of the hon. Lady's party and caused many people to lose their incapacity benefit. The proposal of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will ensure that we approach the problem systematically, to avoid the outcome that she mentioned in which people have to wait a year before they are assessed. The genuinely disabled will get the benefit that they need and continue to get it without pressure being placed on them not to.

Mrs. Browning: In the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999, the Government took powers for themselves that they have failed to use. It is because of that failure that they are going to subject disabled people to the tests. Last week, the Prime Minister also reassured us that people who are genuinely disabled would be supported. Indeed, he said that the Government would go further. What did he mean by that?

The disability living allowance was introduced by a Conservative Government and awarded for life to people with lifelong disabilities. We can all recall that they lost that recognition of lifelong disability at the hands of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). When the Prime Minister says that people with lifelong disabilities are going to be helped, does he mean the way in which the Government helped them in the previous Parliament—by reducing and removing the lifelong recognition of people who were clearly born with a disability and are going to die with it?

Mr. Cook: I cannot accept the hon. Lady's characterisation of what the Government have done for the disabled. We introduced the disability income guarantee and have ensured that children as young as three and four have access to the mobility element of the attendance allowance. In all those ways, we have put money into helping the disabled, which the last Conservative Government never did.

I remind the House that it is not our intention to bring in additional medical tests to penalise people on incapacity benefit. The measure aims to provide help, which they did not receive when the hon. Lady and her partners were in government, for those who want to find work. Let us not lose sight of the fact that 1 million people on disability benefits say that, given the opportunity and assistance, they would prefer to be in work.

Q6. [1904] **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): Only this morning, I attended the launch of the neighbourhood management programme in my constituency, which is yet another example the Government tackling social exclusion. Indeed, the begging bowl that we have been holding out from Hastings and Rye for some time has been filled over and over again, and we are very grateful. However, my constituents now want a hand up rather than a handout. Will my right hon. Friend impress on the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions the need for an early and positive decision on the access to Hastings study, including the bypass?

Mr. Cook: I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend hopes to make an announcement very soon. He is well aware that the Hastings bypass raises complex issues and differing views have been expressed on it. I shall draw my right hon. Friend's attention to his concern.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Will the Leader of the House confirm that next week the Government will lay before the House an order that will take back the powers vested in the new Policing Board and recall the old police authority, because at the talks that he has mentioned the SDLP and Sinn Fein/IRA have refused to put nominees on to the board?

Mr. Cook: On the question of what we will do next week, decisions have yet to be made, so I cheerfully invite the hon. Gentleman to join us at business questions tomorrow. I stress that to achieve a stable and peaceful outcome in Northern Ireland it is important to have an efficient police force that commands the support and confidence of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland, and the Government will not be deflected from that objective.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Yesterday, Edgware school in my constituency was given the go-ahead to become a city academy. That presents an exciting challenge to the school, which serves many disadvantaged children. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that children from disadvantaged areas continue to have priority for places at the school, so that they benefit from the magnificent extra investment that the school will receive in the next few years?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome to the new city academy in Barnet, and I am sure that his constituents are grateful for the new facility. It is important that we develop education in a way that provides diversity and specialisation and responds to the special needs of the area that my hon. Friend represents. The school will be publicly funded and therefore be part of the state sector, so I hope that it will be able to respond to my hon. Friend's plea to continue to give special priority to those who live in the area.

Q7. [1905] **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to a

potential disaster in west Wales? The Ministry of Defence wants to withdraw £750,000 of public funding from the apprenticeship scheme at Aberporth following privatisation. Not only will that endanger 80 jobs in my constituency, but it threatens an objective 1 bid for a high-tech technology park at Aberporth that would offer precisely the sort of job creation opportunities that I am sure the Government welcome. The decision rests wholly with the MOD and the Secretary of State for Defence. Will the Leader of the House make sure that the proposal to withdraw is rejected and that high-class training—the best in the United Kingdom—continues at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Aberporth?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to offer the hon. Gentleman reassurance. First, the MOD has given an undertaking that all apprentices currently at the school will continue to be funded and will therefore be able to complete their apprenticeship. Secondly, the MOD is discussing with the trade unions future intakes of apprentices in the area. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the whole point of the MOD proposals is to provide long-term stability and a future for the facility; and where possible to extend, not narrow, the opportunities for young people in his area.

Q8. [1906] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): After the recent appalling events in Bradford and elsewhere, what is my right hon. Friend's assessment of the state of race relations in Britain today, and what are the Government going to do to ensure that everybody from every community in Britain has equal access to opportunities and the ability to contribute positively to our society?

Mr. Cook: I entirely share my hon. Friend's concern about the recent riots in Bradford. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a statement to the House yesterday, and we all agree that there is no justification or excuse for the violence we witnessed there; it must not be accepted.

I do not, however, want the impression to be given that the events in Bradford are typical of race relations in Britain. The Government have taken many steps to improve race relations: we introduced the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 precisely to address the issue that my hon. Friend raised, which is to put an obligation on all public service providers to provide their service in a way that treats the races equally and reaches out to minorities. If there is one issue on which I hope all parties in the House are united it is that we must defend democracy against those racist organisations that have helped to foment violence and now seek to profit from it. We must not allow their poisonous message to succeed.

Q9. [1907] **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Is the Leader of the House aware of the sheer despair that has led nearly all the junior hospital doctors in east Kent to talk of an impending catastrophe because of undercapacity? Does he realise that they have been issuing hand bells to people waiting on trolleys in our three accident and emergency units to draw attention to their problems? Does he really think it right that our local health authority wants to spend £100 million on a bureaucratic reorganisation that is opposed by both local community health councils and which will not provide one single extra bed or nurse?

Mr. Cook: I am very pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that funding for his health authority in the current year is up by almost 9 per cent. on last year, and that throughout the lifetime of this Government the average increase in funding for his health authority has been double the average increase under the Government whom he supported. If he had pressed that Government at the time, his hospital might be in a better position than it is now.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As Speaker, you are the guardian of the rights of all Members of Parliament, so will you consider the position in relation to a note from the Electoral Commission that has been sent to many, if not all, hon. Members about the treatment of parking passes from BAA plc for Members at airports? Hon. Members have expressed concern that the commission in its early days may not fully appreciate the position of Members of Parliament. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, will be anxious to talk to both sides of the House through the usual channels, and particularly, perhaps, to Home Office Ministers, under whose remit the Electoral Commission comes. Will you consider carefully the letter that hon. Members have received and whether the matter relates to MPs' privileges?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter. I am aware of the problem and shall look into it.

European Communities (Amendment) Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

3.32 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I beg to move,

That, in accordance with the resolution of the Programming Committee of 10th July and pursuant to the Programme Order of 4th July 2001 (proceedings in Committee of the whole House, on consideration and on Third Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill),—

(1) proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall, so far as not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 10.00 p.m. on the third allotted day (or, if that day is a Thursday, 7.00 p.m.);

(2) those proceedings shall be taken on each of the allotted days as shown in the second column of the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at the times specified in the third column of the Table.

Table

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	Amendment No. 1	8.00 p.m. (or 5.00 p.m. if a Thursday)
	Remaining proceedings on Clause 1 and proceedings on Clauses 2 to 4	—
Second day	Remaining proceedings on Clauses 1 to 4 (so far as not previously concluded)	10.00 p.m. (or 7.00 p.m. if a Thursday)
Third day	New Clauses 4 to 6	7.00 p.m. (or 4.00 p.m. if a Thursday)
	Remaining New Clauses	10.00 p.m. (or 7.00 p.m. if a Thursday)

(3) any proceedings on consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall, so far as not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 10.00 p.m. on the fourth allotted day (or, if that day is a Thursday, 7.00 p.m.).

I am pleased to move the motion for the first programme drawn up by the Programming Committee. The purpose of changing our method of programming is to move the initial debate on the size of the time envelope for debate on a Bill from the Floor of the House to Committee, where there will be less grandstanding and more opportunity for sensible discussion. I hope that the programme will prove the wisdom of that approach.

Now that the detailed programme proposed by the Programming Committee has been published in the Order Paper, it is for the House to decide whether to agree to it. I hope that it agrees that it reflects the Opposition's priorities and ensures that all matters of concern to Members are properly debated. That was certainly my intention when the Committee met yesterday. Some 276 amendments have been tabled, not all of them by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). It is important that all the key issues are fully debated, and three full days in Committee will give ample time to address them. The arrangements will allow us to tackle properly each substantive clause, and will enable the House to address various proposals for new clauses—a point of some importance to the Opposition.

It is proposed that the first substantive debate on qualified majority voting take place today until 8 pm. For the rest of the day and the second day in Committee, we shall cover other amendments to clauses 1 to 4. On the third and final Committee day, we shall address proposals for new clauses 4, 5 and 6 until 7 o'clock, and then the remaining new clauses. I commend the motion to the House.

3.34 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): The Bill raises fundamental questions about the future development of the European Union, and the issues are extremely complex.

In Committee, we shall discuss comprehensively such matters as the extension of qualified majority voting in 31 articles and 35 provisions; European defence policy outside NATO and its effect on the Western European Union and NATO; enhanced flexibility and the loss of the emergency brake veto; Eurojust and its effect on United Kingdom criminal and judicial procedures; detailed reforms of the European Court procedures; the extension of EU competence in areas such as common commercial policy; the social chapter, European political parties and several other institutional reforms; structural funds and the effect of the extension of QMV on the United Kingdom's regions; and a possible referendum in Britain to address the lack of democratic accountability and the disconnection with the structures of the EU.

Given the Government's contention, which we hotly contest, that the treaty and the Bill are essential for enlargement, presumably they, too, believe that the Bill's contents are fundamentally important. That makes their attitude disappointing.

We believe that the issues require four days of debate in Committee. That is more important than any more general debate after the Committee stage. It would be a matter for regret if the Government were to curtail the opportunity for us to analyse these important changes in full. I unequivocally put our sentiments about that on the record.

3.36 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am slightly surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) seems to know as well as the Minister how long the Bill will take in Committee. The difficulty that we confront is the apparent ability of hon. Members on both Front Benches to foretell with great accuracy and precision how long it will take a Committee properly to scrutinise a Bill, without necessarily knowing the totality of amendments and new clauses that will be tabled, as that process can continue during the Committee stage. Perhaps the Government, and even my hon. Friend, expect the Committee to take not a dynamic approach, but a rather static approach, whereby we freeze the item at the beginning, take a view of it, or a snapshot, and say, "Well, that's your lot."

That is not good enough. It is the ultimate absurdity that, in relation to a Bill of such magnitude and importance, the Government say that they not only know exactly how long deliberations will take in totality, but, with their huge majority, are laying down the detailed timetable for the consideration of the Bill in Committee, regardless of the magnitude of the matters under consideration and without any knowledge—by definition—of the number and nature of the amendments that may be tabled. There may, however, be partial knowledge of the amendments at this stage. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) has already tabled a number of extremely important amendments, which merit substantial debate and consideration.

Of course, the Government are not interested in that. They see it as their task to get rid of legislation as quickly and as conveniently as possible—not for the Government or their Members any delay or prolongation of deliberation. That is apparently unacceptable to people who—I concede this even about Government Members—dedicated considerable time and effort to being elected as Members of Parliament, but who, as soon as they arrive here, cannot wait to get out of the building as quickly as possible. They do not want to be delayed by the inconvenience and superfluity of consideration of the details of Bills.

Oh no, such matters are not for the Government or their Members. They regard what they choose to call "the mandate" as sufficient. If the mandate given to them by the electorate at the time of an election states that they are entitled to certain legislation, the Government seem ready to override the deliberative processes developed in the House over many centuries, which may, I concede, occasionally cause inconvenience to the Government and their Members. Yes, they may be delayed in this place a little longer than they would have chosen. Perhaps they want more time out of the building to dispose of the increase in pay that they all voted themselves just last week.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. He is addressing the House with that combination of charm and understatement for which he is renowned in all parts of it. Does he agree that there can never be any justification in any circumstances for the abandonment of self-government by legislative default and by what amounts to parliamentary truancy from the Government Benches?

Mr. Forth: Of course, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Every time we consider a programme motion, we see that it provides excuses for hon. Members not to be present, rather than any reason for them to be here attending to their duties. It seems that the point of the exercise is to shrink to the minimum the time that we commit to the scrutiny of legislation.

That is a bad principle in itself, but it is underlain by the assumption that the Minister knows so much about the mood of the House and about what hon. Members have in mind that he can foretell with great precision how long it will take the Committee properly to consider the details of the Bill, notwithstanding the number, scope and importance of the amendments that have been tabled. Surely it is possible for further amendments and new clauses to be tabled during the Committee stage, unless we are to be denied even that right. Of course, such amendments would require further deliberation, so almost by definition we cannot know at this stage how much time we will require properly to consider the detail of the Bill.

[Mr. Forth]

The motion is yet another step on a road that the House has taken; at least, the Government have taken it, but I hope that my hon. Friends have not done so. The Government seem determined to minimise or dispose of all opportunities for proper scrutiny of legislation.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): If I understand the right hon. Gentleman correctly, he is saying that there should be greater time to debate the treaty of Nice in this place. He speaks from the Back Benches, but the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who spoke from the Front Benches, would like the matter to be decided by a referendum. Which of the two deliberative processes should it be?

Mr. Forth: I should certainly be intrigued about the possibility of a referendum on the Nice treaty, as on any matter of profound constitutional importance. If we can have a referendum on a matter as utterly trivial and irrelevant as the Greater London Assembly and the Mayor, there should be ample scope for one on something as important as our nationhood. I would not shrink from that possibility.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are discussing the programme motion.

Mr. Forth: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I know that you would not want me to pursue such matters.

I concede that the great danger in programme motion debates is the appearance of repetition on the part of Opposition Members. I make no apology for that, as the underlying principles to which we object remain the same in each case, although the detail is different. The principle is even more important in respect of this Bill, not only because of its scope and enormity, but in the light of the number and scale of the amendments that have been tabled, to say nothing of those of which we cannot yet even be aware.

I oppose the programme motion, just as I hope that I shall continue to oppose all such motions—on principle and in relation to their application, detail and the terms in which they are presented. For me, they demonstrate all too well the Government's attitude, as they seek constantly to diminish the role of the House of Commons, its Members and its Committees, whether Upstairs or on the Floor of the House. I hope that hon. Members will oppose this and all other such motions.

3.43 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I support the principle of a programme motion where it is demonstrated that adequate time has been provided to ensure that all parts of a Bill are properly scrutinised and that all those who have realistic amendments can speak to them and gain a response from the Government. In respect of the motion before us, which allots three full days in Committee, I say respectfully that it seems to me that those criteria have been more than satisfied.

Interestingly, the contributions that we have so far heard from the official Opposition suggest that they would prefer a wholly open-ended arrangement. The Bill would thus become the Marie Celeste of the legislative programme, travelling hither and thither, with no clear destination. That is because the official Opposition believe that delay equals scrutiny. I have never been persuaded by that argument. Anyone who has faced 50 minutes of cross-examination by the late Mr. George Carman QC realises that delay does not necessarily equal scrutiny, and that a point of any substance can be made succinctly, effectively and in a short time.

I am convinced that the official Opposition are anxious not to scrutinise the Bill but to ensure that it never reaches the statute book. *[Interruption.]* That is a perfectly legitimate position. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) must calm himself.

Mr. Campbell: The Opposition's position is legitimate, but it should not be given spurious respectability, as if their determination to scrutinise every provision line by line, phrase by phrase lies at the heart of their objections.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that, however succinctly a point is made, elements of the Bill that we have not previously considered will come before us. Their consideration will take time, and anything that is introduced later will inevitably be denied that time. We experienced that difficulty time and again when a programme motion was agreed for the Scotland Bill. Many clauses were not discussed, to the great frustration of Labour Members, simply because provisions that were not expected to take much time did so.

Mr. Campbell: It would have frustrated the people of Scotland if the Bill had been considered in the way in which the Opposition are urging upon us this afternoon. Their position would be legitimate if many Conservative Members who are present had not been party to guillotine motions in the 18 years that they were in government. Some of us remember legislation that was pushed through on a three-line Whip. Guillotines were used to ensure its passage because the Conservative Government believed that it was in the national interest and perhaps in their political interest to do that.

Protestations in support of endless delay whereby intellectual scrutiny can somehow be achieved carry little conviction from those who have in the past used every device available to a Government to ensure that their legislation reached the statute book.

Mr. Forth: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Campbell: No.

Mr. Forth: What is the problem?

Mr. Campbell: I am about to sit down so that we can get on to the real business of the Bill.

The programme motion is reasonable and sensible. We should adopt it and proceed to the substance of the Bill, about which the Opposition claim to be worried.

3.48 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on the point that delay does not equal scrutiny. I have never believed that. However, legislation, especially on the scale of the Bill, which incorporates a treaty into our domestic law, requires rational analysis and proper examination. It cannot be done in the limited time available under the programme motion. It is frankly impossible, and the Government know it.

The relevant early-day motion and the Parliament First group received support from all parties. This afternoon, we are considering proper scrutiny and the independence of Back-Bench Members. I make no apology for tabling 250 amendments and new clauses because the treaty requires proper examination. I do not believe that there is the slightest chance of that in the parameters of the programme motion.

We need to get on and, in the interests of brevity, I shall simply add that I am slightly surprised, though not offended, that I was given no opportunity to participate in the Programming Committee, despite tabling so many amendments. Perhaps that is because the procedures do not allow it. The Prime Minister himself has suggested that he would like to see my pamphlet, along with the amendments and the arguments, and I have sent them to him. I am glad to see that the Minister, with whom I have had perfectly amiable relations over a long time, is holding up my pamphlet.

I have told the Minister in advance that, because of the shortage of time and because we do not have an opportunity to go into all the matters in the depth required, I will send him my briefing papers, which are also being supplied to certain Conservative colleagues of mine. He can then respond to them in writing. I should simply like to know, before we start these proceedings, whether he would be glad to follow that as an alternative procedure to the proper examination of this matter on the Floor of the House.

3.50 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): It is a crying shame, and no great tribute to the Minister for Europe that he should come to the House this afternoon to commend to it quite the most draconian truncation of debate on an important constitutional measure that we have seen for some considerable time. *[Interruption.]* People may chunter from sedentary positions in evident disapproval of my expression of that opinion, but I am bound to say to Labour Members that if they wish to cite recent examples of a more severe truncation of debate, I shall be happy to listen to all comers. We are discussing a treaty of the greatest moment for the future of this country. It has profound implications for the future of this nation, and for the question of whether we ultimately remain a nation at all in any meaningful sense. That is not a matter about which people should joke or skit. It is of the first importance.

I want to say to the Minister for Europe, with whom it is always a pleasure to joust in the House, that it is especially insulting that the Government have proposed to proceed with such a severe circumscription on the time for debate in the light of the decision of the people of Ireland. *[Interruption.]* The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin)—who does not, I hope, have an opinion to express on these matters—seems to regard my reference to the verdict of the people of Ireland with a sniffy disdain that is both unworthy and a regular feature of the Government's attitude. The verdict of the people of Ireland is directly relevant to, and should have implications for, the attitude of the House to whether the process of ratification should proceed at all.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I am anxious to develop my argument, but it is always irresistible to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hendrick: The hon. Gentleman seems extremely concerned about the wishes of the people of Ireland. Will he tell us what concerns he has about the wishes of the people of the other 14 member states of the European Union?

Mr. Bercow: I am very interested in their—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am very interested, too, but not at the moment. We are debating the programme motion, and hon. Members should not develop that argument.

Mr. Bercow: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am naturally very well behaved, but just occasionally I need a prod from you and I am always exceptionally grateful to you for it. I shall not be tempted down the path of unvirtuous behaviour by the hon. Gentleman.

The people of Ireland have made an important decision, and we should treat it with respect. There is a real argument as to whether it is constitutionally proper for the House to proceed with consideration of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill at all. I subscribe to the view, which has also been enunciated by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), that we should not consider this measure at this time. It is disrespectful to the people of Ireland and a violation of the principles that govern consideration of these matters. If one country chooses positively not to ratify the treaty, the ratification procedure should not proceed. Eminent lawyers are of that opinion, as well as many politicians.

If we are to proceed, however, let me be characteristically generous-spirited and accept that there is an argument for proceeding, although it is not an argument that I accept. Surely Labour Members can see that there is at least as strong an argument for proceeding more cautiously, for allowing more time, for recognising the case for greater reflection and for acknowledging—and thereby paying tribute to—the fact that hon. Members might wish to table more amendments as the debate proceeds.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Will he address the issue raised by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) about delay? Does he agree that delay is the precursor of detailed scrutiny, because as the Bill continues its progress through the House, ideas develop and further amendments arise as a result of discussions?

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is both right and eloquent in equal measure. I cannot resist his tempting offer that I

[Mr. Bercow]

should respond to the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell). Indeed, I shall deal briefly but with relish with the rather contemptuous speech that he delivered a few moments ago.

Of all the observations that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made, I thought that the most offensive was the description "realistic amendments", which tripped effortlessly off his tongue. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is a distinguished parliamentarian and a distinguished lawyer, but it is not for him to decide what constitutes a realistic amendment. I do not recognise the accuracy of that description save in one particular, and that is your judgment, Mr. Speaker, that an amendment is in order. If that is your judgment, Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly reasonable for hon. Members to hope that there will be a chance to debate it. It is not for the right hon. and learned Gentleman breezily to dismiss amendments that he does not like as unrealistic.

I am a little worried about my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, who is an exceptionally diligent parliamentarian, because so far he has tabled only 250 amendments. That is a magnificent performance, but he is capable of a great deal better. As he observes the progression of the debate, it is very likely that he will decide to table further amendments.

The Minister for Europe is a brainy fellow. He can make the calculation quite readily. Let us suppose that on each of the three days of parliamentary debate that we are to be permitted—these crumbs from the table which have been flicked in our direction by an arrogant and supercilious Government—there are seven hours to debate the Bill. Let us assume that there will be approximately 20 hours or 1,200 minutes of debate.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is very rarely in error in these matters, but I fear that on this occasion he may be because the proposed programme measure sets an absolute end time for each period of deliberation. My hon. Friend does not know—and nor do any of us, including the Minister—what other business may precede our deliberations on the Bill before that absolute end time to which we are now invited to agree. So does my hon. Friend agree that whatever calculations he has made may already be in error because the allocated time could be encroached upon and reduced by as yet unknown business?

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend is entirely correct in that observation. I was offering my own surmise of what we are likely to get from the Government. It is perfectly true that I might have erred on the side of optimism and generosity towards Ministers. It is perfectly possible, and indeed quite likely, that although the Government have chosen not to make any statements today, there may be statements on one or other—or both—of the two remaining days set down for considering the Bill in Committee. If that were the case, my calculation would be that we would have fewer than 20 hours of debate.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I shall give way in a moment, but I am itching to get this point out and I know that the hon. Gentleman will not hold that against me.

If we are to have 1,200 minutes for debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone has tabled no fewer than 250 amendments on massively important matters, and if the bulk of those amendments are open for debate, it logically follows that there will be fewer than five minutes to debate each of them, on the extremely generous and unlikely assumption that there will be no Divisions. If we have a completely uninterrupted debate, that is how much time we shall have.

Do Labour Members really think that that is an adequate allocation of time, when we are talking about matters of profound significance such as enhanced co-operation, the future of European defence, the arrogation of powers by the European Union and the extension of qualified majority voting? If they consider that adequate, and most of them do not bother to turn up to debate the issues at stake, I do not know why they troubled themselves to go grovelling to their electors, begging to be voted in, when as soon as they are here they are only too happy to denude the House of its remaining powers.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend take this argument a little further, but not necessarily to its ultimate conclusion, by reflecting on the fact that the important thing is not that we are debating the issue here, albeit with so few Members in the House, which I deplore, but that we are providing information for people outside, to enable them to make a decision about the merits of what is before us? It is a disgrace that such a programme motion should prevent those people from knowing.

Furthermore, on Second Reading, there was no reference whatever, to my knowledge, to the fact that the principle of the Bill was being acceded to by the House of Commons on the BBC. There was no reference either to the speeches that were made, or indeed—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a very long intervention.

Mr. Bercow: It might have been long but it was both valid and pertinent, as usual. My hon. Friend is entirely correct. All the evidence demonstrates that the public are broadly Eurosceptical, but we delude ourselves if we suppose for a moment that the mass of the British public are knowledgeable about or have yet developed an interest in the detailed contents of the treaty of Nice. It is our responsibility fully to debate the issues, to set out the arguments and to demonstrate to the public what the implications are and what the irrevocable loss of the power of self-government that the Bill inevitable entails will mean. That is what we want to do, and it is from that that Labour Members seem so suspiciously anxious to shy away.

Mr. Miller: Will the hon. Gentleman log on to his server and dig into the massive database that he carries around with him to advise the House when the Conservative Government allowed approximately 40 minutes per line for debate on a Bill? We are dealing with a 34-line Bill.

Mr. Bercow: That is an entirely spurious point, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. He has tossed me a bone, and with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I intend to maul it. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the Bill contains 31 extensions of qualified majority voting; that

there are issues of institutional reform at stake; and that the treaty entails consideration of our future defence arrangements. He recognises that there is nothing in the treaty to atone for the inadequacies of the treaty of Amsterdam in respect of the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. For the hon. Gentleman, who is well informed, knowingly to seek to skew the debate and give the impression to people following our proceedings that this is a minor, tidying measure is unworthy of him. There are major issues at stake.

Mr. Miller: Answer the question.

Mr. Bercow: I am answering the question with alacrity and gusto, and I intend to continue to do so.

Of course there is scope for difference of opinion on the subject and it is perfectly honourable to be, as the hon. Gentleman is, a Euro-federast. There is nothing dishonourable about his position—it just suffers from the demerit of being wrong. He is entitled to his view. However, we ought to be open and honest about the contents of the treaty. For the hon. Gentleman to suggest that just because a shell Bill is all that is required to give effect to the contents of the treaty—that measure itself is just a shell—is unworthy of him.

I will go one stage further and, in the process, I will probably be slapped on the wrist by the Opposition Whips, and possibly by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). It is no good the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) deploying arguments about what happened in relation to previous treaties. I was a parliamentary virgin in the last Parliament, but I am not quite a parliamentary virgin now. It is no good the hon. Gentleman chuntering about the allocation of time, for example, for the consideration of the treaty of Amsterdam or the treaty of Maastricht. I am on the record on many occasions as objecting in the greatest detail not only to the treaty of Amsterdam, but to the treaty of Maastricht. I took great risks with my chances of getting selected as a prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate at all because I thought that the Major Government were profoundly mistaken to ram through the treaty of Maastricht. I am not apologetic about that; that is my view, and I am entitled to it.

Above all, I believe passionately—more than in any other principle—in the principle of parliamentary sovereignty and national self-government. It pains me deeply whenever I see any Government—be it of the left or of the right—compromising, devaluing or discarding that principle. That is what the Minister is proposing to do today. He ought to be ashamed of himself.

4.6 pm

Peter Hain: It is tempting to reply in detail to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and others. He spoke with his usual eloquence and parliamentary skill. It is tempting because those listening to the debate may think that some horrendous crime is being committed by the Government, given the gusto with which he spoke.

The fact is that the House agreed overwhelmingly to the procedure to have timetables and programme motions for Bills such as this, so that there is sensible and serious debate on all the issues. I want that debate to take place and I want the amendments of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) to be discussed. He shows considerable diligence and expertise in tabling the amendments, and he is entitled to have them debated. Virtually the whole of the second day will be devoted to his amendments, and quite right too.

At yesterday's meeting of the Programming Committee there was a great deal of consensus. The Conservative Opposition—rightly, from their point of view, but wrongly in principle—said that they wanted an extra day for consideration. That point was registered and the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) has repeated it. However, I remind him that the Amsterdam treaty—a much more complex, far-reaching and fundamental treaty—took four days in Committee. It is appropriate and proportionate that this treaty, which is much less significant, should take three days in Committee. I did not say that it was an insignificant treaty; it is very important.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) implied that there was a detailed timetable; there is not. There is plenty of scope and few end times for the debates. If it were seen that time was running out, obviously it could be in the power of the Chairman of Ways and Means to reconvene the Programming Committee. That facility is within the rules, as decided by the House.

I say to the hon. Member for Stone that the Opposition leadership could have put him on the Programming Committee. It was not my decision, but theirs. I would have loved to see him there.

Mr. Cash: If I send the Minister the briefing amendments and the reasons for them, and if there is no opportunity to discuss them, will he get someone to reply in writing to me?

Peter Hain: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not responding to that point. I will happily do as he asks. I will be interested in the extra overtime required from the Foreign Office to deal with his points. He may want to table a parliamentary question. *[Laughter.]* On the other hand, he may not. I will read his pamphlet with great interest.

Mr. Bercow: We will test the Minister on it.

Peter Hain: I will not rise to that challenge. I look forward to receiving the briefing from the hon. Member for Stone.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 362, Noes 141.

Division No. 21] **[4.9 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick	Barrett, John
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*	Battle, John
Alexander, Douglas	Bayley, Hugh
Allan, Richard	Beard, Nigel
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*	Begg, Miss Anne
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary	Beith, Rt Hon A J
Atherton, Ms Candy	Benn, Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte	Bennett, Andrew
Bailey, Adrian	Benton, Joe
Baird, Vera	Berry, Roger
Baker, Norman	Best, Harold
Banks, Tony	Betts, Clive
Barnes, Harry	Blears, Ms Hazel

Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*

Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Angela Smith.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Greg
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan
Duncan, Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waller, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and Mr. James Gray.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, in accordance with the resolution of the Programming Committee of 10th July and pursuant to the Programme Order of 4th July 2001 (proceedings in Committee of the whole House, on consideration and on Third Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill),—

(1) proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall, so far as not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 10.00 p.m. on the third allotted day (or, if that day is a Thursday, 7.00 p.m.);

(2) those proceedings shall be taken on each of the allotted days as shown in the second column of the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at the times specified in the third column of the Table.

Table

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	Amendment No. 1	8.00 p.m. (or 5.00 p.m. if a Thursday)
	Remaining proceedings on Clause 1 and proceedings on Clauses 2 to 4	—
Second day	Remaining proceedings on Clauses 1 to 4 (so far as not previously concluded)	10.00 p.m. (or 7.00 p.m. if a Thursday)
Third day	New Clauses 4 to 6	7.00 p.m. (or 4.00 p.m. if a Thursday)
	Remaining New Clauses	10.00 p.m. (or 7.00 p.m. if a Thursday)

(3) any proceedings on consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall, so far as not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 10.00 p.m. on the fourth allotted day (or, if that day is a Thursday, 7.00 p.m.).

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

1st Allotted Day

Considered in Committee.

[Sir Alan Haselhurst *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

Incorporation of provisions of the Treaty of Nice

4.24 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 30, 32, 36 subsection (b), 37 sub-section (b) as it relates to qualified majority voting, 41, 42 as it relates to qualified majority voting, and 44.'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 2.'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 3.'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 5.'.

No. 6, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 9.'.

No. 7, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 12.'.

No. 8, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 13.'.

No. 9, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 14.'.

No. 10, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 15.'.

No. 11, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 16.'.

No. 12, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 18.'.

No. 13, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 19.'.

No. 14, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 20.'.

No. 15, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 21.'.

No. 16, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraphs 22 and 23.'.

No. 17, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 29.'.

No. 18, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 30.'.

No. 20, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 36, subsection (b)'.

No. 21, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than in the final line of Article 2, paragraph 37, the words "acting by a qualified majority.".'.

No. 22, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 41.'.

No. 23, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than in Article 2, paragraph 42 the words "acting by a qualified majority".'.

No. 24, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 44.'.

No. 25, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 4.'.

No. 26, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 6.'.

No. 27, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 7.'.

No. 57, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2 paragraph 10'.

No. 80, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 3, paragraph 2'.

No. 81, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 3, paragraph 3'.

No. 82, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 3, paragraph 4'.

No. 106, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 4, paragraph 6'.

No. 107, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 4, paragraph 7'.

No. 233, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than in Article 2 paragraph 4 the words "with the exception of aspects relating to family law".'.

No. 28, in page 1, line 12, after "occasion", insert—

'other than the Protocol on Article 67 of the Treaty establishing the European Community'.

New clause 11—*Implications for regions of amendment to Article 161 TEC—*

'Prior to 2007, Her Majesty's Government shall lay before Parliament a report assessing the implication for the regions of the United Kingdom of the changes provided for by Article 2, paragraph 14, of the Nice Treaty, amending Article 161 TEC.'.

Mr. Spring: Today, we start our detailed discussions on the provisions of the Bill, which indeed are wide ranging. It is fitting that our proceedings should start with the issue of qualified majority voting, as its extension is a dominant theme throughout much of the Bill and the treaty.

Amendment No. 1 is a catch-all provision covering extensions of QMV in the treaty establishing the European Community, over which the United Kingdom does not have an opt-out. The extensions are covered in separate amendments tabled for discussion today, although right hon. and hon. Members may be reassured to learn that I do not intend to speak to all of them.

During all our discussions in the Committee, we shall try to measure this and other provisions against one yardstick: will they assist in the development of a modern, enlarged, diverse Europe that enhances the security and prosperity of the peoples of Europe? It is important that we consider the effect of the Bill on Britain itself, but the

treaty is for the whole of the European Union. The effect of the treaty on the whole of Europe must be our dominant consideration.

We contend that while letting Britain down in the Nice negotiations the Government also let down the rest of Europe. The approach taken at Nice is no more in the interests of people elsewhere in Europe, especially those in the applicant states, than it is in the interests of the people of Britain.

A little more than three months ago, the Foreign Affairs Committee produced a report on European enlargement and the treaty of Nice. It concluded:

"The Treaty of Nice has proved to be much more substantial than the United Kingdom Government and others initially envisaged."

Does not that encapsulate the result of the Government's lack of leadership at Nice? Is not it inevitable that when our Government fail to put the case for reform, other Governments will fill the vacuum? Do Labour Members take pride in the fact that it was their Government who were taken by surprise by an agenda set by others? What does that say about the negotiating skills of the Ministers who represented us?

The remainder of the Select Committee's conclusion should be to the forefront of our minds as we consider the future:

"The 2004 IGC looks certain to be very much more substantial still, going to the very heart of the balance between the EU's governmental and parliamentary institutions and those of the member states."

Whenever the Government look as though they are about to repeat the mistakes they made at Nice—playing down the likelihood of a substantial agenda, refusing to show leadership and being taken by surprise by the leadership shown by others—we shall endeavour to remind them of the Select Committee's conclusion. It is crucial that Britain is proactively involved in the debate leading up to the intergovernmental conference.

Today, we are examining a particular result of the Government's lack of leadership: the extension of qualified majority voting in 31 articles or 35 areas. As I said, we should assess every measure taken at Nice against one main yardstick: is the measure right for a diverse, enlarged Europe that will be acceptable to the citizens of member states?

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): For the sake of clarity, will the hon. Gentleman tell the Committee whether he opposes the extension of QMV in principle or only in specific areas?

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking that question. He may not be aware that in our 1997 general election manifesto we made it plain that we would not extend QMV and that we would not be in favour of it. That principle remains. We also want to draw a line to enable a movement back to national Parliaments and to their authority. The main threat to the EU is the disconnection of the peoples of Europe from the EU's institutions and structures. If that disconnection persists, that is the route the EU should take—not the one-way route to integration.

4.30 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Are we to understand from what the hon. Gentleman has just said that if it were demonstrated that it was in the interests of the United Kingdom and of the European Union that there should be an extension of qualified majority voting in a particular area, the hon. Gentleman would still not be in favour of it?

Mr. Spring: I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has obviously misunderstood me. We want to draw a line to say that powers must be returned to national Parliaments, and we wanted that line to be drawn at Nice. I am sure that is difficult for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to understand, given the almost unbelievable attitude of Liberal Democrats to the whole political integration process in the European Union.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring: I shall make some progress.

We must assess every measure proposed at Nice against the yardstick of what is acceptable to the citizens of member states. That is a huge challenge for us all, and if we do not address it the success and viability of the European Union will be in peril. I hope that the Liberal Democrats in particular understand the difficulties of that.

The wide extension of QMV is one of the Nice provisions that fails that test most graphically. Some of the items in the list have the potential to be particularly damaging in themselves, but all of them, even the ones characterised by the Government as relatively minor, indicate a direction towards uniform integration that is absolutely the wrong one for a Europe on the verge of enlargement to take.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) pointed out on Second Reading, the idea that harmony and unity in a diverse, enlarged Europe can be increased by extending

"the areas in which the majority can ride roughshod over the wishes of a minority"

only has to be stated to be seen to be completely ludicrous. As he said,

"That is a recipe for discord, not harmony. It is a recipe for division, not unity."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 279.]

The central and eastern European applicant states are among those who have the most to lose from a centralised approach and a lack of respect for diversity.

We are told—wrongly, of course—that the areas in which QMV is being extended are relatively minor: for example, nothing but the pension arrangements for the Court of Auditors, to use the Prime Minister's mistaken example that he gave in December in the House. If that were true, they would hardly be essential prerequisites for enlargement and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) brilliantly and accurately pointed out in the House last week, the two arguments used for the Nice treaty—that it is, at the same time, essential and inconsequential—are mutually exclusive and utterly contradictory.

I turn to a couple of specific aspects of QMV to illustrate our concerns; I will return to them in more detail later if there is the opportunity to do so.

First, I should like to address the extension of QMV in article 13, relating to incentive measures in the area of anti-discrimination. That is covered by amendments

[Mr. Spring]

Nos. 1 and 3. The agreed wording makes it clear that any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of member states is excluded, so what precisely is meant by "Community incentive measures"? Perhaps the Minister could enlighten us, although his predecessor certainly could not. When asked at the European Scrutiny Committee, after the Nice treaty had been agreed, what the new incentive measures on anti-discrimination would amount to, the then Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), replied,

"I do not know. It has just been agreed".

Is not that precisely the problem? Why do Ministers persist in agreeing to open-ended extensions of qualified majority voting without having the first idea about what proposals might follow? It is an extraordinary way to negotiate on behalf of the peoples of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Would my hon. Friend care to cast his mind back to our exchanges on Second Reading last week? He will recall that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) believed that it was right that QMV should apply on anti-discrimination measures and that there should be a formal European Union position. Would my hon. Friend, by contrast, not agree with me that important though anti-discrimination policy undoubtedly is, it is pre-eminently a matter for democratically elected members of the British legislature and is no business whatever of the European Union?

Mr. Spring: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, but we must accept that the position of the Liberal Democrat party, of which the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) is a member, is to have a written constitution for the European Union, to remove further the powers of national Parliaments and to have much greater centralisation. The Liberal Democrats have consistently pursued that theme whenever the issue arises.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring *indicated assent.*

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned me, after all. It is just as well that I do not have a persecution complex, because he does not seem to be able to complete a sentence without mentioning me or my party. The purpose of a constitution would be to ensure that the rights, roles and responsibilities of EU institutions were set down clearly and unequivocally, enabling people to understand what the EU is about. The hon. Gentleman ought to be in favour of such clarity.

Mr. Spring: I am perfectly satisfied that the laws on discrimination, and so on, that govern the people of the United Kingdom adequately protect them. If we continue to centralise the structures of the EU, the process of alienation of the people of the EU from its structures and institutions will only grow worse. I find it extraordinary that that is not understood, particularly after the Irish referendum.

Mr. Doug Henderson *rose—*

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston) *rose—*

Mr. Spring: I propose to make to a little more progress.

The treaty of Nice extends qualified majority voting in article 100, which covers measures to be taken in the event of severe difficulties in the supply of certain products and Community financial assistance to member states in severe difficulties. That is covered by amendment No. 5, and it is also included in amendment No. 1. Perhaps the Minister would now like to explain what that provision does. What are the benefits for Britain of that extension of QMV?

On the face of it, that extension allows fairly sweeping powers. Subsection (1) of article 100 allows the Council of Ministers, now by QMV, to

"decide upon the measures appropriate to the economic situation, in particular if severe difficulties arise in the supply of certain products".

When asked, the Minister's predecessor said that that did not, for example, extend competence over North sea oil reserves. We can be grateful for that, but the provision was used for Council directive 1998/93/EC, which amended a directive imposing an obligation on member states of the EEC to maintain minimum stocks of crude oil and petroleum products. Whatever the merits of that decision, and without the article extending competence over the supply of a particular reserve, could it not nevertheless be used to pass further legislation on such issues in future—this time by QMV?

Will the Government list which products fall under the scope of article 100? Who will measure the so-called severe difficulties, and how will they be measured? The second subsection states:

"Where a Member State is in difficulties or is seriously threatened with severe difficulties caused by natural disasters or exceptional occurrences beyond its control, the Council, acting by a qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission, may grant, under certain conditions, Community financial assistance to the Member State concerned".

Will the Minister tell us what was in Ministers' minds when they agreed to abandon the veto on that? Who will define what constitutes an exceptional occurrence beyond the control of a member state?

On Second Reading, the Minister made great play of the fact that article 100, as revised, will be subject, under declaration 6, to the 2000–06 financial perspective and the "no bail-out rule" laid down in article 103, which states that a member state shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of other member state Governments or other member state public bodies, except in the case of mutual financial guarantees.

The fact that the Government have to defend their decision to extend QMV on the basis of what it does not do rather than on what it does says a great deal about the measure. If decisions that are made under the article are meant to respect budgetary ceilings, does that not still provide large room for manoeuvre? If the article is not meant to be used to bail out the commitments of other

member state Governments or public bodies, what about non-public bodies? If the events are so truly exceptional, why is this extension of QMV essential for enlargement, which is the stock reason for the Nice treaty? Are we expecting more exceptional occurrences in an enlarged Europe? Will the decision-making process grind to a halt without QMV?

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that it was right to extend QMV when the Conservatives were in office, but that it should not be increased in future. The structure of his argument is familiar because it was deployed when the Conservatives opposed increases in tobacco tax and the fuel duty escalator. The difference is that his resistance to extending QMV now is ideologically driven. He has given no practical justification for his argument. Is he really saying that even if there is practical merit in extending QMV, he will resist it?

Mr. Spring: I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman. I have been trying to establish the fact that there is no basis to extend QMV in this case without a considered Government view, and all we have heard is multiple contradiction.

If we have a policy of one size fits all in an enlarged European Community and larger countries gang up on smaller ones by using QMV, the huge increase in EU member states will put fresh strains on administration and structure. If we do not seek protection we will increase the strain that we are under and land ourselves in considerable difficulties. I would have been much happier had the hon. Gentleman stood up and said that the Government fought to return powers to the national Parliament where there can be proper scrutiny to connect us once again with the British people. The fact that the Government have not done that is what is wrong in principle.

Roger Casale: Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear whether he and his party refuse to accept any extension of QMV in principle?

Mr. Spring: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not here when I cited our manifesto commitment, which made it plain that we would not seek any extension. In the process of constant negotiation in the EU, we would want to return powers to national Parliaments. That is the crucial objective. If Labour Members who want the European Union to survive and prosper do not accept that the democratic deficit will undermine the structures and success of the EU, they do not understand the fundamental problems.

Mr. Doug Henderson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring: In a few minutes.

Several appointments will be subject to a qualified majority vote, and some are far from minor. The high representative for common, foreign and security policy will be subject to QMV under article 207(2) TEC, which is covered by amendments Nos. 1 and 14. That raises the possibility of the EU's two permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—Britain and France—being outvoted on the appointment of the EU's foreign policy representative. Article 214 TEC covers the appointment of the Commission President, which is the subject of amendments Nos. 1 and 16. Does the Minister not agree that that appointment is vital? Without the veto, for example, Britain under the Conservatives would not have been able to prevent the appointment of Jean-Luc Dehaene.

4.45 pm

Article 214, as revised by Nice, states that the Council shall act by qualified majority in adopting the list of commissioners. That is meant to be

"drawn up in accordance with the proposals made by each Member State",

but that provides no guarantee that the list will be submitted to the Council. Will the Minister tell the House why it is necessary to extend QMV on that matter, or will he give the House a guarantee that no vote on future commissioners will be taken by QMV on the basis of the ideology of the commissioners concerned and against the wishes of the member states that are appointing them?

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale), the hon. Gentleman appeared to argue that it was necessary not to allow an extension of QMV because it would allow large nations to gang up on small ones, yet with his current example he appears to be making the opposite argument—he opposes extension because it would allow everyone else to gang up on a couple of the large nations, namely Britain and France. Will he make clear which of the two reasons worries him most, or is it the case that he is opposed to any extension of QMV and any old argument will do?

Mr. Spring: Again, I am disappointed—the hon. Lady does not understand the principle that we are trying to establish. We want a line to be drawn about the remorseless process of political integration that is occurring under the EU, to which the Government appear to subscribe in the absence of any clear alternative. We Conservatives, on the other hand, have set out a clear vision of a much more flexible and diverse EU wherein the one-size-fits-all policy—an ossified example of 1950s and 1960s thinking, frozen in time—is finished for good. Ours is a conception of an EU that should work and our amendments to the Bill represent part of that vision.

Later, I shall speak in detail to new clause 11, which deals with extensions of the social chapter to structural fund issues. For now, does the Minister accept that the loss of the veto would leave Britain powerless to stop British regions losing out under the provision? The amendment merely asks the Government to be open and honest about the effect of the proposed change on the regions of this country.

Originally, the Government clearly opposed measures such as those on enhanced co-operation, but they gave way on QMV while offering contradictory justifications, saying that the matters given away were either necessary for the smooth functioning of the EU or unimportant.

I hope that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends will speak in this afternoon's Committee consideration of a highly important series of issues. I conclude by saying that the confusion arises from a Government who, unlike the Governments of so many of our European partners,

[Mr. Spring]

have no clear view of the architecture of the EU or of what it should be in the next few years and decades to come.

Mr. Doug Henderson: As several Members observed on Second Reading, the Conservatives are clearly in some difficulty. I expected the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) to say that, given that difficulty, he would be guided by his party's 2001 manifesto, but he told us at the start of his speech that he was still being guided by the Conservatives' 1997 manifesto.

Mr. Miller: More like 1897.

Mr. Henderson: If my knowledge of history serves me, right, that slightly predates the establishment of the European Union.

My electors, watching this afternoon's debate on cable television, will see the hint of hypocrisy that tinges the Conservative party's position on qualified majority voting. Avid watchers of such debates will remember that under the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty, many extensions were made to QMV. I hate to repeat a point that has been made many times in the Chamber during debates on these matters, but it needs to be said that in the Single European Act, Conservative Members agreed to 12 extensions of QMV. They knew at the time that if those extensions were not included, the Act would not work because countries would just say, "We're sorry, this issue is not in our interest, bang bang." At the same time, Conservative Members do not say that the Single European Act is the most important thing in the EU, but that it is the only thing that matters in the EU. They therefore recognise the need for QMV in the only thing that they regard as a virtue of the EU.

Mr. Hendrick: My hon. Friend said that the Conservatives agreed to 12 measures on QMV in the Single European Act. I remind him that they agreed to some 30 such measures in the Maastricht treaty. Does that not smack of hypocrisy?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend is right, and I am grateful for his foresight of my next point. The Conservative party was not unanimous about the Maastricht treaty but, to be fair, most Conservative Members recognised that the treaty was essential if Europe was to hold together, be stable and develop, and accepted that obligations were involved. One obligation was that Parliament could not have exclusive control over decisions on certain issues and that sovereignty had to be pooled on issues where an EU view was needed to prevent a country from vetoing any proposal that it found to be against its interests or that it did not want.

Electors in my constituency and elsewhere who are watching our debate will say that there is at least some hypocrisy in the Conservative position. If there was hypocrisy in the past, there is neanderthalism today. Opposition Members have their heads in the sand. Even when the tiger is coming up behind, the ostrich is still bending down. Essentially, in their proposals, the Conservatives are saying, "We don't care how practical a proposal is; we don't even care if it's only in Britain's interest. Under no circumstances will we agree to QMV on any issue at any time."

Mr. Bercow: I am exceptionally grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because he has blood on his hands from piloting the treaty of Amsterdam in 1998. I am increasingly frustrated by his contribution. Will he confirm his recollection of 19 January 1998, when we debated in detail some of these matters, including subsidiarity and proportionality, that many of us made clear our consistent opposition to QMV in both the treaty of Maastricht and the treaty of Amsterdam?

Mr. Henderson: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, who has reminded me of the divisions that were apparent in the Conservative party three years ago on this very subject. I do not think that the position has changed; if anything, the divisions have become deeper and Conservative Members connect less to the real issues.

I come back to my earlier point: even if there is a proposal that is clearly in Britain's interest, the hon. Gentleman is against any extension of QMV, even if it wipes out an industry in Britain or causes enormous environmental damage to part of our country. He is prepared to lay waste to industry and the environment in defence of his political and ideological position. He is entitled to adopt that position, but the public have a right to know exactly where he and some of his hon. Friends are coming from.

Someone said to me, "The Conservative party is finished if it cannot persuade parts of the financial services industry that it is in their interest to have a Conservative Government in Britain." There is clear evidence of that in some of the attitudes that the Conservative party has struck on QMV, and it is apparent to any operator in the City of London or any British operator elsewhere in the EU or in other parts of Britain.

If a position makes sense and is adopted by consensus in the EU, one country should not be able to block negotiations with other major players in the financial services industry, probably in the United States or the far east. That is tantamount to destroying the Single European Act as it relates to financial services. With the enlargement of the European Union, all sorts of prospects appear on the horizon. Surely one country should not be able to block a sensible proposal.

When EU negotiators enter into talks with other countries on financial services, they should have a clear mandate that has been agreed, after discussion, by QMV. If we adopted the position advanced from the Conservative Front Bench, such negotiations would not take place at all, as there is every likelihood that the proposal would be vetoed by one country that did not stand to gain as much as the others or that would perhaps lose a little. That would undermine the operation of the Single European Act in respect of financial services.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: I am happy to give way to the successor to my pair.

Mr. Francois: The ostrich is about to counter-attack. The hon. Gentleman argues that if any matter is subject

to QMV, negotiations may lead to some agreement, but that if a veto is retained there may never be agreement. Is it not an odd argument that we cannot be involved in negotiations unless QMV operates? Surely we can be involved in negotiations, and if there is a proposal to which we object, we can use our veto, although most of the time we may not choose to do that. His argument is daft.

Mr. Henderson: With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I think that the financial services industry in the EU will understand my argument. We will not even get to the starting gate for negotiations with the Americans or the Japanese unless we can firm up a European position. If Latvia or Germany—any country, regardless of size—did not support a particular piece of trade liberalisation, there would be no negotiation whatever. That is the point that I have been trying to establish.

Mr. Hendrick: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Henderson: I do not want to hog the field.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again. Does he consider, as I do, that the view of the Conservative party is extremely unpatriotic? Under the Conservative Government, markets in this country were liberalised and opened to companies from other countries. We are considering a measure that would push through the liberalisation of financial services across Europe. British banks and financial institutions are vulnerable to those in other countries, but because of the intransigence of one or two member states we cannot push through agreement to ensure that British companies can acquire French or German companies, particularly banks and insurance companies. Is it not unpatriotic of the Opposition to block the mechanisms that would allow that?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. What matters is not what I think, but what the electorate think. The electorate made their judgment in 1997 and in the last general election about which political party was patriotic.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: I have been more generous than others were towards me when I tried to intervene. I shall see how we go on the next point, then I may be tempted to give way again.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk made a silly and jingoistic point when he said that if the veto was removed in respect of the rules and tasks of the structural and cohesion funds, some of our regions could lose out. That is a misunderstanding of how the structural and cohesion fund industry works. We are not the main recipients, and that will remain the case, quite fairly, because others need more help than we do. Higher aggregate demand in the economies of those other countries encourages our exporters, so it is in our long-term trading interests for countries in the eastern part of the European Union to develop their economies.

5 pm

The motivating force for establishing QMV in respect of such funding was the negotiating attitude adopted by the Iberian countries and Greece. They said, "Unless we get our way on structural and cohesion funds, everything else will be disrupted, not only in this negotiation, but in others, whether in Council meetings or in relation to particular treaties." I have been a negotiator in my time, so I know that that card can be played sometimes, but not for ever. Anybody who plays it for too long will be shut out and left without influence.

If one wants to be part of the building of a European ideal and the European economic and political process, one must make a positive contribution. The Iberian countries have understood that, which is why they have been tempted to accept a QMV decision, even though changes are occurring and they will not continue to be the main recipients of such funds. Once enlargement occurs, for the foreseeable future, other countries will receive a substantial part of the funding. The hon. Member for West Suffolk should reconsider the matter before he makes another point about it.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: I do not see why I should, but I shall be more generous to the hon. Gentleman than he was to me.

Mr. Spring: I apologise if I did not give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that he will agree that I gave way a great deal to many other Labour Members.

The hon. Gentleman may have slightly misunderstood the point that I was trying to make. We are calling for openness in the Government's approach so that the facts can be established. The Library has concluded that, on all available evidence, a significant number of areas in the United Kingdom that currently have objective 1 status would lose out. We should know what the Government's view is, and that is the basis of our proposal. It has nothing to do with jingoism; we merely seek some openness and honesty from the Government for a change.

Mr. Henderson: The precise terms that have been used refer to that aim, but the hon. Gentleman raised this issue: some British areas might lose if the veto is removed. We cannot continue to proceed on that basis. If we want a sensible system to disburse social funding, there must be some fairness and an understanding that fairness must be taken into account. One has to make progress, but one cannot do so if all participants veto every little bit that they do not like. Enlargement would not happen if that attitude prevailed, and anyone who has ever been at such negotiations or acted on behalf of potential recipients in their constituencies knows that that is so. There must be give and take on all such issues.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that small countries would be discriminated against if QMV were extended, but I do not think that that is correct. If small countries are discriminated against by QMV, discrimination must already be occurring under the Single European Act before extension. He suggested that abolition of the veto means that small countries will be discriminated against. That is not how it works. People in the European Union with common interests put together a proposition, whether

[Mr. Henderson]

it is an environmental one from the Scandinavian countries or an industrial one from the French and British. They then try to persuade other countries to accept it. There are big and small countries that have an interest and take part, but others say that the matter does not affect them and that they will flow with the decision that is reached. The idea that this extension discriminates against smaller countries while the 42 extensions to which the Conservative Government agreed do not is silly. The hon. Member for West Suffolk has been coaxed into adopting that stance because of his position.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The hon. Gentleman draws a distinction between different sorts of treaties without paying heed to their contents. The Single European Act is primarily about increasing trading opportunities and competition. The Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties are primarily about European government. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who has just walked in, again displays his complete ignorance of the treaties' contents by shaking his head. I am glad that the Minister for Europe understands those matters.

Qualified majority voting makes a substantial difference in the context of the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties. That is one of the main reasons why the Irish people voted against the Nice treaty, which is about QMV and larger states bulldozing smaller ones.

Mr. Henderson: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. The Under-Secretary should know about the treaty because he was well coached in the past. I am confident that he knows a lot more about it than me.

I do not accept the point of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). The Single European Act provided for extensions of QMV and dealt with economic issues such as building a single market. The Amsterdam, Maastricht and Nice treaties cover some similar issues. Financial services negotiations with third parties are a matter of single market economics. Some aspects of the treaties did not cover economics, but that is the case with all treaties. I understand the point that he tried to make, but I do not accept that it is empirically correct.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already; I should give somebody else a chance.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Henderson: I cannot resist giving way to my right hon. Friend.

Joyce Quin: The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) pointed out that he voted for the Single European Act. Perhaps he will not mind my reminding hon. Members that during the debate on that measure, he said that the dangers of QMV were exaggerated.

Mr. Henderson: I am always glad to give way to my right hon. Friend, but I am especially glad this afternoon. She made an important point.

If enlargement is to happen, the Nice treaty must be adopted. Those who have examined it know that without QMV, there is no treaty. As we move towards enlargement, QMV is essential for all the reasons that have been given in the debate.

The treaty will not be the end of extending QMV, but I believe that many existing provisions will be used more often. They will form the bulk of QMV in future. However, some modification and development will be required and further proposals will be made. I am not ashamed to say that, and I do not hide from it. As information technology and environmental issues develop, the Community may believe that decisions should be made through majority voting so that no individual country has a veto.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech. Does not it appear on the surface that majority voting favours the larger nations, especially Germany?

Mr. Henderson: No. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I do not think that that is the case. The large nations such as France, Germany and Britain might say, "We must be able to block a proposal under qualified majority voting if we feel it is against our collective interest and the European Union's interest." However, that situation hardly ever arises; indeed, I do not know whether it has ever arisen. I need to check the history books.

More normally, countries with a common interest ask the Commission to initiate a proposal or to respond to a proposal from the Commission. They then build support for their case, and if they do not get it, they usually back off and have another go, review, modify or whatever. If they get the support that they need, they try to reach unanimity before QMV is raised. However, if it proves difficult to establish unanimity, one member state will rely on QMV. Member states will try to build support among small and large countries. I do not think that small countries are discriminated against.

Proposals such as the measure to review the rules on the tasks of the structural and cohesion funds are an important development for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. I can foresee a situation in which there could be quite a ganging-up against the Republic and Northern Ireland—because they have both been heavy recipients of funding in the past—to support a particular distribution of structural funds elsewhere. If there were a veto, it might mean that there would be no agreement, or that the UK and Ireland had to give way to protect their position. With QMV, there will be a more balanced approach in which a largish group of nations will make decisions on the distribution of structural funds. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will gain from that process.

I have made the points that I wanted to make, and I shall leave it to others to speak further.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The speech by the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) was pretty brave stuff. He was reflecting on what we were invited to understand was his party's clear and unequivocal position. However, any reference to the views of that apostate, as we might describe him, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who is currently a candidate for the leadership of the official Opposition, was absent from any part of the hon. Gentleman's speech.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's attitude towards the Nice treaty is, I fear, a long way away from that expressed on behalf of the official Opposition by the hon. Member for West Suffolk—and the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not the only one of whom that is true. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) made it clear last week in a most illuminating article in the newspaper of record, *The Times*, why he was supporting the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe, and evinced a certain amount of embarrassment about the arguments that he had had to advance about the Nice treaty during the election campaign.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk frequently said how disappointed he was, and I confess that I, too, am pretty disappointed, that we have not heard from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe—or from the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), because he was the Whip charged with the responsibility of taking the legislation on the Maastricht treaty through the House of Commons. That shows that gratitude rarely lasts long in politics. All the way through that process, the Liberal Democrats supported the then Government, assisting them in getting the legislation on the Maastricht treaty on to the statute book. There were no accusations at that time from the Conservatives that the Liberal Democrats were overly committed to European integration. Indeed, they were happy to exploit our commitment towards Europe.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk has made a brave statement of the case that he would like the Opposition to put forward, but in truth it is a case sustained neither by history nor by contemporary events in his party.

Mr. Spring: Bearing in mind the comments of many Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates in the recent general election, I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not suggesting that there is any unanimity of view among Liberal Democrats. There certainly is not. The issue of how we approach our relationship with the European Union produces different views and attitudes right across the political spectrum, and right across the breadth of the political parties in this country. There is nothing new about that.

5.15 pm

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. A little while ago he was accusing the Liberal Democrats of being hell-bent on further integration. Now he says that we are split on the topic. If we are split on the topic, we can hardly be hell-bent on it.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose—*

Mr. Campbell: I do not propose to give way at the moment.

Mr. Cash: The Liberal Democrats will be smashed to atoms by going in different directions.

Mr. Campbell: If I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to try to push me in a different direction, I would be pretty confident that I could hold my own course.

Mr. Redwood: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I shall not give way to the right hon. Gentleman at the moment, although I may do in due course.

What I find difficult to understand in the attitude of the official Opposition, as evidenced by the amendment, is their argument that there should be no extension of qualified majority voting in any circumstances, because it is time to bring powers back from Brussels to domestic Parliaments. I could understand it if they proposed to approach the issue of qualified majority voting on a case-by-case, merit-by-merit basis, and said that when they examined the treaty of Nice and the extensions of QMV therein, they objected to one, three, five, six, seven or any other particular number of the extensions

I thought that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) put the question very clearly indeed. On matters such as the liberalisation of financial services and transport, how can it possibly be in the interests of the United Kingdom to oppose qualified majority voting when our economy would benefit and our interests would be served? Arguing against a particular provision on the ground that it does not serve those interests seems entirely logical, but I do not find it easy to understand the necessity to argue against qualified majority voting in all circumstances, even when it is demonstrably in the interests of the people whom we represent.

Mr. Francois: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: Not for the moment.

What lies behind that is the suggestion that with qualified majority voting, the interests of the United Kingdom are irreparably damaged on a regular basis. The fact is that in the past two years Britain has been outvoted in the Council of Ministers on only five occasions, while in the same period Germany was outvoted 20 times and France eight times. Those statistics do not suggest that the rest of Europe is somehow ganging up on us and damaging our significant domestic interests so much that we cannot consider the extension of qualified majority voting in future on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Redwood: I do not understand why the right hon. and learned Gentleman failed to understand my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who speaks for the official Opposition with great clarity. He put forward the proposition that we do not wish more powers to pass to Brussels. That was agreed by every Conservative Member present—a goodly number of us—because we believe very strongly in that case. Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman understand that the United Kingdom has not been outvoted recently because we have such a craven Government, who never stand up for the British national interest because they do not want to test the system, as they know that they would lose the vote?

Mr. Campbell: There may be still be time for another leadership candidate, Sir Alan.

[Mr. Campbell]

The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to his view that the Government are craven. I think that they have demonstrated timidity over Europe, and that the case for a single European currency should have been argued with much more vehemence than it has been so far. However, the position that the Opposition seek to adopt on qualified majority voting simply does not stand up to any logical scrutiny.

Reference has already been made to the Single European Act, and I have referred to Maastricht. It is interesting to consider the attitude of the Government of the day—a Conservative Government—to some of these issues. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) is not present. I understand that he has other responsibilities, but it is notable that when talking about the process of signing up for the Maastricht treaty, he said that

"qualified majority voting has enabled us to get some liberalising measures through against protectionist resistance by some of our partners."—[*Official Report*, 11 June 1990; Vol. 174, c. 103.]

I cannot think of a better way of encapsulating the value of qualified majority voting. It allows us to seek, so far as we can, and as quickly as we can, the kind of liberal Europe that is in our interests, and enables us to overcome protectionist resistance from those who may believe that they have some special interest that must be defended to the death by the exercise of a veto. If we have an enlarged European Union, which we all apparently want, qualified majority voting will be necessary to ensure that it functions, and that it does so in a way that accords with our domestic interests.

Mr. Bercow: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that there is a clear conceptual difference between the acceptance of qualified majority voting for the purpose of creating or bolstering a single market and dismantling barriers, and for the adoption of policies that interfere with the autonomy of nation states in relation to the labour market? The two are radically different.

Mr. Campbell: I would accept that the hon. Gentleman's argument had some force if he were not supporting shadow Ministers who say that there should be no extension of qualified majority voting in any circumstances, and that a line must be drawn in the sand. If there are circumstances in which it can be shown that it is in our interest to cross that line, I cannot understand why it is necessary to maintain a blanket ban on any extension.

It is perfectly reasonable to have an argument, as we did on Second Reading, about whether it is appropriate to have QMV with regard to discrimination, but I part company with the Conservative party, and in particular with its Front Benchers, over the idea that we should take a blanket approach and not have an argument on the merits.

Mr. Cash: As on the programme motion, I find that I am in agreement with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, although on a limited point. Amendment No. 233 deals with the incredibly important question of child abduction. Under the treaty—at the specific behest of Germany and Austria, as I understand it—family law is subjected to unanimity. There are certain cases that lead me to believe that in this particular instance, qualified majority voting is the only way of breaking the stranglehold, and that is why I tabled that amendment.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, but he will forgive me if I ask why he did not make it to the hon. Member for West Suffolk, because it drives a horse and cart through the position adopted by the official Opposition.

Qualified majority voting is now extended to 31 articles, over half of which refer to technical portions of the treaty, dealing with appointments, rules of procedure and the management of the European Parliament and European committees and courts. A further four of the articles refer to areas that Britain has opted out of. Of the remaining 10, the extensions are in such areas as anti-discrimination practice, support for industry and environmental measures. Exercising my best judgment, I cannot believe that those are matters of such fundamental constitutional importance that the United Kingdom's interests can be properly regulated only if we maintain our veto over them. That is why I cannot support the amendment.

Mr. Miller: I am following the theme started by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) was a little cruel to suggest that the Opposition were being hypocritical. I think that they are simply so confused that they are facing several ways at the same time. That seems to be the case with everything on which we have to deal with the official Opposition in this House.

I had the pleasure of being in Nice the week before the treaty negotiations, speaking at a conference involving a wide range of groups from the applicant countries. The only negative point is that to get to Nice, I would certainly advise hon. Members never to fly Sabena, which seems to leave things around Europe, including my luggage.

Interesting points were raised at the meeting by a number of the smaller countries, which were represented by people from outside the main political arena, and by people representing businesses and aspects of industry in their respective nations. They did not see how it would be possible to make the new Europe work effectively without some change in the voting patterns,

There was some merit in the earlier arguments of the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), but that slipped away. As I understood him, he argued that, as a matter of principle, no extension of QMV could make sense. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North said, it is blindingly obvious that within the future evolution of the European institutions, in some circumstances it will be easily agreed that there are matters to which it would be beneficial to extend QMV.

I am totally confused by the Opposition position. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North said, they rely on the 1997 manifesto rejection of any extension of QMV. The hon. Member for West Suffolk said that the Government did a bad job in Nice, but did not go on to explain the logic by which, on a case-by-case basis, the extension of QMV was a bad thing. If there is an ideological principle I have yet to hear

it. If the case is based simply on dogma, perhaps nothing has changed in that wing of the Conservative party, as represented by Mrs. Thatcher all those years ago. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] Conservative Members are trying to erase their memories. If Mrs. Thatcher is being airbrushed out, the Conservative party really is moving to the right.

Last week I referred to earlier negotiations involving Peter Carrington and Ian Gilmour, and to their conflicts with the then Prime Minister. The dogma has now reached a point of total and utter absurdity. Now the official argument seems to be that, as a matter of principle, QMV is a bad thing. That is all we have heard from the official Opposition.

5.30 pm

The Opposition have not recognised that in Nice the British Government insisted that certain issues should be decided by unanimity. Britain has, of course, a veto over such issues as taxation, social security, border controls, defence, the financing of the EU and future changes to treaties. That is a good, solid, principled position because in all those areas no new rules can be introduced unless the British Government agree.

Let us start with what the Nice treaty actually says. If the hon. Member for West Suffolk had presented to the House a logical reason why the Government should not have given ground on any of the articles in the Nice treaty, perhaps the House would listen more readily to the Conservatives.

Mr. Spring: I did.

Mr. Miller: Frankly, I did not follow the hon. Gentleman's logic. He started by saying that he was opposed to the extension of QMV as a matter of principle.

Mr. Bercow: Does the hon. Gentleman concede that the rejection of qualified majority voting in respect of taxation, by this Government as by the Conservative Government, is not of itself a guarantee of the retention of sovereignty in relation to tax matters? That is transparently obvious to most observers. As proof of that point, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the fact that the Paymaster General has voluntarily chucked away no fewer than 85 tax advantages that this country enjoyed, simply to satisfy the European Union.

Mr. Miller: We could get into a deep philosophical argument about definitions of sovereignty here. Perhaps it is time that the nation became engaged in such a debate and we moved away from some of the trivial nonsense that the Conservative party seeks to portray as definitions of sovereignty. The hon. Gentleman and I will, I am sure, agree on one thing: Britain still has a veto over taxation.

Mr. Bercow: That does not get us very far.

Mr. Miller: If we can also agree on the day of the week, that will be two things we can agree on.

The Government have spelled out the key areas on which they have not given ground, and it would be helpful to hear in detail—point by point—from the Opposition their reasons why the Government should not have given ground on the other measures. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) mentioned 31 articles that comprised 35 measures. The Opposition therefore have many opportunities to find a flaw in the arguments of my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. However, that will be difficult because 11 of the measures deal with the streamlining of appointments and procedures, four deal with international negotiations and agreements, to give Europe a stronger voice in the world, and six deal with improvements in the effectiveness of EU spending—perhaps the Opposition are worried about those. A further five will help business to complete the single market, and three more will help individuals. All the measures have specific phrases associated with them in the treaty and the supplementary text. Perhaps if the official Opposition could leave dogma behind and deal with the principles, the nation would be better served by them.

In conclusion—

Mr. Bercow: Yes.

Mr. Miller: I see that the hon. Gentleman and I agree about something else.

In conclusion, I return to the observations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North. He said that in some sectors—he cited the example of information technology—we may have to reach agreements with our European partners. Those agreements would be for the benefit of Europe's competitiveness, as they would enable us to move faster than, for example, the Asiatic countries or north America.

Although we have a broad idea of what will happen to the IT industry over the next few years, none of us can predict its future exactly, and we cannot envisage what its long-term structure will be. As Europe may have to move faster than its competitors to maintain its edge over them, it would be absurd for a Government not to leave the door open to the possible extension of QMV.

Yet the Opposition appear to believe that, as a matter of principle and irrespective of what might happen in the future, their 1997 gospel that there should be no extension of QMV must be adhered to. That is an absurd position, and it cannot be logically sustained. It merely typifies the naive view of a very split Opposition.

Mr. Cash: Amendment No. 1 focuses on qualified majority voting, which covers a series of articles. That puts me in a quandary, as each of those articles merits discussion on its own account. QMV has two aspects. On the one hand, there is the problem of its practical application, which requires changes to domestic British legislation; on the other, there is a matter of principle.

As I pointed out in my interventions on the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), QMV raises a matter of principle with a difference. I certainly voted for the Single European Act, and Britain adopted QMV on a variety of matters when it joined the European Community in 1972.

There are a number of amendments to which I need to speak, so I hope that the House will forgive me if I deal with them all in this speech. I shall be as brief as possible, but I do not want to jump around from one subject to another. I shall try to deal with the amendments in the order in which they have been selected for debate.

[Mr. Cash]

I shall begin with the general point that debates such as this are hugely important to people outside the House. It is the duty of hon. Members to do their best to make them intelligible, so we must be careful to distinguish the wood from the trees.

In that connection, I am reminded of the White Paper published in 1971, which clearly stated that Britain would retain the veto, because to relinquish it would damage our national interest. The White Paper went further, stating that relinquishing the veto would damage the very fabric of the European Community.

The point being made in that White Paper was simple. It was that the members of a harmonious community do not railroad and bulldoze each other by the use of qualified majority voting. They allow discussion to take place and understandings to develop; they do not push people up against a wall and say, "We will shoot you with qualified majority voting if you don't agree." That is particularly relevant when it comes to government.

There is a distinction between arriving at a degree of understanding and compromise and changes in legal processes in an arena such as the European Union in which there is a degree of co-operation, with which I agree. My party is conscious of the advantages that can come from greater co-operation—as am I—but not at the price of giving up our own government. That is the key point. Therefore, the Single European Act is, as I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, distinguishable from the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and now Nice, because those are, with qualifications, primarily to do with the creation of a European Government.

The Irish vote has a lot to do with this. The application of qualified majority voting in relation to the enhancement of the powers of the larger states caused great concern in Ireland. My travels with the Select Committee on European Scrutiny around eastern and central Europe have shown that there is deep concern there as well. Those countries do not make too much noise about it because they see certain advantages in being in a European union. Even so, they hope that the Government and the Opposition—or the unofficial Opposition, if I can put it like that—will help them to maintain their democracy, acquired at the "springtime of nations". That is an important message for the Government.

The European Union will not survive if it creates tensions as a result of qualified majority voting, which alienates the populations of the countries concerned. It is primarily devoted to getting through whatever technocratic decisions may be taken by the lego-wonks of the European Commission and the politico-wonks that exist in some parts of the European elite.

The extension of the use of qualified majority voting, which reduces the need for unanimity and the value of the national veto, has had a serious detrimental effect on the confidence that member states have in the European Union, full stop.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman consider the converse of what he has just described? For example, Jean-Luc Dehaene was rejected because of the use of the veto and Jacques Santer eventually became head of the European Commission. We found that the Commission was badly managed and had to persuade the College of Commissioners to resign. In terms of quality, the appointment of President Santer was, in effect, the lowest common denominator rather than the highest common factor.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has raised that instance. It was Mr. Jens-Peter Bonde and the Eurosceptics who led the campaign to get rid of the Commission, despite the fact that the MEPs in the Labour party and my own claimed rather more influence over what happened. The bottom line is that the Commissioners went because they were no good. The tragedy is that they were reappointed.

The blocking minority is in jeopardy under these arrangements, which is detrimental to the interests of the harmonious working of the European Union.

5.45 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to his intervention during my speech and pick up the theme of what he has just said? Am I right to understand that he believes that there are circumstances in which qualified majority voting is essential? If so, on what principles does he base his view? He gave an illustration with regard to the abduction of children, but perhaps he could go a little further and tell us the principle upon which he holds that view.

Mr. Cash: I shall indeed. The principle is that the whole of the European Union needs to be renegotiated. If we reached a point at which we had to reduce the functions of the EU and that was done properly and we continued to accept the principle of political co-operation—as we should—we could get down to the business of deciding the arenas within which it should apply. We do not have the time or the disposition to go into that at present, although I tabled a new clause on the subject that was not called, much to my chagrin—to use a French expression. However, everything has grown like Topsy and the bottom line is that we developed qualified majority voting on a continuous escalator with no discrimination.

My principle is that we should go back to the drawing board: save Europe, as Edmund Burke once suggested about the depredations of the French revolution, and get the thing right. That is the principle on which we should operate. It is in the interests of democratic nation states not only that they should have their say but that they should not be bulldozed by this monumental leviathan.

Mr. Campbell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a possible logical consequence of his argument would be a constitution for Europe that laid down the very principles that he describes?

Mr. Cash: I also tabled a new clause on that subject, which I regret was not selected. I see the twinkle in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's eye. The irony is that, under the arrangements leading up to 2004, the constitution that would emerge by then would produce an epicentre—thanks to the acquis communautaire, the existing legal framework and the crazy idea that there will be enhanced co-operation in eight member states even if the total number of member states rises to 27. There will

be a core or a centre of gravity that will take that European constitution along a line, together with QMV and enhanced co-operation and the so-called flexibility that goes with it. That, too, is a wood-for-the-trees point because the line will go in only one direction. I therefore dispute the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposition, because I take the contrary view about a constitution that would work properly and that I would consider safe or desirable for the EU. That is the key point.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Hooray!

Mr. Cash: I shall try to deal briefly with the question of Britain's influence. Much has been made of that by Ministers and by the Secretary of State in his Second Reading speech. As I pointed out in the Select Committee during my cross-examination of the former Minister for Europe, Britain's influence is not only on the wane, it is being fundamentally reduced as more vetoes are abolished by the Council of Ministers.

At Nice, about 43 vetoes were lost—the exact number depends on how the tally is made. In the 1971 White Paper, when the House was so badly misled, such matters were described as imperilling the fabric of the Community. That is happening at present. The Community is in peril because of those mistakes. Only 19 vetoes were lost at Amsterdam. They were largely negotiated by the previous Conservative Government, although I was not enthusiastic about that, and inherited by the Labour Government. I wrote a blue paper—a 25-page hatchet job—on that.

Forty-one vetoes were lost at Maastricht. In conjunction with many of my hon. Friends, I opposed that. Many of those hon. Friends are on the Opposition Benches at present. Some hon. Members who have recently arrived on these Benches would most emphatically have been with us during those great and heady days when we held the Government to ransom, fighting for the interests not only of the United Kingdom but also of Europe as a whole.

Thirty-seven vetoes went in the Single European Act—I have dealt with that—and 38 went in the treaty of Rome.

Although those are demonstrations of the emasculation of our democracy, the standard justification for the proposed massive extension of QMV at the Nice intergovernmental conference is that the veto would

"imperil the single market in an enlarged European Union".

So the official line from the EU is that these 43 vetoes would somehow prevent enlargement or lead the Union to grind to a halt.

It is argued that the single market has come to be understood, quite conveniently from the Brussels perspective, as including virtually every aspect of European Union business. The removal of barriers to trade and obstacles to the free movement of people has become a convenient excuse to centralise more and more powers at the EU level. That is where the concept of subsidiarity is upturned.

As I said at the time of the Maastricht treaty in 1990, the first time that I heard the word "subsidiarity" I realised, having been brought up by the Jesuits and recognising it as a concept that comes from Catholic theology, that the concept of subsidiarity was a con trick. It is based on the assumption that there will be a hierarchy of norms—a hierarchy of government—and in jurisprudence that is perfectly well understood. The only problem is that one should not apply religious theological concepts to matters of politics. I think that that is all I need to say on that.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend and I agree entirely about the risible concept of subsidiarity, but would he care to recall the verdict of the celebrated Lord Mackenzie-Stuart on the subject of subsidiarity, for was it not that great man who described subsidiarity as

"a prime example of gobbledegook"

and said that those who regarded it as a constitutional safeguard were showing

"great optimism"?

Mr. Cash: Yes indeed, and after he had been challenged he had the good sense to repeat it—in one of the great Hamlyn lectures, I believe. I very much appreciate that intervention. It is a reminder that some very eminent jurists know what rubbish subsidiarity is. It is not just rubbish as a concept; its practical application causes changes in domestic law that are bad for the people who must live under it. That is the key point.

I return to the subject of the effects of the new voting system. I know that there are those who disagree with me in this respect, but I have made my case in very many publications and articles and no one has taken issue with me about it. It would be easy to try to do so and I wish that people would. However, I simply make my proposition, which is that the elite of Germany has increased its influence. It is the unspoken word; I cannot imagine why. One need not be at loggerheads with everyone to point out the truth or the facts. It is a fact and, to my mind, not standing up to it, not explaining it and not dealing with it is simply walking away from reality.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cash: No; I am sorry. The hon. Gentleman did himself no good with his previous intervention, so I will not allow him this one.

The new voting system, which is called double majority voting, was introduced in the Nice treaty and it will especially benefit the German Government. First, it is useful to recall how the qualified majority voting system worked until Nice. A decision required a 71.26 per cent. share of the vote to be approved: 62 of 87 votes in the Council of Ministers. That meant that the votes of countries accounting for 58.16 per cent. of the EU's population would constitute a majority.

Following Nice, the new procedures for QMV are very much more complex. Whenever a decision goes to QMV in the Council of Ministers, a country can demand—the Minister knows it—that double majority voting be used. Double majority voting requires two conditions to be met for a decision to be adopted.

First, in a 27-member EU, a proposal must gather 258 of 345 votes, or 74.78 per cent. of the votes in the Council of Ministers. In other words, a significantly higher threshold is required, making it easier to block a proposal, although it would be harder for existing member states to block it as their share of the vote would be lower.

[Mr. Cash]

Secondly, the proposal must be backed by countries representing 62 per cent. of the EU population—the so-called population safeguard. But thanks to that second clause, the so-called safeguard, Germany and two other large countries, such as France or Italy, will be able to block anything that they do not like, whereas Britain will need more than two other countries to vote with it to oppose undesirable decisions from its point of view.

The blocking minority is 88 votes in the Council, which means that Germany would not have been able to block decisions so easily in the absence of the population requirement. Therefore, many EU observers are calling Chancellor Schröeder the victor of Nice. It was all over the papers at the time and it was the German papers that were saying it. Following Nice, Germany will start to lose its traditional deference to the EU. As I pointed out on Second Reading, a fundamental geopolitical shift in the balance of power in Europe is taking place, but it is being done through lego-political power play.

Mr. Shepherd: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. Many across the country—

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman should remember to address the Chair.

Mr. Shepherd: My hon. Friend is recognised as one of the greatest authorities, in the legal sense, of the understanding of these treaties and constitutions developed through the European Union—he probably has greater understanding than revealed in anything that the Foreign Office has produced. The burden of my hon. Friend's argument is that the transference by the proposed limitation on the veto is such that it changes the constitutional order within Europe. Therefore, many of my constituents are asking why the Danes do not require a referendum in this instance. They ask me whether it is because the corruption of the Danish constitution is now so great that this further transference of power to the Community or the European Union is such that the Danes no longer have the scope for a referendum on such important constitutional issues.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend raises an important point, again on the matter relating to a referendum and its impact on qualified majority voting, because the referendum is the safeguard for the electorate where the elite, through qualified majority voting, has been taking decisions that, as a result of the scrutiny processes throughout the European Union, are nothing less than a farce.

The bottom line is that the Irish, with their tremendous good sense, voted against the elite, as did the Danes in their referendum on the euro, when every single radio and television programme and newspaper was against them. The people know best, and if I may say so, as a Tory, it follows that great dictum of either Lord Randolph Churchill or Disraeli: "Trust the people." I put more trust in the people than I do in the House or the Council of Ministers. The plain fact is that it is for the people to take that decision, and they need to be properly informed about it.

Mr. Shepherd: Have the Danish given away, as a result of a previous referendum, the right to take a decision on this treaty? Why is there not a referendum in Denmark on this treaty?

Mr. Cash: There certainly should be. The answer to that question is that the Government, the elite, in Denmark are not prepared to hold another referendum, just as, for example, there is a reluctance—

The Chairman: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that he is being led astray by his hon. Friend.

6 pm

Mr. Cash: There are many roads to the treaty of Nice, and my hon. Friend suggests one that I shall have to avoid, just for the moment. We shall have ample opportunity to consider it later.

Basically, my main proposition is that the smaller states will lose out, and the effect will be that they will be bulldozed, which is one of the reasons why they are so concerned. Indeed, their voting shares will decrease even in the absence of enlargement, which is one of the main reasons that Ireland voted against the treaty of Nice.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Gentleman take the time to mention the number of Members of the European Parliament, which will be affected by the change? Is he aware that, given the drastic cut in the number of Members for the south of Ireland, Northern Ireland, which has three Members, will not retain that number in future? Indeed, Northern Ireland might not even have one Member in the new Parliament.

Mr. Cash: I understand why the hon. Gentleman makes that point, but I must not be diverted down that path either. Suffice it to say that there has been a substantial change in the number of MEPs, and—surprise, surprise—it turns out that Germany has the most, although some may say that that it because of its population. That is all part of the real problem. Some may dispute this, but those countries dependent on Germany economically or politically, or in coalition with it—in the European Parliament, with the new co-decision procedure, or whatever—will vote with it, so we shall have a greater Germany, and in the words of Thomas Mann, will it be a European Germany, or a German Europe? I am confident, but concerned that it will be a German Europe. We need to face those questions in a responsible and, I hope, sensible and friendly manner, but we must point out that we do not like such things and we will not have them. That is my message on that key point.

It has been said that QMV will lead to a two-speed Europe. I wrote a paper for the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Hurd of Westwell, at the time of the Maastricht treaty. I shall not repeat any part of that paper, other than to say that it was published in 1993, in the appendix to a book called, "Visions of Europe", in which I gave my reasons for objecting to QMV. I said that the movement toward majority voting and a two-speed Europe would put us on the sidelines, whereas that was what we were accused of doing.

When we deal with the clauses relating to enhanced co-operation, I shall have a good deal more to say about the relationship between that and majority voting because

that, in itself, creates an extremely deep black hole. As I said on Second Reading, those who have advocated variable geometry have made a very profound strategic mistake—in fact, a strategic mistake of such enormous proportions that it is incapable of being described. That monumental mistake in foreign policy is based on the idea that, if words such as "flexibility" and "subsidiarity" are used, the proposal means what it appears to say. "Through the Looking-Glass" and "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" have a lot to say about such things.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sylvia Heal): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is moving on to what will be a debate on a subsequent date.

Mr. Cash: It is a seamless treaty, and I can assure you, Mrs. Heal, that in this context enhanced co-operation cannot be treated separately. The Clerk of Public Bills, to whom I am not supposed to refer, knows well enough that QMV and enhanced co-operation go hand in hand. If I have to try to explain the inner workings and the entrails of the treaty, it is difficult, given the fact that we started out with the dilemma that I described at the beginning of my remarks, to separate the vast number of articles dealt with under amendment No. 1 and its incidental application to individual parts of the treaty as we proceed. If it were possible to disentangle this Heath Robinson business and produce a workable and sensible treaty, I wish we could do so. The problem is that the proposal has been deliberately devised as a mechanism for unbelievable complexity, which is completely beyond the man in the street, but thank God people see through it when they vote.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): As I have a simple mind, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would clarify something for me. He says that we are about to create a European Union dominated by a greater Germany, which was the great victor of Nice, but Germany's population is 82 million and its new vote is 29—the same as that of the United Kingdom, France and Italy. Earlier on, if I understood the hon. Gentleman correctly, he accepted that QMV was needed on certain occasions, and that smaller countries need to be equally represented. I should be grateful if he could tell me what weighting he would think it fair to apply. Could he explain why a country of 82 million people, which now has the same number of votes as a country with 57 million, is still seen as the victor? I simply do not understand the logical sequence of his argument.

Mr. Cash: That is simple—the treaties and the concept of political union are hopelessly illogical. The problem is that the anomalies that arise cannot be got rid of without having total political union, which is the objective. The problem is a simple one for me; I simply say that we must renegotiate the treaties and take them back at least to the Single European Act, so that we do not go down the route of political union. Yes, Germany has certainly increased in power. The day that the Berlin wall came down—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now wandering very wide of the amendment.

Mr. Cash: I am afraid that I have been diverted by the eloquence of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), which is difficult to resist.

Having said that, I shall now speak to amendment No. 233, which I tabled, and which deals with child abduction. I am jumping into that amendment, but I want to deal with other amendments, and I shall do so as quickly as I possibly can. Child abduction is a horrifying business, so much so that, notwithstanding the fact that I wish to see the EU framework renegotiated, it warrants the application of QMV to that aspect of family law that deals with it.

Many hon. Members will know that the wife of our ambassador to the United States, Lady Meyer, has children who were taken from her by her husband. They have not been returned to her, primarily because the German courts will not allow it. Indeed, the problem seems to be peculiar to the German jurisdiction. I have not the time to go into every detail, but Germany and Austria are primarily involved because their laws effectively prohibit the return of children who have been abducted by their natural parents in the EU.

The number of cases of abduction has increased every year. According to the Belgian Ministry of Justice, 221 children were abducted from Belgium in 1998, and 562 in 2000. In France, a fourfold increase in abductions was recorded between 1997 and today. That is pretty horrendous stuff. As far as I am aware, none of the parents—who are mostly American and French, but some are British—has been able to regain access to their children if they are held in Germany. I shall send the Minister details of two particularly difficult cases.

In one case, the gentleman concerned has managed to see his children for only a few hours since he finally traced them seven years ago. In another, an Australian lady is unable to get her daughter back from Germany although the German father died last October. She has seen her for only a few hours in the presence of the social services youth authority, the Jugendamnt, and the grandparents are suing for custody.

A Franco-American father, Maurice Elfeke, recently went to Germany when he heard that his children's name was going to be changed without his consent. They were abducted two years ago and since then he has had no contact whatsoever. He was arrested last week and put in jail because he sprayed his mother-in-law's garden with black paint. He is now on hunger strike in jail and several parents will meet in Berlin on 14 July for a hunger strike demonstration. Lady Meyer saw her sons for 10 minutes outside a court room in 2000, has no access rights and has managed to see them for 25 hours in total.

A Franco-German commission has been established, but it has produced no results. A US-German Commission was established last year at the behest of President Clinton. The proposed reforms have been backed by Hillary Clinton and, most recently, Colin Powell. Although the initiatives have not resolved a single case, the main problem is the lack of enforcement of orders in Germany, Austria and, I believe, Sweden.

The French have produced proposals for the recognition and enforcement of actions and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children has been set up to protect children. The problem is serious. The ICMEC is preparing a written paper, which I can supply to the Minister, and in early September the European Commission will present the draft regulation. The main problem is that although justice and home affairs have

[Mr. Cash]

moved to the first pillar, unanimity is still required in family law. We have the European Court of Justice and I hope that the Committee will understand why, in such exceptional circumstances, it is essential to change the law in the interests of those children and their parents. The Prime Minister's wife is also deeply engaged in the problem. She understands it and gives full support to those who advocate change.

This is not the first time that I have taken a slightly unusual view. As a realist, I put the interests of those children and their parents ahead of any other concerns. It might be best to change The Hague convention. Failing that, we need to change the qualified majority vote. I intend to press the amendment to a vote. I want to know what the Government are going to do about those children and their parents. There is enough time before we finish our deliberations on Wednesday for the Minister to give my concerns careful consideration.

Mr. Miller: I am listening carefully and it seems that the hon. Gentleman's argument underlines what I said about it being wrong to rule out in principle an extension of QMV in the circumstances. Although we are at different ends of the telescope in terms of the development of the EU, he makes a powerful case on this subject.

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the temperate way in which he phrased his intervention. I object to QMV in many arenas for the reasons that I gave. We must make a decision: do we want a European Union or not? That is the difference between my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and me.

6.15 pm

By that, I do not mean that I do not want a European Union; it is just whether I want this one. The principle of renegotiation comes into that. To say that in principle we are against QMV hardly sits well with the fact that we passed the Single European Act. Incidentally, I wrote to the Prime Minister a few days ago and ended the letter by explaining, a little cheekily, that I voted for the Single European Act and he voted against it. We must remember that issues of principle are extremely important when applied in particular circumstances.

Other issues also concern me. Amendment No. 3 deals with anti-discrimination and article 251 as it applies to the new provision. It is the usual combination of QMV in the Council and co-decision with the European Parliament. We should attack the implicit argument that member states will be racist in the absence of EU-wide anti-discrimination laws. We have seen what is going on in Bradford and Burnley. I am chairman of the all-party committee for the reduction of third world debt and am devoted to ensuring that there is no racism in this country. However, we are talking about a quasi-constitutional way to deal with an extremely sensitive issue. To assume that member states will be racist in the absence of EU-wide anti-discrimination laws is a difficult and dangerous route to take.

Mr. Hendrick: I respectfully ask the hon. Gentleman how he can possibly argue for QMV on, for example, child welfare, about which we heard powerful arguments, yet allow member states in modern western civilised democracies, which believe in humanity, to let employers and organisations discriminate on the grounds of race without legal redress in the EU?

Mr. Cash: The answer to that probably lies in the Race Relations Act 1976. In fact, I was one of the first people to sign the equality declaration because I believe that we must ensure that there is no discrimination, but that should be achieved in a national context. My prime concern is with quasi-constitutional issues that apply to the EU as a whole. Race is a matter for nation states and is a good example of subsidiarity. Indeed, I could go into the problem of the Turks in Germany and similar issues, but I would probably take up too much time. Cross-border abductions are another matter.

I recommend an interesting article by Professor Roberto de Matei on the charter of fundamental rights and the totalitarian spirit. No doubt you will pull me up sharply, Mrs. Heal, if I dwell on that, much as I should like to. I cannot understand why we are not allowed to debate the charter because it is a monumental shift in the juridical and jurisdictional nature of the EU and thus of this country.

Amendment No. 4 deals with freedom of movement. Frankly, it boils down to my objection to the fact that decisions will be taken by QMV because of the move towards an arrangement that we would do best to avoid at this juncture.

Amendment No. 5 covers article 100 on Community financial assistance, which deals with emergency relief for accidents, disasters and supply problems. Aid can now be given to member states in the event of "natural disasters", rather than solely in connection with "exceptional occurrences". I believe that that increases the probability of misinterpretation and what I call EU functional creep. Again, QMV is extended and the veto abolished. The attached non-binding declaration restricts the subsidies available for the next few years, but I regard the article as highly dangerous because it opens the door to extensive intra-EU redistribution of wealth.

Amendment No. 6 deals with social provisions. The remit of the EU is being expanded to encompass the combating of social exclusion. I cannot imagine why that effort should be carried out on a European scale. The provision opens a book of blank cheques that will increase the sums of money made available on European scale, but does not answer the question of how those sums are to be provided. The modernisation of social protection systems is mentioned, but who knows what such vague terms mean? Again, everything is subject to QMV with the exception of four matters: protection of sacked workers, representation and collective defence of workers and the conditions of employment of third-country nationals, which remain subject to unanimity for the time being.

In the final analysis, it is likely that the EU will use QMV in that context to meddle extensively with national security systems, which will threaten British interests. We noticed that during the general election the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear that he does not believe that the EU would start to play around with our national security system, but I regard the provision as an open

door. It will be an Achilles' heel: the consequences of adopting such a route will be to make EU economic growth even more difficult.

Roger Casale: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how it is possible for the EU to spend as much money as it wants on anything when its member states have just agreed that there should be an absolute ceiling on EU spending of 1.27 per cent. of European gross national product?

Mr. Cash: Skilful characters are trying to tempt me down all sorts of routes that would not meet with the Chairman's approval, but let me give an example by way of a quick response. Creating functions inevitably takes us closer to a tax regime, as Mr. Hans Eichel suggests. Romano Prodi calls for 60 billion euros. There is the problem. A gun is put to people's head: they are told that they have created the functions, so they must now pay for them. That equals taxation. I should like to refer to an article that I wrote, "The Paradox"—

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman said that he would deal with these matters rapidly.

Mr. Cash: Indeed, I am doing so, Mrs. Heal, but questions remain regarding unfunded pensions, and other issues crop up in that context.

Amendment No. 7 relates to QMV and codetermination with the European Parliament, which is now introduced for industrial policy. A necessary consequence of that is a further increase as socialist policies are imposed on countries such as the United Kingdom, or those with right-of-centre Governments. I object to the provision on those grounds.

Amendment No. 8 relates to social cohesion and structural funds. After a massive fight at Nice in which the rearguard action was led by Spain, it was decided that structural funds are to be determined by QMV only from 2007. The problem for countries such as Spain, and the cause of the battle, is that enlargement reduces their relative degree of poverty and so deprives them of handouts, with the money going instead to eastern European countries. I have no doubt that they are truly poor and need the money, but the bottom line is that the eastern European elites have, in effect, been blackmailed and that is one of the reasons why they agreed to the extension of QMV. The problem is a serious one.

Amendment No. 10 relates to environmental policy. QMV is introduced for recycling and waste management and a non-binding declaration adds that the EU is to take the lead in environmental issues, including sustainable development. That will, of course, not be accompanied by the necessary abolition of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy.

Amendment No. 11 relates to economic, financial and technical co-operation with third countries, which raises serious problems. Again, QMV is attached, as are measures that allegedly reinforce democracy and the rule of law, which strikes one with my interest in third-world countries as a bit rich, considering the EU's record. That record causes me to doubt that the provision is liable to achieve its objective.

Amendment No. 12 relates to the statute for Members of the European Parliament. Unanimity for the determination of the general conditions of MEPs is abolished, which means that the regulations and general conditions, including salaries, of Britain MEPs will no longer be determined by the United Kingdom. Article 190(5) represents the first step towards making MEPs wholly independent of member states. No doubt that is why the leader of the Conservative group was telling us to change the rules on our leadership on this morning's "Today" programme.

Amendment No. 13 relates to article 191, which deals with "political parties at European level". The implication appears to be that restrictions will be placed on the way in which political parties are funded, which jeopardises free speech—an issue that affects us all. The article on regulations governing political parties could be interpreted as giving the Council powers to ban political parties that it dislikes. That must be watched extremely carefully. In my view, it should not be in the treaty.

The original article was purely declaratory and quite vague about what was meant by "European political parties", but the article now gives the Council a role, a regulation and funding from EU funds. Decisions are to be taken by QMV with European Parliament co-decision. All in all, the article represents an important and unacceptable extension of EU power. He who pays the piper calls the tune. Parties in the European Parliament should be funded by national parties.

Article 191 is followed by so-called declaration 11. It is intended to soothe Eurosceptic fears, but is legally non-binding. In addition, its first paragraph is factually incorrect. The whole point of the provisions added at Nice is to give more powers to the European Union.

Amendment No. 14 relates to the appointment of the Secretary-General of the Council, which is to be made by a qualified majority vote. I could spend some time exploring that, but it is not necessary to do so. Suffice it to say that I disagree with it.

Amendment No. 15 relates to salaries, pensions and allowances. I do not believe that the officers of the Court of First Instance should have their salaries determined by qualified majority vote.

Amendment No. 7 relates to the European Court of Justice. Member states are to appoint judges and advocates by common accord. The replacement of judges is to be determined by the statute of the ECJ, and a new provision is included to determine the ECJ's rules of procedure by QMV. That is extremely dangerous, given that body's increasing importance.

Amendment No. 18 relates to article 224 of the treaty, which deals with the Court of First Instance. Again, QMV is introduced. I do not agree with that. Amendment No. 22 deals with the Economic and Social Committee, whose numbers are to increase from 222 to 350.

Amendment No. 24 deals with financial controls. Arguments have been advanced to show that from 2007 accounting procedures will be determined by QMV; it seems incredible that they should be dealt with in that way.

6.30 pm

Amendment No. 25 deals with articles on immigration and asylum policy, which are extremely opaque; there are many arguments against them but time does not permit me to develop them. Amendment No. 26 deals with the representation of the EU at international level on

[Mr. Cash]

monetary union, which again is determined by QMV. Amendment No. 27 deals with special measures for the introduction of the euro, but I shall leave it and other amendments in the group for consideration in writing by the Minister. There are many amendments on matters amounting to an abrogation of the powers of the House.

I shall return briefly to my opening remarks about not being able to see the wood for the trees. I have various objections to many aspects of the clause. Child abduction has to be dealt with; we must remedy the position of not being able to see the wood for the trees; in a nutshell, we must renegotiate the treaties. Until we do so, we shall continue to go in the wrong direction in the Europe Union.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I shall be brief. Our debate has been a kind of Second Reading—I do not criticise it for that—on qualified majority voting. I have a few points that I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with in his reply. First, I want to make sure that I have the right treaties with me. I have been looking at some of them, but I cannot find certain things that perhaps I should be able to find.

Amendment No. 1, the lead amendment, seeks to exclude article 2, paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 9 and others from the Bill. Looking at article 2, paragraph 2—this is no criticism of anybody, it is just me—I see that it relates to enhanced co-operation. It also states:

"Article 11 shall be replaced by the following Articles 11 and 11a".

As I understand it, article 11 is article 11 of the treaty establishing the European Community. It is cited on page 3 of the treaty of Nice, which says that it is in treaty series No. 29 (1996) Cm 3151.

I went to the Vote Office and asked for Cm 3151, which—again I am not making any criticism—contains the treaty on European Union. That treaty is not terribly relevant to our discussion, as it does not create the rights and obligations that may impinge on domestic law. Cm 3151 also contains, conveniently, the treaty establishing the European Community; again, that is perfectly all right. That treaty is amended by the treaty of Nice; I hope that hon. Members can follow me. Article 11 of the treaty establishing the European Community is, as I understand it, being replaced by new articles 11 and 11a of the treaty of Nice. Fine; I looked up page 51 of the treaty establishing the European Community and found article 11.

Until that point, I was deliriously happy; at least I had got that far. I found that the original article 11 is about enabling

"governments to carry out . . . obligations with regard to customs duties".

I looked at the top of the page, which is headed "Part Three: Community Policies". The new article 11, however, has nothing to do with customs duties; it is about enhanced co-operation and various other matters. Well, fine. Looking at page 51 of the treaty establishing the European Community, I found the heading "Community Policies" and thought, "Well, that is all right too." Title I under that heading is "Free movement of goods". I am not sure what that has got to do with enhanced co-operation or, indeed, all the other matters that are being amended or repealed. I am not going to complicate matters further but, looking further ahead in the treaty, I found the same problem again.

I only want to ask the Minister, "Is it me?" I am prepared to accept that it is; perhaps over the past few years I have not followed certain treaties as closely as I should. Now that we are in a world of transparency for the EU, we are going to have a committee like the rather ridiculous tax rewrite Committee for Finance Bills. Apparently, we are now going to have an EU treaties rewrite committee. I do not particularly want to serve on that committee, and I am sure that it will take a long time to establish. However, I should like to know where I can find the article 11 that is being replaced by new articles 11 and 11a; the original article 11 is not in my copy of the treaty establishing the European Community. It may be in someone else's, but the Vote Office does not seem to have it. I do not know which copy the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is working from; I am not suggesting that it has a secret treaty, but perhaps it is working from different drafts.

Mr. Shepherd: Different language.

Denzil Davies: The treaty is in different languages, but presumably the problem is still in the French version and every other version. Where do I find the article 11 that is being replaced by new articles 11 and 11a in the treaty of Nice? Or is article 11 in the treaty establishing the European Community, which has nothing to do with the new articles, being replaced? The Bill is important, so I hope that we will know which treaties we are talking about when we insert them in the European Communities Act 1972.

I want to ask a few brief questions about the substance of some new articles that are incorporated by the treaty of Nice. Paragraph 5—if it is a paragraph—on page 16 says:

"Article 100 shall be replaced by the following".

I have not had the energy to check whether article 100 in the treaty of Nice is completely different from article 100 in the treaty establishing the European Community, or only a little different; I do not know whether the problem that applies to article 11 applies to it. However, we will let that go. Article 100 deals with paying money out or providing financial assistance to member states with difficulties caused by natural disasters. It refers to a member state

"threatened with severe difficulties caused by natural disasters"—

I think that we probably understand what is meant by natural disasters—

"or exceptional occurrences beyond its control".

I do not know what is meant by "exceptional occurrences". Perhaps the Minister will give us, if not a definition—that may be asking too much of such a wide phrase—an example of exceptional occurrences that are beyond a state's control. I am sure that they exist and, no doubt, were discussed.

The problem with incorporating treaties in statutory legislation—in effect, that is what we are doing—is that we do not have many definitions. Hardly ever do we find definitions in the treaty of Nice or in any of the other treaties, as one would expect in a statute, yet we are incorporating the treaty into the statute law of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bercow: I understand how curious the provisions seem. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is,

at least potentially, a clear conflict between the provision for qualified majority voting in respect of what are opaquely described as "exceptional occurrences", and the general European prohibition on state aids?

Denzil Davies: I assume that the prohibition on state aids was a prohibition on aid from the state—its own Government—to an entity within that state. The treaty of Nice deals with supranational aid from the centre to the state, I suppose. Perhaps that is because there is a prohibition on state aids, but I am not sure.

The measure goes on to state that

"the Council, acting by a qualified majority . . . may grant, under certain conditions, Community financial assistance".

May we be told what those conditions are? The person who drafted that must have had some idea of the kind of conditions that were meant; otherwise the word "certain" would, presumably, not have been inserted. It probably limits the relevant conditions, in the mind of the draftsman. What conditions would be imposed on the member state by the centralised body—the Council of Ministers or the Commission—in granting such aid?

At the top of page 17 of the treaty of Nice, sub-paragraph (7) states:

"Article 123(4) shall be replaced".

I had a sneak preview of the original article 123(4) in my copy of the treaty establishing the European Community. I do not know what is stated in the Foreign Office copy, but in my copy that paragraph has nothing to do with what is contained in the amendment to the treaty. It has nothing to do with that extremely important article, which deals with the third stage. I remember something about the third stage from years ago, when we discussed the treaty of Maastricht. No doubt the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) remembers it well.

Mr. Cash: The beginnings of flexibility.

Denzil Davies: I am not sure about flexibility. The third stage is not very flexible in respect of the amendment.

What is being replaced by sub-paragraph (7)? It is certainly not replacing what I have in my copy, but it may be replacing what the Foreign Office has in its copy. Why is the change necessary now? Is the new article 123(4) substantially different from that which it replaces?

The article deals with unanimity and the fixed rate at which a member state's currency is translated into ecus. I thought that the ecu had gone, but apparently we still have ecus, at least in the paragraph to which I refer. It states that

"the ECU shall be substituted for these currencies"—

that is, the member states' currencies. The fixed rate becomes the rate for the ecu, as I understand it.

The article continues:

"This measure shall by itself not modify the external value of the ECU."

I have no idea what that means. I hope that we will be told. We are incorporating the new article, which refers to fixing rates irrevocably. Would that apply if and when the United Kingdom joins the single currency? Will new article 123(4) then be applicable to us? I should have thought so. It refers to fixing the rate and converting that rate into ecus. What happens to the preceding two years and the need for sterling to float? I do not understand. I hope that the Minister can tell us whether the article will affect us.

6.45 pm

Mr. Shepherd: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that he is behaving like Mr. Gradgrind? Such detailed questions are outrageous. The thrust of the treaty is surely to consolidate a European state. It is therefore outrageous to discuss the mere detail, as he is doing. We should accept the intent, which is clear to most of us. The treaty drives towards the consolidation of a state in which the United Kingdom is a subordinate constituent.

Denzil Davies: That has been my view ever since the European Communities Act 1972. I do not want digress and be out of order, but being a Celt, I could smell an Act of Union in 1972. The English are not very good at smelling Acts of Union, because they have never had such Acts imposed on them, but that is coming. That was the hon. Gentleman's point, I think.

The detail of the single currency is important, and I hope that the Minister will explain why we have new article 123(4) and what the old one was, as it is not in my copy of the treaty establishing the European Community.

Finally, there is another extremely important amendment in paragraph 5 at the bottom of page 17. It deals with GATT—the general agreement on tariffs and trade—trade in services, intellectual property, the Uruguay round and all that went with it, and the surprising decision of the European Court of Justice in favour of the competence of the nation state. That must be one of the few cases in which that political court came down in favour of the nation state against the Commission, which was particularly angry at the time. Now, that is being overturned. The competence of the nation state is being taken away. Whether that could have been called a veto, I do not know.

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): In case I cannot deal in my reply with all the details that my right hon. Friend raises, I shall write to him. He may wish to know that there was a mistake in the Command Paper containing the treaty of Nice. Two footnotes were later corrected. I want to be sure that he has that correction.

Denzil Davies: I do not, although I studied the footnotes carefully. Perhaps I should not refer to the footnotes in the treaty establishing the European Community, as that might confuse the Foreign Office even more. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the intervention. It is my fault that I did not understand a word that he said, but I am sure that he will deal with the matter at greater length when he winds up. If not, no doubt he will, like all Ministers, resort to a letter. I am sure that I shall get a learned letter, which will be placed in the Library.

The trade in services negotiation will be difficult and important. There are fundamental views on all sides about it. I am sorry that the Government have given up the competence of the member state—of this member state, which is my concern. Whatever view one takes of the agreement on trade in services, the effect of multinational companies and so on, I am sorry that my Government have given up their competence on that and handed it over

[Denzil Davies]

to qualified majority voting. This is not a trivial veto on a matter such as the registrar of the European Court. Who cares who the registrar is? That, apparently, is the Foreign Office view, but I do not agree with it.

The veto is extremely important, as it goes to the heart of trade in services and its effect on this country and others. Of course, the French have protected their culture and have obtained a derogation. Where negotiation deals with French culture, they have got a veto, but the Brits gave that right up. Perhaps we are not as interested in culture as the French. I am sorry that we have given up the veto, which is not trivial or minor. Will my hon. Friend the Minister explain, in what might be a rather lengthy reply, the rationale behind giving up the power of the House in a matter that is as important as international trade in services?

I think that I had better stop there. I am sure that I could speak about many other aspects of the treaty, but I have made a few points with which I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal.

Mr. Redwood: I have made my declaration in the Register of Members' Interests.

I follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who has done the Committee a great service by pointing out a problem that I, too, have discovered. I thought that I had come to the Chamber well prepared for this detailed debate in Committee. I brought the treaty with me, but when I tried to pursue the amendments and the Government's proposals in the documentation, I encountered exactly the same problems that he faced. I shall not repeat what he said about them, but I hope that the Minister will deal with them. We appear to be amending and introducing legislation for a treaty under the heading of articles that bear no relation to the documentation that is available to hon. Members for this debate. I shall proceed on the basis that the Government should know what they are doing and in the light of the other documentation that I have read, even though it is not within the correct frame of reference for this debate.

I want to return to the main issue with which the amendments deal—the question of how much qualified majority voting is desirable—and to consider whether it would be better to join my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) in saying that we do not want any of the proposed extensions of qualified majority voting, or whether the Government have a point. Their argument is that, because modest powers over trade and commerce were surrendered to qualified majority voting under a previous Conservative Government, it is clear that we must surrender a range of other powers, some of which are more serious, dealing with a range of other matters that are in no way connected with the single market or trading. Similarly, one could suggest that, if one drink makes someone happy and shows that they are clubbable, that person should get stoned out of their mind by drinking everything that they can lay their hands on. According to the Government, they would have no problems whatever with a hangover or a headache.

Although it is the official Conservative case that a few drinks of qualified majority voting are all right, but a lot would make one completely drunk, I take the view, having negotiated under QMV, that it should be a prohibited substance. I do not believe that, even in our new inclusive spirit, we should seek to remove it from the list of prohibited substances, because it is closer to a hard drug than anything else that might be up for review.

Mr. Bercow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that qualified majority voting is infinitely more damaging to health than cannabis?

Mr. Redwood: I think, Mrs. Heal, that I am being drawn wide of the subject of the debate.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I would be interested to hear my right hon. Friend's view on one specific increase in qualified majority voting—the one that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) mentioned in relation to child abduction. Does he agree that such a move would be a step too far? Should the issue be covered by multilateral and bilateral negotiations, or was my hon. Friend the Member for Stone right to table his amendment?

Mr. Redwood: I usually find myself in agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) on European matters, but I fear that I cannot follow him on that specific issue. His usual cogent arguments against qualified majority voting relate to issues on which we wish to develop international agreement as well as to those on which we do not want to develop any such agreement. He should bear in mind the fact that if the leading continental countries are against his proposal, they can block it under qualified majority voting. If they favour it, however, he can obtain what he seeks by negotiation with the veto in place. The veto is an important guarantee even in that respect, as it can prevent this country from being forced into doing things with which he would not agree.

Mr. Cash: As my right hon. Friend and I are going to disagree—we can agree to disagree—I must remind him that when the Maastricht treaty was considered, there were many matters on which we voted differently. I leave that as a matter of record.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. He might like to remember my record on qualified majority voting. I was the chief policy adviser to Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven when she was negotiating the Single European Act as Prime Minister. My advice was that we should not surrender the powers in perpetuity, but make the surrender extremely limited for the specific purpose of the few directives needed—as we saw it—for the single market, and let the powers revert. Unfortunately, the Baroness did not accept my advice on that occasion, although she did so on many others. I did my best to prevent surrender of the powers, as I thought that that was wrong then.

On the Maastricht treaty, my hon. Friend will know that mine was one of the few voices—often the only voice—in the Cabinet to say that it was wrong to surrender the powers. After I resigned from the Government, I was able to make my view public. I can assure him that I never agreed to the proposals in the Cabinet Committee, but I obviously could not make that known to the general public until I had resigned. Perhaps I fought on too long, but I felt that somebody in that Cabinet had to put the case against QMV and other measures that I thought were leading too fast towards European integration.

Roger Casale: After some of the interventions by Opposition Members, the right hon. Gentleman's

argument seemed to take a more frivolous turn. I am not sure whether we have now returned to serious debate. There is a difference between what he and Opposition Front Benchers seem to want. Those on the Front Bench would like to rule out in principle any further extensions of QMV in future, but he would like to end all the qualified majority voting procedures that already exist, too. How does he propose to negotiate with our partner states an end to all the qualified majority voting procedures that currently exist in the European Union? How would he achieve that?

Mr. Redwood: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has leapt to conclusions that my comments did not justify. I explained that I had in the past consistently opposed extensions of qualified majority voting, but I fully support the Conservative Front Bench position, which is to say no to the further surrenders in the treaty. Furthermore, I support my Front-Bench colleagues in saying that we should get powers back over a wide range of matters, including agriculture and fisheries, in respect of which the surrender has gone too far.

I accept that there has to be a renegotiation and that we will not get all the powers back, but if we do not ask for some of them back, we will not get any. I object strongly to what the Government are doing, not only because they fail to try to get powers back when we are clearly at a disadvantage after surrenders by Governments of all persuasions, but because they then frivolously give away the powers under discussion without understanding how that undermines their position and that of future Governments. They do not understand how their actions are undermining the position of United Kingdom voters and our democracy, or how they will come back to haunt this country in future.

Labour Members suggest that the measures are needed for enlargement, but that is one of the most misleading points that has been made in this debate. We know that the Irish people wisely voted against the whole treaty. It is difficult to see why we must rush through this discussion on qualified majority voting, when they have said that it is not important for enlargement, and they do not want it to be foisted upon them in larger measure, so they have vetoed it and other important parts of the treaty.

7 pm

When the Danish voted no in the original referendum on the Maastricht treaty and the single currency, mine was a lager. I am now more attracted to stout. It is good that two smaller European countries have shown their independence and a democratic will that can be expressed in referendums. I wish that the Government would give us a referendum on QMV and the Nice treaty, which has fundamental constitutional implications. I do not understand why they need to rush the Bill through when the Irish people have said no, and there is no immediate prospect of reversing their decision. The British Government believe that in the case of a no vote, they should keep balloting, in the hope that people will vote yes through exhaustion. That does not augur well for any referendum for which they may provide.

Government amendments to the treaty and the Bill are required to allow us to renegotiate the common agricultural policy. That issue is not being solved and it is crucial for member states and applicant members.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is going wide of the amendment by referring to that subject.

Mr. Redwood: I was trying to put QMV in context. It is at the heart of the amendments that I support.

More QMV will lead directly to more Community activism, orchestrated by the European Commission. A European government already exists; it is unelected and powerful. The measure that we are considering manifests that government's wish to gain more and more power over the aspects of our lives that are detailed in the documents we are discussing. Those aspects range widely from product markets through discrimination to control over political parties. A powerful executive Government might take such powers in a democracy, with voters' approval—but they should not be given to an unelected, undemocratic government, which usually meets behind closed doors and is not subject to the same scrutiny and exposure as a proper democratic regime.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend is right. One does not need to look into the crystal ball when one can read the book. Does he realise that there was a dramatic extension of QMV in the treaty of Amsterdam? Since its ratification, 4,995 European Union directives, regulations and decisions have had an impact on this country. That precisely illustrates my right hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Redwood: I knew the general point, but I am grateful for my hon. Friend's repertoire of statistics, which illustrates it with great clarity and precision.

Enlarging the Community does not require a super-active or hyperactive government, which generates more and more laws. Indeed, that makes enlargement more difficult. If more regulations and laws are imposed not only on richer members, but on poorer states at a different level of economic development, they may not be able to catch up with such intrusive government and expensive regulation. More power for the Commission to legislate through QMV is the last thing an enlarged Community needs.

We are told that the Community will come to a halt without qualified majority powers—but if, as a legislature, it slows down, that is not bad news; it is good news. We have too many laws. Some are generated by our Government, but at least they can be democratically removed when people believe that the position has become insufferable. If we allow QMV to advance ever more strongly, we cannot control the massive volume of law from Brussels. That will be damaging to applicant members. The poorer the country, the more damaging it will be; it will create an impenetrable barrier for poor countries.

Roger Casale: The right hon. Gentleman says that he wants to renegotiate the treaties on the European Union. Which other Governments of member states would like a European Union in which the veto was restored and powers were repatriated? What would the right hon. Gentleman offer in return? Does he believe that his negotiating stance is such that he could achieve something for nothing?

Mr. Redwood: That is a little wide of the debate, but I have set the facts out elsewhere. Baroness Thatcher

[Mr. Redwood]

was 11:1 down when she sought repayment of our colossal contributions. That did not daunt her, and her negotiating skills were sufficient to gain unanimity in favour of a rebate for us. We need such a negotiating power, and a Conservative Administration could provide it. We would offer our partners many things, such as our presence, our trade and our good will. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that they sell us far more than we sell them. They have every interest in our remaining part of the trading club; there is no reason for us to join their common government.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Which of the five candidates for the Tory leadership has the negotiating skill of Baroness Thatcher and could achieve the aims that the right hon. Gentleman has outlined?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. That is very wide of the discussion.

Mr. Redwood: I thank you, Mrs. Heal, for respecting the secrecy of the ballot.

We have been told that the Government are committed, as the previous Administration claimed to be, to subsidiarity. We are also told that subsidiarity flourishes and is alive. It is difficult to understand how it can develop or flourish when so much extra QMV is to be introduced. That is a contradiction. If we lose our veto over more subjects, more will be decided in Brussels. More decisions will be made against our will. Far from letting power percolate back to member states and their democratically elected Parliaments, the Bill constitutes a massive extension of state power at the European level by the unelected government of the Commission, aided and abetted by the absentee Ministers who occasionally attend lunches in Brussels and rubber-stamp the Commission's plans.

The democratically elected constituent parts of the European government cannot even propose a draft law or regulation. The Commissioners of the unelected government in Brussels have to do all the drafting. The British Government are incapable of setting an agenda, negotiating in favour of a British position and changing the Brussels agenda. The current British style of negotiation is to ring the Commission, discover its agenda, rush out a press release stating that that is what they would like, and return claiming triumph when they have run up the white flag yet again. As QMV increases, that will be increasingly true.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend is making a thoughtful speech. Not only is it true that the British Government are incapable of drafting a directive or regulation that could be adopted by Brussels, but more importantly, Members of Parliament are incapable of stopping any draft regulation or directive. The sole power of our European Standing Committees is to refuse to "take note" of something—and the Question is then put on the Floor of the House and automatically nodded through even if we have voted in favour of not taking note.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. It is dispiriting that so much of our democracy is being removed. The Bill will make things worse. On many subjects, the House may not even be consulted before a Minister goes to Brussels to consider a proposition. The Minister may go along with a proposition because he fears being outvoted, or he may be bold enough to endure that. He will then return to the House and claim that he has triumphed and that it is in our interest to accept the proposition. If we try to do anything, it will not matter because the proposition will already be good law, settled at European government level. The views of the House will be overridden yet again.

The Under-Secretary smiles wanly because he knows that I have outlined the true position; perhaps he is in favour of that. I wonder why he wants to remain a Member of Parliament when he is so keen for all the decisions that we used to make to be taken elsewhere by QMV or by the executive order and fiat of Commissioners whom we have not elected.

We are considering the negotiating powers of member states, and whether they have the right to defend their national interest. When I was a Minister, I attended some 21 Councils of Ministers—primarily the single market Council, but others as well—and I got a range of experience. Whenever I went with a veto, I found negotiating a pleasurable and relatively straightforward experience. I could guarantee to my colleagues in the Government that I would never come back with an answer that we could not accept.

All the time that there was political support in the Government for the line that I wished to take—that was another issue—I could guarantee to my colleagues that I would either come back with a vastly improved draft because I had threatened to use the veto until I got the draft that I wanted, or come back empty-handed, and often happier that way, saying that I had used the veto because the proposals were totally unacceptable and that the British position had been preserved by exercising that veto. There was never any danger: we got either good law or no law. I would normally favour no law, although there are rare occasions when one might want a good law. With a veto, one can guarantee either good law or no law. Surely that makes sense for any Minister.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): How many times was the veto used against the United Kingdom when the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister?

Mr. Redwood: Not as often as I would have liked. It is entirely reasonable that member states should protect their national interests. It is also reasonable, in a world of subsidiarity, that in most cases there should be not a European law but national laws passed by each member state according to its wishes. I want a trading arrangement, primarily, and a single market that works. I do not believe that we get a single market by having lots of laws. We pass too many laws in the name of the single market.

A single market is about traders, freedom of movement and removing barriers. It is also about having no customs dues, about having the ability to sell a product or service here as well as there, and about Governments not getting in the way. As always with the European Union, it tries to turn the single market into a massive extension of state power. It has proposed some 300 laws, many of which we finally agreed to because we had to under QMV,

and many of those were not strictly necessary for a single market. The single market would be stronger if quite a number of them were repealed.

When I tried to negotiate under QMV, I found it far more time-consuming and expensive in every way. There were times when I was able to persuade my partners and colleagues and win them over. However, that might take three to six months of intensive campaigning involving international telephone calls, getting on planes to foreign capitals to persuade friendly Ministers, horse-trading on particular issues, developing parliamentary tactics or making people sit up late into the night—which they were not used to doing—in the hope that they would give in to me on a vital clause because they wanted to go home.

All those things had to be done, and it was not a pleasurable experience. I often had to come back and report to the House of Commons—as I always did, because I thought that that was important—that we were making law that was not ideal, but that it was the best we could do in the circumstances because we had given away our right to make, in the House and on behalf of the British people, the laws that we thought were correct.

I urge the House to support the position of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk and of the official Opposition—supporting whatever amendments are necessary in the light of the advice that we get on the documentation from the Foreign Office, which seems to be a bit of a shambles—to ensure that we do not give away any more qualified majority votes. Before the Minister says, "We can't do that, because Britain has given its word", I would say that Britain is surely still sufficiently democratic that, if the British people and their parliamentary representatives think that this treaty goes a step too far, we can go back to our European partners and say that it goes a step too far. We have the opportunity to do that now, because the Irish people have said that it goes several steps too far, and that, as far as they can see, the treaty of Nice is a dead letter.

Many good points have been made on individual items. I do not want to take up much more time, as others wish to contribute, but I am worried by the proposals on product intervention and the surrender of the unanimity clause. I find those proposals ambiguous, and I am not sure that the Government have protected our position on oil in the way that they claim. Whenever I have raised the issue, their defence has always sounded rather shrill. They are clearly worried by the issue, and I would like to hear their legal advice on it.

7.15 pm

I am worried about the subsidies to member states in trouble. We have not had a clear enough definition of what that might mean and how much it might cost British taxpayers.

I am also worried by any hint of dilution of the veto on the common foreign and security policy. This country should control its own foreign policy, and its own Army, Navy and Air Force. The Government are on the slide on that issue. I trust that they will offer leadership in Europe, but I want them to do so by power of persuasion, not by giving away our right to go it alone should the need arise. I am worried that the rules on structural funds might now pass out of veto territory into qualified majority voting territory. I fear that we might not do as well as we would wish if that were to happen.

My final observation is about the extraordinary text—highlighted by the right hon. Member for Llanelli—concerning the European Central Bank and the ecu. I thought that the ecu had been pensioned off some time ago, and was being replaced by the euro. I was always worried about the legality of that move, because the ecu is the currency in the treaty and it has a specific value, which could be different from that of the euro at any given point because of the way in which currencies move, and the fact that it is a weighted basket currency. We now see the ecu coming back in the language of the treaty of Nice.

I hope that the Minister will explain why we have reinvented the ecu when the Germans and others were trying to polish it off, and why we did not have proper amendments to the treaty confessing that the whole third stage plan for the ecu had gone wrong. That plan was blown up when the exchange rate mechanism fell to pieces, and when the German Government decided that the ecu was an embarrassment because it had sunk so far against the deutschmark. I hope that the Minister will also explain why we do not have proper treaty amendments for incorporation into the Bill to make the euro an honest currency in the legal sense, even if it is still a devaluing currency in every other sense. It is not a currency that I welcome. I see the Minister laughing. He would be well advised to make it legally honest, even if it is never going to be honest money.

I have great pleasure in supporting my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk and a united Conservative party in saying that we do not want all this qualified majority voting. It undermines our liberties and our democracy, and it is taking away the rights entrusted to us by the British people. Our tenure in this place is leasehold—although some have longer leases than others—and it is wrong to give away the freehold.

Mr. David: The treaty of Nice is an exceptionally good deal for the United Kingdom. There is much in it that deserves to be commended. For example, it contains proposals for sensible changes to the European Parliament, for well-thought-out changes to the European Commission and for significant changes to the European Union's legal system. There will also be significant changes to the Council of Ministers, especially with regard to qualified majority voting and to voting in the Council of Ministers.

As the Government explained in their White Paper in the lead-up to the Nice summit, QMV does not weaken Britain's place in Europe. The opposite is the case: a sensible extension of QMV will strengthen the United Kingdom's position. It is interesting that, in this philosophical debate, the Opposition have conceded that there are many circumstances in which QMV has already operated to the material benefit of the United Kingdom. The greatest single achievement of the European Union to date is the single European market. No one in this debate has doubted for a moment that that single market, although not yet complete, would not have proceeded as far as it has done without qualified majority voting.

I am, therefore, happy to see an extension to qualified majority voting. Some of the measures proposed in the treaty of Nice advocate an extension of QMV in areas of no tremendous significance—for example, with regard to the Committee of the Regions and to the Economic and Social Committee. Not many people would argue that those two bodies were institutions of great significance. In fact, they are decidedly not European Union institutions.

[Mr. David]

However, I accept that other areas in which an extension of QMV is proposed are of some significance. The structural funds have already been mentioned. The extension is also proposed in areas of industrial and commercial policy and in environmental measures. It is also suggested that it be extended to ensure that the single European market is made complete.

Mr. Bercow: Arguing by advocacy rather than by evidence, the hon. Gentleman contends that the single market is a tribute to qualified majority voting. If that is his position—it is a perfectly honourable one—can he tell the House how and why the free trade agreement that Switzerland has with the European Union is inferior to participation within the formal confines of the single market?

Mr. David: The free trade agreement with Switzerland is a positive measure, but it is only the beginning of what, we hope, will become a more complete arrangement. I hope that, as many people have advocated, the Swiss will reconsider their position and develop an ever-closer association with the EU in future. The current arrangements are a step in the right direction, but there is further to go.

Mr. Hendrick: Does my hon. Friend agree that the position of Switzerland and Norway will become untenable as the EU expands further, as they will have the benefits of the EU but none of the costs, and that those benefits, if they wish to retain them, will have to be looked at carefully?

Mr. David: I agree with my hon. Friend that the position is not ideal, but not that it is untenable. It is satisfactory at present and points us in the right direction. The position of Switzerland and Norway indicates that a deeper association is mutually desirable.

Further to my points about the single European market, it has been accepted that there were difficulties in securing the legislation that we wanted in our national interests when unanimity was required. Given that there were difficulties with an EU membership of 15, we can imagine how much more difficult it would be with a membership of 27. It would be enormously difficult to try to achieve unanimity. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) told us that when he was a Minister he used to fly around Europe making deals and arrangements. Even he would find it difficult to fly around 26 member states trying to secure agreement on different items of policy.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is making my point. One has to fly around Europe dealing with all these people because of qualified majority voting. If we had a veto there would be no need for that. If there was a silly proposal the British Government would simply say no.

Mr. David: On the other hand, instead of voting everything down, seeking to destroy everything and being entirely negative, as the Opposition would like us to be, would it not be far better if we had an imaginative, powerful agenda for Europe, as the Government have, and the power of advocacy to fulfil that agenda?

We have heard a lot about the United Kingdom being able to exercise a veto, but we should not forget that if we have a veto so will every other member state. At the moment the EU comprises 15 member states. If there were 27 member states, they would all have a veto and that would be a farcical situation. Apart from the Opposition, very few people in Europe are trying to argue that proposition.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Does not the hon. Gentleman betray the mindset with which he and his hon. Friends come to this House by suggesting that the great enterprise of additional legislation will lead us to some utopia? Is it not a matter of the danger of additional legislation that we can prevent by the exercise of a veto, but not through qualified majority voting?

Mr. David: I return to the point that I was making earlier. The Government have a positive agenda for Europe. We want to build a better Europe. We are not satisfied with simply maintaining the status quo or attempting to turn the clock back. We want the EU to develop so that we have a single market, supported by a strong social backdrop to produce the wealth-creating capacity that we all want.

Let me give an example of what could happen if we had enlargement without the extension of qualified majority voting. Reference has been made to the structural funds. Let us imagine that the British Government, negotiating the new financial perspective from 2007 onwards, negotiated a very good deal for the regions of the United Kingdom, drawing substantial sums of money from the structural funds, but at the last moment one of the new member states—such as Slovenia, with a population of under 2 million—suddenly refused to accept that and decided to exercise its veto. It would be perfectly entitled to do so. What would happen if Cyprus, with a population of 700,000, decided to exercise its veto? It would be perfectly entitled to do so. What would happen if Malta, with a population of under 300,000, decided that the deal negotiated by the United Kingdom was unacceptable and chose to exercise its veto? That would be an untenable and farcical situation in which deals negotiated by our democratically elected Government could be scuppered by a small minority of people in a far-flung section of the EU. That is not democracy.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Gentleman must surely not need reminding that we are a net contributor to the EU and the vetoing of a structural fund allocation is not something over which we should weep if we were able to retain the money and distribute it among our own regions as we wished.

Mr. David: That is a much broader argument that goes far beyond this debate. It is not an argument against the Nice treaty, but in favour of our withdrawal from the EU, which I suspect many Opposition Members would like to happen.

Let me return to qualified majority voting and the proposed changes. With regard to the weighting of votes at the Council of Ministers, it is worth pointing out that under the present formula the United Kingdom has 10 votes, which represent 11.4 per cent. of the 87 votes. Under the Nice treaty it is proposed that, with a membership of 15, the United Kingdom would have 29 of

the 237 votes. That would be an increase to 12.2 per cent. of the votes, so under the Nice treaty the United Kingdom's position would be strengthened by the reformulation of votes. Admittedly, that is only in the short term. After enlargement, the voting strength of all the larger states will be reduced as a percentage of the total.

I wish that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) were in his place, as it is worth noting that Germany, which has the largest population in the EU, will have the lowest voting strength in relation to its population. I find it objectionable that the hon. Member suggests that there is some kind of plot whereby Germany is trying to take the lead and subvert democracy. What has been negotiated at Nice demonstrates that that is absurd.

As we have already heard, qualified majority voting is not being advocated across the board. It is important for us to recognise that in some areas such as taxation, social security and border controls, there is an argument for maintaining the principle of unanimity. We are not arguing a maximalist position, but a reasoned pragmatic position that will take Europe and the United Kingdom forward.

In conclusion, I believe that the treaty of Nice is absolutely essential for EU enlargement, as is qualified majority voting, and enlargement is in the interests of all the candidate countries. Clearly, those countries would not be applying for membership of the EU if it were not in their best interests to do so. Let me stress, however, that it is also in our best interests. It will mean more jobs and more trade and will allow us to tackle common problems. It will mean fewer pressures for economic migration. Perhaps above all else, it will mean greater economic stability, with peace and security. It will mean an end to the east-west divide that has scarred our continent for too long.

That is why I honestly believe that the amendment will be rejected and that the House will eventually lend its support to the treaty of Nice.

7.30 pm

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said that he wanted to press amendment No. 233 to a vote. I ask hon. Members to look at the amendment paper, where they will see that people have subscribed to that amendment whom one would normally regard as the standard bearers of rectitude in matters European. One would have thought that they were the people to follow, given the reputation that they have established in these matters.

My hon. Friend was persuasive in his arguments for amendment No. 233. He told us of the agony experienced by a mother who had her children abducted and could not gain access to them. Those emotional arguments were so powerful that he abrogated the principle that my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) set out at the beginning of the debate: that the Opposition were opposed to any further encroachments of qualified majority voting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone said that such was the extremity of this one case that we should take a further leap and place family law into the domain of qualified majority voting, and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have been persuaded by him and subscribed to the amendment.

The problem of child abduction in Europe is very much, though not exclusively, a German one, under laws that date back unreformed to national socialism. My hon. Friend was forensic in his exposition of how majority voting has changed under the treaty of Nice and how the Germans will increasingly get their way as a consequence of their increase in the share of the qualified majority, and particularly the double majority voting. That entirely undermines his case for the amendment. The consequence will be that we will have cast family law into the pot for qualified majority voting, but the Germans, by the strength of his own argument, will get their way anyway. Far better, I urge my hon. Friends, to oppose the amendment and stick with the principle established by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk, dealing with such matters by bilateral negotiations.

Mr. Hendrick: The decision-making processes agreed at Nice are considerably to the benefit of the United Kingdom. They have been changed to ensure democratic legitimacy. In qualified majority voting, not only will the qualified majority be necessary but the votes will have to represent at least 62 per cent. of the total population of the European Union before a decision can be made.

The comments of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) about the Germanification of Europe are totally unfounded, because the treaty says that Germany will have the same number of votes as the UK, even though the German population is 82 million and ours only 57 million. It says:

"Acts of the Council shall require for their adoption at least 258 votes in favour, cast by a majority of members, where this Treaty requires them to be adopted on a proposal from the Commission."

Germany has only 29 of those 258 votes. We can see that people who pretend to be interested in Britain remaining in the European Union are using scaremongering tactics on qualified majority voting and enhanced co-operation.

The President of the European Commission will now have to be approved by the European Council by QMV and there will be new powers to organise the Commission and sack individual Commissioners if necessary. Many of us remember the appointment of the previous Commission President and the disagreement between European Governments, when unanimity was needed. Every single member state had a veto. If that was bad with the 12 member states that existed then, what would it be like with 25, 26, 27 or 28 members? Because they could not reach agreement, the 12 member states at the time came up with Mr. Jacques Santer, who proved to be a useless head of the European Commission. Decisions were made that lacked clarity, concision or vision, and we ended with the spectacle of a totally discredited European Commission.

Mr. Redwood: If the Commission President was so bad and the Commission so discredited, why did not Mr. Kinnock resign?

Mr. Hendrick: I was in discussions with Mr. Kinnock at the time. He wanted the entire Commission to resign, and he was instrumental in persuading certain Commissioners, including Mrs. Cresson, to do so. One of the most reluctant to resign was the President himself, who was appointed under the unanimity procedures that the Conservative party is still trying to defend. Unanimity may be okay for decisions such as own resources, border

[Mr. Hendrick]

controls, treaty changes and taxation, but not across the board. QMV has worked in Britain's interests. In 1998–99, there were 85 contested QM votes in the Council of Ministers. The UK was outvoted or abstained on five occasions, compared with eight for France and 21 for Germany.

QMV protects Britain's interests in many areas, including the European Court of Justice; trade in services; article 161, on the tasks and rules of the structural and cohesion funds, which will stop net recipients blocking efficiency and cost savings; environmental issues; financial regulation; appointments; and industrial policy. The Opposition amendments are aimed not at improving the European Union, but at wrecking the Nice treaty and other treaties negotiated over decades, as well as wrecking the relationship that we have with the 14 other member states.

Peter Hain: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in this interesting debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who will appreciate—indeed, he anticipated—that I will study what he said with great care before I write to him in detail on the points he raised. I have pointed out to him that there were a number of errors in the footnotes of the Command Paper that have been corrected. That may account for some of the issues he mentioned, if not all.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), as before, exulted in being Mr. Veto in Europe. A fine load of good that did Britain and I am not sure that it did him much good either. It is important that we concentrate on the big picture. People listening to this debate could have been sidetracked into some of the intricate detail and away from the big picture.

When Britain joined the European Economic Community, under a Conservative Government, there were already a considerable number of articles in the treaty of Rome that were subject to qualified majority voting. As the EEC and, later, the EU has grown larger, so there has been a need to extend QMV to stop decision making grinding to a halt.

Frankly, the picture painted by the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) was literally incredible, as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) pointed out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) observed, there is at least a measure of hypocrisy in Conservative criticisms of the Bill because the biggest extension of QMV came with Mrs. Thatcher's Single European Act in 1986. Literally thousands of directives and regulations have been passed using articles to which QMV was extended under the Single European Act.

The Single European Act allowed progress on the single market to be accelerated; a good thing, too. Yet the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) was happy to see QMV, to use his phrase, "bulldozed through" in the Single European Act, for which he voted, but not in other areas.

I admire the sense of principle and integrity of the hon. Member for Stone when he realises that an issue needs addressing—he spoke with great eloquence and sincerity about child abduction. The original proposal at Nice was that the whole of article 65 should move to QMV but one member state in particular was adamant that family law should be excluded. Given that unanimity applies to treaty change, and that we asked others to respect where we considered a matter of fundamental importance to be at stake, we had to respect that decision. The hon. Member for Stone differs from the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who seems blind to the dreadful problem of child abduction.

Maastricht also introduced QMV to many new areas of activity: implementing measures for common foreign and security policy and for the justice and home affairs pillars; for trans-European networks in transport; for telecommunications and energy infrastructures; for development policy co-operation; for consumer protection; and for the environment.

Why am I dwelling on the history? Because it was not this Government who agreed to those moves, but the Conservative party: the same party that now tells us that it is against new extensions of QMV in principle; the same party that calls QMV "giving away the veto" and an "erosion of national sovereignty"; the same party that has such a negative view of Europe that it seemingly cannot accept that QMV can ever be in Britain's interests. It is also the same party that has tabled amendments to the Bill seeking to remove every single new area of QMV.

Let us examine some of the new areas where Britain's national sovereignty is being eroded. The Conservatives object to the use of QMV on the financial regulations in article 279, which will make it easier to carry out much-needed reforms to tighten financial management, making rules for accounting officers and financial audit. These provisions will ensure that the British taxpayers' money is used properly. We do not want vested interests to block such reforms; we want more efficient ways to tackle fraud, mismanagement and waste in the EU. I am astonished that the Conservatives do not.

7.45 pm

Mr. Cash: I recognise the dilemma in amendment No. 233, but we are considering the problems affecting children and their parents in difficult circumstances. We should be able to concede on that matter, but not in relation to matters of European government, which is a different issue altogether. That applies to common foreign and security policy, as well as to Maastricht and Amsterdam, which we largely negotiated.

Peter Hain: I always enjoy my dialogues with the hon. Gentleman, who is a serious student of this matter. He deserves respect and to be listened to. However, government is about areas of social policy such as family law. It is to his credit that he has recognised that, in the appalling example to which he referred, QMV should apply; we wanted that in Nice, but were unable to achieve it. However, he should look with similar objectivity at other aspects of its application.

The Conservative party objects to QMV to appoint special representatives in common foreign and security policy.

Mr. Redwood: Quite right.

Peter Hain: "Quite right," says the right hon. Gentleman. To whose credit is haggling over the

nationality of these representatives, so that they arrive too late do any good? QMV will make sure that the right person is appointed quickly—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston in another context. We have had national interests blocking the best person for the job. QMV enables that to be overcome.

The Conservatives object to QMV being applied to incentive measures to help stamp out discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. We have been encouraging the Commission to do more in this area; QMV will make that task easier. We still have built-in safeguards to prevent any weakening of British standards through harmonisation of national legislation.

I could go on; in fact, I will. Another important point is that the Conservatives object to QMV on industrial policy under article 157(3), which is about competitiveness. QMV will help us to deliver the Lisbon economic reform agenda. It will deliver measures to support initiative, the development of small and large enterprises and better exploitation of innovation and research; all measures that will clearly benefit British business.

The amendment that really takes the biscuit and shows how far down the road of madness the Conservatives have gone is the one that would strike from the treaty the move to QMV on deciding the pension rights of the registrar of the Court of First Instance. Apparently this and articles like it represent such a monumental erosion of national sovereignty that the Opposition are demanding complete renegotiation of the treaty; more, they are demanding a referendum. The Conservative party would deny the British people a referendum on joining the euro, one of the most important issues of our time; the same party that denied the people a referendum on the fundamental changes made by the treaty of Maastricht. However, it wants the British people trooping off to the polls over the crucial constitutional issue of the pension rights of the registrar of the Court of First Instance. This is bizarre.

Mr. Redwood: Like the Minister, I wish to see fraud and racism stamped out throughout the EU and beyond. Which are the countries that the Minister thinks will support fraud and racism that need to be overridden by the use of QMV? Surely we can negotiate on those matters by unanimity. Which countries are so awful?

Peter Hain: That is not the way to look at the issue. In tackling discrimination, difficult and tough decisions are needed. There are different views about how we achieve it, and QMV helps.

The Government take a pragmatic view towards QMV based on calculating Britain's interests, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) said in his excellent speech. On structural funds post-2007, QMV may well assist in advancing that issue for areas such as Wales. QMV works for Britain; it built the single market on which more than 3 million British jobs and thousands of businesses depend. It is simply not true that Britain always loses out and others always win, as Conservative fantasy suggests. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston was right to say that in 1999 Britain was not outvoted on a single issue, but Germany was twice, France was three times and Italy was eight times.

We are clear that more QMV, in the right areas, can work strongly in Britain's interest in the future and that is how we approached the negotiation on the Nice treaty. When we felt strongly that an issue was of such fundamental importance that the decision must remain in the UK, with this Government and this Parliament, we just said, "No, we will not agree to QMV." We made that clear to the House and to our EU partners even before we had begun the negotiations.

We set out in advance the areas on which we would not agree to QMV. We said that we would not accept QMV in areas such as tax, social security, defence, border controls, treaty change or the Community budget. And nor did we. The UK veto remains on all of those issues.

We firmly and successfully defended our interests as we saw them. Of course, that works both ways. We could have accepted QMV on some issues at Nice—such as on family law within article 65, which is the issue to which the hon. Member for Stone referred—but they were red line issues for other member states.

We have heard several times today that Nice extends QMV in 31 articles of the treaties. That is true, and there are good reasons for all those changes. However, the Committee should consider how many times the article on appointing common foreign and security policy special representatives will be used compared with the number of times the articles that the Conservatives agreed should move to QMV under the Single European Act have already been used. The Committee could also compare the significance of moving decisions on consumer protection to QMV, as the Conservatives did at Maastricht, compared to moving to QMV for decisions on the rules of procedure of the Court of Auditors, as we did at Nice.

Mr. Bercow: Closer to home, does the Minister for Europe not recognise that the loss of the veto has already resulted in the imposition on this country of the information and consultation directive? The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) told the Trade and Industry Committee on 4 November 1998 that he would stop that directive. It is virulently opposed by the Federation of Small Businesses and will cost tens of thousands of small enterprises in this country dearly.

Peter Hain: That sounds like the scare stories put about before the 1997 general election, when we were told that the minimum wage would cause the loss of millions of jobs. Instead, 1 million new jobs were created under this Government. I went to the Council of Ministers in Luxembourg after the general election—at short notice, I might add—and was able to negotiate a better deal on that information and consultation directive so that it will be introduced over seven years and will not apply to companies with fewer than 50 workers. It will have little impact, contrary to what the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) suggests.

The debate is not about numbers, but about British interests. It is a shortsighted view to oppose QMV in principle, as the Conservatives do, and every one of the 31 moves to QMV that we agreed at Nice will be in Britain's interests. It is in Britain's interests to have QMV for industrial policy to increase competition, as we decided at Nice. Our companies do very well out of the single market.

It is in Britain's interest to have QMV for international agreements on trade in services because our companies will benefit from the liberalisation that that is likely to

[Peter Hain]

offer. It is in the UK's interests to have QMV for the rules and procedures of the European Court of Justice because that will deliver more efficient procedures and speedier judgments to ensure that the EU's rules are respected.

I could go on. The fact is that QMV works for Britain, which the Conservatives seem to have forgotten since they agreed to QMV in 42 articles or sub-articles under the Single European Act and Maastricht.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Minister mentioned defending the national interest and the trade in services. I am pleased that he was not drawn into the game of playing one EU country off against another. My point is about the surrender of negotiating rights under QMV, in so far as that then transfers exclusive authority to negotiate on those issues to European Commissioners. The Minister will know that Pascal Lamy was keen to deny individual states the right to negotiate on trade in services—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech, not an intervention.

Peter Hain: I do not agree with my hon. Friend. Why do he and Opposition Members have so little confidence in Britain's ability to go to Europe and get a good deal? We have been consistently able to do that, but my hon. Friend, like Opposition Members, seems to suffer from an incredible inferiority complex about the strength of our arguments and our ability to win in Europe.

The position of the Government is crystal clear: when QMV is in Britain's interests we will agree to it, and when it is not in Britain's interests we will not agree to it. It is as simple as that. The QMV provisions of the Nice treaty fully reflect that principle. That is why we strongly support the treaty, and why we reject the amendments.

Mr. Cash: I must be very brief. The matters that have been discussed can be dealt with by renegotiation. It is essential that we solve the problem of QMV by rejecting it in all its aspects, except when it affects the people I described in my earlier speech. I am a member of the Child Abduction Committee, as set out in the Register of Members' Interests, and as such I am completely in favour of all the arguments put forward by my right hon. and hon. Friends about QMV, with the exception of amendment No. 233.

Mr. Spring: I agree with the Minister for Europe that we have heard several fine contributions tonight from both sides of the Committee. What has emerged clearly is how confused the Government are on QMV. They are schizoid. They say that the moves on QMV are hugely important and then, in the next breath, say that they are inconsequential. The Government cannot have it both ways. The real reason for that confusion is that the Government do not have a clear view of the architecture of Europe and the role of Britain in it. That is the heart of the problem.

Before Nice, the former Foreign Secretary talked to the Foreign Affairs Committee about the 50 items on the French presidency's list of potential extensions to QMV, and he substantially ruled them out. In practice at Nice, the majority of the items on that list were eventually accepted in one form or another. Some were amended, but were still accepted. The rhetoric beforehand was entirely different from what actually happened.

Before the last IGC, Ministers repeatedly listed six areas in which they would refuse to extend QMV—treaty change, taxation, border controls, social security, defence and own resources. However, Labour's recent election manifesto mentioned only two issues in relation to retaining the veto—tax and border controls. I tabled a written question specifically on that point and received a bland reply about the national interest. The increasing ambiguity on the subject is a hallmark of a Government who have no clear view on Britain's interests.

We keep hearing the parrot cry about constructive engagement in Europe, but the Government cannot name a single power that has been returned to this national Parliament as a result of their negotiating skills in the past four years.

The political integration process is going in one direction only. We want a modern, dynamic and successful EU that will incorporate all 27 or 28 countries. Qualified majority voting undermines that. Nice was not, in practice, about enlargement: its effect will be to slow down and damage enlargement.

We may well wish to press new clause 11 to a Division in due course, but the debate has made it clear that the Government have undertaken no fresh thinking about our relationship with Europe. The evidence for that is the way in which they have given up our veto on crucial matters.

We therefore have no hesitation about pressing the amendment to a Division this evening.

It being Eight o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [28 June], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 149, Noes 349.

Division No. 22] **[8 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Collins, Tim
Amess, David	Conway, Derek
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael	Cormack, Sir Patrick
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James	Cran, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Bacon, Richard	Djanogly, Jonathan
Barker, Greg	Dodds, Nigel
Baron, John	Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Bellingham, Henry	Duncan, Alan
Bercow, John	Duncan Smith, Iain
Beresford, Sir Paul	Duncan, Peter
Boswell, Tim	Evans, Nigel
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*	Fabricant, Michael
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia	Fallon, Michael
Brady, Graham	Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Brazier, Julian	Flight, Howard
Browning, Mrs Angela	Flook, Adrian
Burns, Simon	Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Burt, Alistair	Fox, Dr Liam
Butterfill, John	Francois, Mark
Cameron, David	Gale, Roger
Cash, William	Garnier, Edward
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*	Gibb, Nick
Chope, Christopher	Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Clappison, James	Goodman, Paul
	Green, Damian *(Ashford)*

Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Gray and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen

Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Phil
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Ivor Caplin.

Question accordingly negatived.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have now to announce the result of the Divisions deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on Education, the Ayes were 293, the Noes were 195, so the motion was agreed to.

On the first motion on Northern Ireland, the Ayes were 482, the Noes were 10, so the motion was agreed to.

On the second motion on Northern Ireland, the Ayes were 483, the Noes were 10, so the motion was agreed to.

[*The Division Lists are published at the end of today's debates.*]

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Further considered.

Mr. Wilkinson: I beg to move amendment No. 40, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 1),'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 41, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 2),'.

No. 42, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 3),'.

No. 43, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 4),'.

No. 44, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 5),'.

No. 45, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 6),'.

No. 46, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 7),'.

No. 47, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 8),'.

No. 48, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 9),'.

No. 53, in page 1, line 9, after "(i)", insert—

'Article 1 (other than paragraph 15),'.

No. 78, in page 1, line 9, after "10", insert—

'other than Article 2, paragraph 47'.

No. 29, in page 1, line 12, after "occasion", insert—

'except for Article 3, paragraph 1(b) of the Protocol on the Enlargement of the European Union in so far as that relates to the appointment of a special representative in the area of common foreign and security policy'.

New clause 1—*Special representative in the area of common foreign and security policy*—

'In relation to Article 1, paragraph 3 of the Treaty of Nice, amending Article 23(2) TEU, prior to a vote in the Council on the appointment of a special representative in the area of common foreign and security policy, Her Majesty's Government shall lay a report before Parliament setting out its preferred candidate for the post and shall lay a further report after the Council meeting if that candidate has not been adopted.'.

New clause 2—*International agreements under Article 24 TEU*—

'In relation to Article 1, paragraph 4 of the Treaty of Nice, amending Article 24 TEU, prior to casting a vote in the Council on any such international agreement, Her Majesty's Government shall lay before Parliament a report setting out the implications for the United Kingdom of such an agreement.'.

New clause 7—*Western European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*—

'This Act will not come into effect until Her Majesty's Government has laid before Parliament a report showing the implications for the Western European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, for the future functioning of these organisations, and for the United Kingdom's role therein, of Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Nice Treaty, revising Article 17 TEU, and Article 1, paragraph 5 of the Nice Treaty, revising Article 25 TEU.'.

New clause 8—*Adoption of decisions under Article 17, paragraph 1, TEU*—

'For the purpose of Article 17, paragraph 1 of the Treaty on European Union, as amended by Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Treaty of Nice, the constitutional requirement of the United Kingdom before any decision under that paragraph (common defence) may be adopted by the United Kingdom shall be that the decision shall have been approved by an Act of Parliament.'.

New clause 33—*Eurojust*—

'This Act shall not come into force until Her Majesty's Government has obtained, and laid before Parliament, legal advice from the Attorney General on the effect on the criminal and judicial processes in the United Kingdom of Article 1, paragraph 8 of the Nice Treaty, revising Article 31 TEU, as they relate to the provisions on Eurojust.'.

Mr. Wilkinson: I speak in support of new clause 7 in particular, which is of great significance. Under the treaty of Nice nearly all the functions of Western European Union, as laid down in the treaty of Brussels and modified by the Paris protocols of 1954, are taken over by the European Union. Only two remain, and to some extent there is a third, residual, function as well. The first is the mutual defence obligation under article 5 of the treaty of Brussels. The second is the existence of the Assembly of Western European Union, which sits in Paris and of which I have had the honour to be a member for some twelve and a half years. The third is the residual function relating to armaments co-operation—the supervision of the West European Armaments Group.

Article 5 of the Brussels treaty is the fundament and heart of European defence. It is the mutual security guarantee among the European members of the alliance to come to the defence of a member state if it is subject to aggression. It is an explicit, clear and total guarantee. It is a commitment to mutual defence, and nothing less. Interestingly, article 5 of the Washington treaty commits the signatories to consult in order to take appropriate action, or words to that effect, but article 5 of the Brussels treaty is firmer even than the Washington treaty in the obligations that it places on member states. I am pleased that this function, which is regarded as residual by European Union policy makers, is retained as Western European Union's raison d'être in its remaining form.

8.15 pm

The Parliamentary Assembly of Western European Union is an invaluable body. It is a forward-looking institution that has produced countless reports, often well ahead of their time. It brings together representatives of no fewer than 28 states, which is significant because it bridges the gap between the European Union and the wider Europe. The security of our continent has to be considered in that wider context.

The aim of the treaty of Nice is to narrow European security and defence to member countries of the European Union. When a crisis emerges, they have an obligation to consult on what response should be taken. Of course, they voluntarily commit themselves to inviting other members of the alliance into the consultation procedure, but those countries are not part of the decision-making process to the same extent as the EU member states. European NATO countries such as Norway and Turkey and others that have more recently joined the alliance, such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, are therefore second-class citizens within the security apparatus of their own continent. It is a particularly grotesque fact that Norway and Turkey, which were literally in the front line against the former Soviet Union during the cold war inasmuch as they shared a boundary with the Soviet Union, should be deemed in any way to have a lesser share in decision making about the security of our continent.

We would do well to bear in mind the fact that, apart from the virulent and dangerous phenomenon of terrorism from ETA in Spain and the Irish Republican Army and loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, there is no immediate security threat within the EU itself. There are, however, grave developments of major consequence to the security of our continent of which we are all too well aware in parts of Europe that lie outside the EU. This is especially true in the Balkans, with the threat of civil war in Macedonia and the difficulties of maintaining an uneasy peace in Kosovo and of retaining a presence of peacekeeping troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The non-EU countries have just as great an interest in the security of our continent as do the EU nations.

It is a thoroughly retrograde step to arrogate to the European Union a more exclusive right to a premier role in European security. Indeed, it is a somewhat perverse arrogation of duty to the EU nations, inasmuch as many of them are neutral states which throughout the long period of the cold war deliberately eschewed membership of NATO and of WEU. Furthermore, we are reminded of the implications of this fact by the outcome of the Irish referendum, which came about to some degree because a significant number of Irish electors believed that by virtue of the treaty of Nice they were giving away their treasured neutral status and that Irish forces might find themselves under British or NATO command. That was anathema to a significant minority of voters in Ireland who, with other strands of opinion, came together to form the majority who voted down the treaty of Nice.

I urge Her Majesty's Government to think long and hard and to recognise the implications. Our Turkish friends, who are in a pivotal strategic situation, feel especially disadvantaged. It is from Turkish bases that British and other allied aircraft fly missions over northern Iraq under the policy of restraining Saddam Hussein in the no-fly zones. It is the Turks who, as the bridge

[Mr. Wilkinson]

between Asia and Europe, are vital in the Balkans. It is also the Turks who, with their perspective to the Caucasus and other zones of conflict and threat, are especially interested in those areas. To give the Turks a lesser status in decision making over European security, which is inherent in the Nice proposals, is anathema to the Turkish Government and they have not been able to acquiesce in that initiative.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): In view of the hon. Gentleman's comments on Turkey, I am sure that he is aware of Turkey's ambition to join the European Union. If it did so, presumably that objection would fall away. The reason that it is not altogether welcome at this stage has to do with the activities of the Turkish army, to which he refers so favourably. Does he feel that the development would be desirable?

Mr. Wilkinson: There have always been difficulties in the body politic in Turkey. Wise commentators understand that. However, the interests of mutual security transcend those difficulties, do they not? It was on Turkish soil that NATO felt it necessary to deploy Jupiter ballistic missiles against the Soviet Union in the 1950s. Turkish troops were shoulder to shoulder with our forces and other allied troops maintaining the freedom of South Korea during the Korean war. We would be foolish to be as critical as the hon. Gentleman of internal affairs in Turkey to the extent of allowing that critical frame of mind to prejudice our appreciation of the security value which Turkey contributes to the continent of Europe.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend always sets out his case clearly. He will know of the genuine anxieties in Turkey about the proposed new European defence arrangements. In the view of many Turkish commentators, the arrangements may cause the dismemberment of NATO and possibly the ultimate withdrawal of United States forces from Europe. Given Turkey's difficult geographical position, that is why the Turks are concerned. That is why we should express considerable support for Turkey's anxieties at this stage, as we consider the future of the European defence effort under the proposals emanating from Nice.

Mr. Wilkinson: How right, as ever, is my hon. Friend, but I must address the point made by the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), which I did not answer in full. Turkey may be knocking on the door of the European Union, but we should consider how long other European countries have waited—applicant nations supposedly in the forefront of eligibility for entry. They started knocking at the door at the beginning of the previous decade. They are still not yet inside the EU house. We do not know exactly when they will come in, and the Turks' admission may be postponed sine die. I can imagine all kinds of barrier being put in their way—especially the kind described by the hon. Gentleman relating to Turkish domestic politics and so on. That is not to take on board subtler and more implicit objections relating to Turkey's predominant Muslim faith, although it is of course a strictly secular nation.

Let us not say, "Turkey may participate fully when it is a member of the European Union", because it may be an unconscionable time a-coming, and in the intervening years all sorts of crises may emerge which will necessarily involve Turkey and should involve it as a full front-line partner in the decision-making process. I say that advisedly, because what nation would wish its troops to be deployed in situations which may evolve into combat when it is not involved in decisions on those deployments from the outset?

The question is crucial to the NATO context too, is it not, Mr. Lord? Under the proposals of the European security and defence initiative, the Europeans are to make good the deficiencies in their own capabilities. We all know about the headline goals that are supposed to be met by the year 2003 to allow 60,000 troops to be deployed in two months, with an armada of naval vessels and a panoply of air power over the top, but crucial capabilities will still depend on the United States: heavy lift, strategic reconnaissance, intelligence, smart munitions for all-weather operation and much else besides. Many of those capabilities will require the employment of US service personnel, because no one else has the training to operate the equipment concerned. What Congress of the United States will allow its personnel to be deployed in support of a European operation of which it is inherently critical? We are told that the Europeans will go it alone only if the Americans feel that they should not, or will not, take part; so there is an inherent veto from the United States from the outset over those key capabilities that are necessary to the success of any operation.

8.30 pm

Let us not delude ourselves about the Petersberg tasks. We all know that it is the small conflagrations—the situations which we suppose we can solve with a brush-fire type operation of peacekeeping and containment—that smoulder and ignite into a major conflagration, which involves the deployment of large numbers of forces with supporting services. That is what has happened in the Balkan wars until now, and we cannot assume that things will be different in future.

We cannot assume that the concept of the Petersberg tasks—of providing the inventory of capabilities and the complement of units up to the 60,000—will be confined to the limited operations for which the Labour spokesmen, the drafters of the Nice treaty, designed it.

Mr. Cash: I am much persuaded by my hon. Friend's arguments. Does he accept that it is impossible to sustain the distinction between peacemaking under the present arrangements in the treaties of Amsterdam and Nice and the previous understanding of Petersberg tasks? Under Petersberg tasks, stealth bombs and smart bombs were used, and there was a full-scale war in the Balkans. It is unworkable for this matter to be dealt with using vague wording. It is obviously a movement towards a European army and all the support services, as my hon. Friend said.

It is also deeply worrying to discover, by tracing through the complicated procedures described, that qualified majority voting is involved. It is absolutely impossible to imagine that anyone would have any proper command and control system in such circumstances.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is very wise. I shall not take up all the points that he makes. Suffice it to say that I find one feature particularly perplexing and deeply worrying. I cannot comprehend what benefit is construed

from the duplication of military and political staffs between NATO and the European Union. Those who manage a crisis want one clear chain of command and, above all, one set of analysts and one set of staff specialists; otherwise, there will be two interpretations of the crisis as it develops, one by NATO staffs and one by the European Union staffs, and who will know which should predominate? There will be bitter conflicts between the two.

I am reading the late Robert Rhodes James's book on the Gallipoli campaign, which describes the confusion between the military staffs under Hamilton and the naval staffs under De Robeck. What did we then get in the Balkans? The biggest allied tragedy in joint operations that occurred in the 20th century, even allowing for Dieppe. There is a serious possibility of delay, confusion and even conflict and recrimination between the two sets of military political staffs—those in NATO and those in the European Union. I do not see how the cause of European security will be advanced thereby.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I do not always agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I certainly recognise his expertise in this field, based as it is on much practical experience. Is it not clear that there is increasing reluctance on Capitol Hill to commit American forces on the ground in Europe? If such is to be the future attitude of the House of Representatives and the Senate, does it not make sense for the Europeans to have a capability to deal with issues such as those in Kosovo or other parts of the Balkans, in circumstances where we know that we cannot automatically expect the Americans to come to Europe?

Mr. Wilkinson: Of course I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. There is no need to create such a European Union architecture for the evolution of an autonomous security and defence policy just to achieve the goals that we all know need to be met.

As with NATO, the Western European Union's great strength is that it is a free association of sovereign, independent states, which for their common good came together to work for their mutual security. This approach will not exist in the EU because there is a political dynamic and a political objective to create a European army, to use the expression of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash).

That policy involves a capability for autonomous action on the part of the EU, per se, as an embryonic state, ultimately to give it the characteristics of a fully fledged state. The EU has much of the other apparatus, but it has not yet been fully put in place. Let the Europeans do their best to build up their capability, but they do not need to abolish most of the functions of WEU and subsume them within the EU and to create an architecture that competes with NATO.

It is noteworthy, Sir Michael—forgive me for downgrading you most unworthily and inappropriately in the nomenclature which I used earlier—that one of the noblest features of the modernisation and transformation of NATO has been the partnership for peace programme, whereby the countries of central and eastern Europe, which were formerly our adversaries, have been taken into the bosom of the western defence community in NATO and helped to bring their armed forces under civilian, democratic control, thus learning how to work under democratic Governments, how to harmonise their procedures and operational methods with those of the NATO alliance and how to exercise together, breaking down barriers and becoming all part of one happy family.

That has worked very well, but the EU's objective is just the opposite; it is to keep at arm's length and to exclude to some degree those who are not members of this sacred union, which is acquiring a political dimension and capability for autonomous defence action. This is thoroughly retrograde. It is recreating divisions which we hoped had ceased to exist in our continent, with the ending of the cold war and the dismantlement of the Berlin wall. So new clause 7 is entirely wise. A report on all those implications should be put before Parliament, but of course we have had nothing of the kind and I think that thoroughly remiss.

In conclusion, I shall argue this final point: there is much talk about how democratic scrutiny of European defence will be maintained on a transnational basis. In the current review of whether the European Parliament should assume that function, whether a new assembly should be created or whether we should use the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union, I urge that we use the Assembly. I say that not because I am particularly parti pris but because the WEU Assembly actually works well, and it does so because of its wide membership. All the countries—whether EU nations, NATO nations outside the EU, or countries from further east whose representatives work alongside us—are essentially on one footing. Our Parliament has the right to question Defence Ministers and an obligation to vote funds for defence. Other Parliaments have the ability to modify defence budgets, and it is from the ranks of national parliamentarians that national Defence Ministers are drawn.

The European Parliament, by contrast, is déraciné—it does not have the same roots or legitimacy; it does not even have the same treaty competence. I cannot comprehend why we should arrogate the oversight function to an Assembly which is more remote from the peoples of western Europe. We risk creating a hybrid entity with no clear mandate or treaty responsibility, which the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union has. Whatever the outcome of the debate on European security and defence, I hope that we will maintain transnational democratic parliamentary scrutiny, as provided by WEU.

Dr. Palmer: I want to respond to some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). I agree that it is probably correct that the European force is unlikely to take a controversial role without the consent of the United States. He referred to a veto, although I am not sure that I would express it like that. However, a major commitment in the real world, even under the Petersberg tasks, is unlikely to be carried out in the teeth of opposition from Washington.

Involvement is much more likely if the United States decides, for whatever reason, that it does not want to commit ground forces but has no objection to—perhaps even welcomes—an active European commitment. I respect the hon. Gentleman's historical view and think that he will agree that for many years, since the first world war, Congress has been sceptical about the willingness of European countries to put their troops where their mouths

[Dr. Palmer]

are and commit themselves to concrete engagements instead of relying on US troops to rush over and bail us out when we have a problem. Many members of Congress would have put it that brutally. Although opinions vary in the US just as they do here, a few people on both sides of Congress welcome the prospect of the Europeans taking seriously the job of pursuing peacekeeping and other Petersberg tasks independently, in consultation with our American allies.

We are all aware that the debate on security is a proxy for the broader debate on the direction of the EU. It would be illusory to suggest that the hon. Gentleman is not partly motivated in his criticism by his aversion to the idea that the EU might move beyond what it already is and begin to resemble a joint state or entity.

8.45 pm

If we have a common foreign and security policy, it is difficult to argue that we should have no capability to implement even the smallest, most peaceful activity that comes under that heading under our own steam. I assume that the hon. Gentleman would argue that a common foreign and security policy is essentially wrong-headed and that we do not need the EU to develop such a policy. I do not want to put words in his mouth, but I think that he would regard that as a dangerous development. The debate in which we are currently engaged is inextricably linked to the question of whether we favour the whole concept of a common foreign and security policy.

If we were to reject such a policy, it would be logical to reject the provision before us and to welcome new clause 7. However, to do that would be to reject the serious commitment of the EU to maintain peace on our borders. I appeal to hon. Members' sense of history. The history of Europe does not support the idea that it is sensible for western European countries not to take an active interest in events on the fringes—an interest that extends to having a joint foreign and security policy that affects how they behave, and includes a willingness to commit forces to reinforce the peaceful objectives of that policy.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Opposition entirely endorse the very striking point that the hon. Gentleman has just made, but it does not follow that we need a separate structure to achieve those ends. There is a danger. How do we avoid becoming sucked into an effort for which we do not have the capability through a structure that was not designed for the purpose?

Dr. Palmer: That is a reasonable point: we must be careful not to become involved in a peacekeeping operation that develops into a war-fighting operation when we do not have the infrastructure to support such an action. That challenge will be faced by the EU as it develops its new capability. However, with respect, one cannot have it both ways: if we want significant war-fighting operations to be reserved for NATO, as most hon. Members on both sides of the House do, we cannot escape the fact that we will have to draw the line somewhere and acknowledge that certain operations are beyond our capability.

Mr. Hendrick: Given the problems that developed in Bosnia and subsequently in Kosovo, does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we have a rapid reaction force that can act quickly? Such a force is not a European army: it will not be a standing army, but one that comprises volunteer forces from member states, so it cannot be considered a Euro-army, as the Opposition argue. Does he also agree that, with only a handful of staff based in Brussels, the WEU hardly has the administrative power or clout needed to do what must be done by the EU, given the EU's political clout and the structures that already exist within Europe?

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful for all those points. The more we can define the rapid reaction force's precise role and objectives in our debate and the broader debate across Europe, the more effective it will be. I accept the point made by several hon. Members that it is necessary to attempt a precise definition; otherwise, in practice, we will have problems in the grey areas. However, that does not mean that we should not make the attempt; we must do so because, as my hon. Friend said, the force is essential for the security of the EU.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The hon. Gentleman is typically generous in giving way. He got to the nub of the problem when he talked about reserving serious war fighting for NATO and confining the work of the EU force to crisis management. The flaw at the heart of that argument is that there is no way of having such a fire break. The major wars that have been fought in history have, as often as not—indeed, more often than not—started when attempts at crisis management spiralled out of control. Creating a structure outside NATO reopens the deadly prospect of war breaking out in Europe without the Americans being involved from the outset. That is the nub of the problem and the cancer at the heart of the project.

Dr. Palmer: I am afraid that I do not agree, as the position is the reverse. There are a number of serious situations, such as the recent conflict in the Balkans, that go beyond the normal scope of diplomatic endeavours and cannot be tackled within the broader ambit of NATO, which would effectively require a full-blooded commitment from the United States. The USA is not willing to give that commitment routinely or intervene regularly in what it may see as every brush fire or little conflict in parts of Europe, so we need an alternative option. I accept that we must be careful not to get involved in something that is beyond the scope that we have set, but if we do not have that option at all, it is likely that serious situations will be allowed to get more serious because of the lack of a relatively limited response to deal with them. Recent history in Europe, notably in the Balkans, provides support for that belief.

Finally, in response once more to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Wilkinson—I am sorry, the hon. Gentleman and his constituency have become synonymous over the years, and I mean the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood—I listened with surprise to his belief that the WEU is less remote to the peoples of western Europe than is the European Parliament. I would have agreed if he had said that there is a problem with democracy and with people identifying with the institutions of the EU. We all recognise that there is a democratic deficit and limited interest in the European Parliament. As we know, the turnout for European elections does not even reach the

dizzy heights that we achieved in the general election this year. However, I wonder what percentage of our constituents have ever heard of the WEU, let alone regard it as the less remote body that represents them on those issues.

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman is most courteous and indulgent. May I clarify the distinction? The membership of the WEU Assembly is drawn entirely from national parliamentarians, who sit on the defence and foreign affairs committees of their Parliaments and take part in all the defence debates, the procurement process and the voting of funds. It is from their ranks that national Defence Ministers are drawn. The European parliamentarians in Strasbourg or Brussels often do not even have proper constituencies and are seldom seen in them, let alone in their national Parliaments, lobbying or trying to influence events.

Dr. Palmer: The belief that democracy is best served by indirect representation through national parliamentarians is most strongly held by national parliamentarians. I do not believe that the man or woman in the street would consider that a particularly impressive way of representing his or her views at European level. The hon. Gentleman says that the European Parliament is not perfect, and I accept that.

I am using my freedom of the Back Benches to take a somewhat critical view of the WEU, which I am sure that my Front-Bench colleagues would not wish to do. The hon. Gentleman suggests in new clause 7 that the proposals could have grave consequences for the WEU. That is not necessarily the case, as long as the membership of the European Union is only a subset of the broad scope of nations across Europe. As long as that is the case, the WEU will provide a contact point for many countries that are not, for the next few years, likely to be members of the European Union. That is a healthy balance.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman considers me a raving Europhile. I will not conceal from him my hope that there will come a time when the membership of the EU and the current membership of the WEU are not all that different. At that stage, we might reconsider the matter, but for now his fears do not seem to be justified.

Mr. Spring: Several issues are covered under this group of amendments, as the Nice treaty makes a number of changes to the treaty on European Union. I shall touch on just a few of those issues.

Amendment No. 40 concerns the so-called early warning mechanism agreed at Nice. Under the revised article 7 of the treaty on European Union, the treaty of Nice allows the EU to "address appropriate recommendations" to a country if there is a risk—I repeat, a risk—of a serious breach by a member state of the fundamental principles listed in article 6(1) of the treaty on European Union: liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

Does the Minister agree that that runs the risk of damaging and divisive interference in the internal affairs of member states, on the basis of mere speculation? Of course, as the House knows, under article 7 countries can already take action if there is a "serious and persistent breach" of those principles by a member state.

How exactly will the new provision work? It is no secret that it was formulated in response to recent events in Austria. Presumably, when they signed up to the article, Ministers had an idea when it might be used, so perhaps they will now tell us what the intention is. Would the provision have been exercised in the case of Haider's inclusion in the Government of Austria? If so, what would the recommendations to the Government have been, and when, if ever, would the mechanism have come to an end?

How will the article 6(1) principles be assessed, both under the new mechanism and under the existing article 7 provision? In particular, will the Minister guarantee that those principles, which include respect for human rights, will not be interpreted through the prism of the charter of fundamental rights? For example, article 19 of the charter states:

"No one may be removed, expelled or extradited to a State where there is a serious risk that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty".

If the charter will affect national law only in so far as it implements Union law, what is the point of that particular article?

9 pm

Let me cite one example. Will the Minister assure the House that the provision that the Government agreed at Nice will not be used to decide that a member state that intends to extradite a suspected murderer to the United States is in danger of contravening article 6(1) principles and will therefore be given recommendations by QMV, under revised article 7 TEU? I am sorry that those are technical points, but they must be explored.

The second issue that I want to speak about is the European defence identity. We heard an absolutely outstanding speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). I was especially pleased that he referred in some detail to Turkey, which feels concerned about the recent developments in Nice. As the House will appreciate, although European defence policy is not contained in the treaty, some changes were agreed to pave the way for it.

First, references to the Western European Union in article 17 TEU have been deleted. Amendment No. 41 would deal with that problem by removing paragraph 2 from article 1 of the treaty. Secondly, article 25 TEU, as amended by Nice, provides an enhanced role for the Political and Security Committee. Under the authorisation of the Council, the committee will exercise

"political control and strategic direction of the crisis management operations"

and may, with Council authorisation, take decisions in that context.

Finally, declaration 1 of the final act of the intergovernmental conference, which does not form part of the Bill, relates to European security and defence policy, which it says will become operational quickly. It foreshadows a decision to be taken by the European Council no later than the Brussels summit.

New clauses 7 and 8 would ensure greater parliamentary scrutiny of those developments. New clause 7 would require a report to be submitted to Parliament on their effects on NATO and the WEU, and new clause 8 would require a Bill to be introduced before any decision on common defence is taken.

[Mr. Spring]

The House has debated those issues several times, and I do not intend to cover familiar ground for too long, but I should like to make some specific points in relation to new clauses 7 and 8. The background to the debate is that the Conservatives strongly support greater European defence co-operation and a stronger European commitment to NATO. Indeed, it was a Conservative Government who started that process. We genuinely believe, however, that the European defence policy that is currently being developed represents an evolution towards a European army in all but name. The documents agreed at Nice and elsewhere make it clear that the force will exist outside NATO, which flatly contradicts repeated assurances made by Ministers and confirms the major reservations of the Americans. We believe that the structures agreed at Nice will weaken and undermine NATO.

I have some specific questions for the Minister. First, how does he reconcile the removal of references to the WEU in article 17 TEU and the decline of the WEU with what the Prime Minister said to the House four years ago? He said that

"getting Europe's voice more clearly heard in the world will not be achieved through merging the European Union and the Western European Union or developing an unrealistic common defence policy."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 314.]

Does the Minister accept that although changes to the WEU were agreed at Maastricht, it was developed as the forum for expressing European defence interests within NATO and was formally recognised as such by the EU? The idea was that the WEU was to be balanced halfway between NATO and the EU. Its development posed no threat to NATO and all the units available to it were either to be borrowed from NATO, or if they were outside NATO they were available to it in an emergency.

Does the Minister not accept that the establishment under the Nice treaty of the Political and Security Committee is another sign that, by creating new, stand-alone EU structures, the European security and defence policy duplicates existing NATO structures? What is the point of doing that unless it is to rival NATO, with all the consequences that flow from that?

Despite assurances from the Prime Minister that planning for military operations would happen in NATO, the Nice accords and the statements of the Secretary of State for Defence make it crystal clear that many operations can and will be planned outside NATO. National headquarters can be used under the auspices of the EU. The Nice accords further make it clear that there is no onus on the EU to involve NATO at any stage of a crisis. It is evident that a defence entity that is a clear rival to NATO is being established. It could undermine the Atlantic alliance and the United States' commitment to Europe's security.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) made a thoughtful contribution. I emphasise to him that the Americans want burden sharing, and they are not getting it. Our anxieties are shared by the head of the EU's military staff, Major General Messervy Whiting, who said earlier this year that the EU's rapid reaction force would start to compete with NATO when it acquired a full range of strategic military assets. He said:

"In the early years, we'll be looking at things below the NATO threshold, things NATO doesn't do, like disaster relief and evacuation of citizens. In due course, once our collective capabilities are developed and we have strategic transport, the EU should be in a position to go higher . . . At that point, there will have to be a critical conversation between the European Union and NATO over who takes on what".

In the light of such issues, we have tabled new clauses 7 and 8. One attempts to provide for analysis of the developments that I have outlined and their effect on NATO and WEU. The other proposes a mechanism to provide parliamentary scrutiny by means of a Bill. The changes have serious implications for the future of NATO, and I trust that the Minister for Europe will understand the need to be open about them so that the House can hold a rational debate on the matter. The future of NATO and our relationship with it are crucial to the continued security and stability of Europe.

Amendments Nos. 46 and 47 and new clause 33 deal with Eurojust. After the Tampere summit in October 1999, when Eurojust and related measures were discussed, the Conservative party made it clear that we supported moves to improve co-ordination. We do not intend to oppose Eurojust if co-operation and co-ordination are involved. However, we seek a guarantee that we shall not go beyond that, and that the Bill does not pave the way for harmonisation. New clause 33 would provide for a report from the Attorney-General about the implications of Eurojust for the criminal and judicial processes of the United Kingdom.

Perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity to update hon. Members about developments on Eurojust since the Select Committee on European Scrutiny published its sixth report in February. The Committee welcomed the Government's view that they could not accept any wording on Eurojust's remit that accorded the Commission any operational role in national investigations or prosecutions. However, it expressed anxiety about what is described as ambiguity in the draft documents, which related to the amount of influence that Eurojust is expected to exercise.

The report stated:

"The requirement that a prosecuting authority in a Member State should be obliged to account to Eurojust for its reasons for not complying with a request to prosecute, or for not complying with a request to co-ordinate prosecutions with those of another Member State, suggests to us that Eurojust is intended to have some influence over prosecution discretions; otherwise there would seem to be little point in asking for the reasons to be stated".

I trust that the Minister can reassure us on the latest discussions.

Angus Robertson (Moray): May I ask the hon. Gentleman why there is no recognition in the proposal of the fact that Scotland has its own legal and judicial system? Why has that fact not been incorporated in the amendment?

Mr. Spring: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has brought that point to my attention. I am sure that we shall bear it in mind, as will the Government.

Ministers should act to allay the concern in some quarters that, while initially promising nothing more than co-operation between prosecuting authorities, Eurojust may be the first step towards having an EU public

prosecutor able to conduct investigations outside our legal system and corpus juris—the EU body of criminal law. For example, Commissioner Vitorino has said:

"A provisional judicial co-operation unit, which will serve as a kind of laboratory, enabling us to conceive and simultaneously test Eurojust, will take up its work soon. We may in the longer term also agree on the concept of centralised prosecution as a further logical step along the path of co-operation and co-ordination within the Union, at least for a number of sectors of particular European relevance."

The explanatory statement of a report voted for by Labour and Liberal Democrat MEPs in November, the Gebhardt report, said:

"Eurojust must . . . be so constituted that it can be regarded as a forerunner of a future European public prosecution service designed to strengthen the European Union's judicial dimension in relation to criminal law. But institutionalisation alone is not enough. The Council must draw up, in co-operation with the European Parliament and the Commission, appropriate rules of law on the basis of which Eurojust will be able to operate. Parliament has already indicated the form that such a 'corpus juris' might take . . . The acquisition of such a body of law would enable the European Union to clearly counter the charge that its structures were undemocratic because it did not possess an independent legislature, executive and judiciary with counterbalancing powers, the hallmark of all democratic societies."

We are seeking important reassurances from the Government on those issues. We need to be assured that, by providing treaty articles in this area, EU leaders are not paving the way to moving beyond mere co-operation towards the kind of development—such as the creation of a European public prosecutor—for which many in the EU have been calling for some time.

Amendments Nos. 45 and 48 also raise important issues relating to enhanced co-operation in the second and third pillars. We are particularly sympathetic to amendment No. 48, which concerns the loss of the so-called "emergency brake" veto in the justice and home affairs pillar. However, we will be discussing the principle of enhanced co-operation later in the proceedings, and I intend to address the veto issue in relation to its loss in the Community pillar at that time.

I apologise to the Minister of State for asking a series of very specific questions, but I hope that he will recognise that these are genuine concerns, and that he will address them during the course of the Committee proceedings.

Mr. Hendrick: I shall start by saying how much some Labour Members deplore the scaremongering of the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) and some of his colleagues when they say that the treaty threatens NATO in some way. The European rapid reaction force will give the European Union the capacity to conduct military operations in response to international crises when NATO is not, and does not wish to be, engaged. I find it incredible that the Opposition should want Europe to have a capability to intervene in crises across Europe, yet are unwilling to give it the means to do so. I also find incredible the suggestion that the Western European Union might serve as the body capable of co-ordinating such operations, because it has a staff of less than 100, based in Brussels.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I think that the hon. Gentleman is missing the point of the Opposition's objections. What we object to has nothing to do with the capability of European countries to defend Europe. It has to do with the structures that organise and apply those capabilities. We want European defence capabilities to be organised and applied within the structure of NATO. Under the treaty, we are getting new structures without capabilities, whereas we need new capabilities within existing tried and tested structures such as NATO.

9.15 pm

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Clearly, if the United States does not wish to be involved, we need a coherent political structure that can direct operations, and the only political structure that can do that is the European Union. The Western European Union has very little clout, so it is bizarre to suggest that such a structure should be built around the WEU when most of the countries involved are members of the EU. That says more about the Opposition's attitude to the EU than it does about the capability of the WEU to conduct such operations.

The range of potential missions is described as humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace making. For many months during the war in Bosnia, the United States was unwilling to get involved in a European conflict, and that unwillingness led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Bosnian people. The ethnic cleansing in that part of the world was an atrocity that had not been witnessed since the second world war, and the unwillingness of the Americans to get involved because they were reluctant for any of their troops to come back in body bags led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman is really testing the patience of the House. Is it not inconceivable for him to present this argument when it is perfectly clear that it was impossible for the EU to generate anything in the way of heavy lift or the response that was required to deal with the catastrophe in Bosnia? The hon. Gentleman is talking total rubbish because he has not referred to the increase in function, the shift away from NATO and the absolute refusal of member states to provide the resources that were necessary. In fact, the Germans are continually decreasing their defence capability. The hon. Gentleman is talking absolute rubbish and, most unusually, he is making a fool of himself.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I hope that he will not pull his punches so much in future.

The ink was not dry on the common foreign and security policy when the conflict in Bosnia broke out, and it is quite clear that the Americans did not want to get involved. For many years now, they have made it plain that they are not prepared to spend American tax dollars on defending European nation states. Now that Europe has produced a constructive set of proposals, many of which the United States accepts, we are hearing arguments—not from Colin Powell or any other American representative—about possible Turkish opposition to the proposal. Indeed, the outcome of the Irish referendum has been put forward as the reason why Europe should not move in this direction. To anyone who says that it leaves out Turkey or Norway,

[Mr. Hendrick]

I would say that I certainly do not remember Turkey or Norway arguing for strong intervention in Bosnia or expressing any great wish to sort out the problems there.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the Danes are not contributing any forces at all to the so-called rapid reaction force?

Mr. Hendrick: I am not here to answer for the Danes, but to speak for the interests of the British people and my constituents in Preston, so I shall not go down that route. The Opposition constantly refer to Denmark and Ireland as though they were the most significant and weighty states in the EU.

Angus Robertson: Perhaps one of the advantages of the European rapid reaction force is that it brings in countries that are not involved in NATO, such as Austria, Finland and Sweden. That may benefit everybody in Europe.

Mr. Hendrick: I agree. More nations are involved than would have been had any other method been adopted. Had the treaty not been agreed, the Opposition would not have made any constructive proposals to deal with any of the crises that may arise in Europe as a result of the current political problems.

For the benefit of Opposition Members, I must explain that the treaty does not involve the creation of a European army. The commitment of national resources by member states to any operations will be based on their sovereign decision as nation states, not the decision of the European Commission or the European Parliament. The European Union has not been given a role in collective or territorial defence, which remains the sole responsibility of NATO, and anybody who, like the hon. Member for West Suffolk, says that the proposals in some way rival NATO obviously does not understand the treaty and has not read it very well. The treaty acknowledges that NATO remains the base of its members' collective defence and will continue to play an important role in crisis management.

European military capabilities must be strengthened as a priority. The Euro-army is the latest Conservative anti-European myth. The proposal is for a stronger Britain and a stronger Europe, and the Opposition know it.

Dr. Julian Lewis: The hon. Gentleman has been exceptionally generous in giving way, and I thank him for that. He says that there is no conflict between the rapid reaction force and NATO, but if the rapid reaction force is not to have standing forces of its own—which it is not—and if it is only to deploy forces that are normally allocated to NATO, what would happen if it were engaged in a large-scale peacekeeping operation, taking forces away from NATO, and another crisis arose in which NATO and the United States wished to act, but found that their forces were depleted because they were engaged in some escapade with the rapid reaction force? Which of the two crises would come out on top? Is all this necessary, when if the force remained within the structure of NATO, all such matters would be resolved internally?

Mr. Hendrick: The number of troops committed to any such operation is likely to be relatively small in relation to NATO's total capability.

Dr. Lewis: Sixty thousand.

Mr. Hendrick: Yes—relatively small.

There is nothing to stop two crises arising at the same time. Presumably, NATO would have the capability to deal with the situation. The hon. Gentleman's hypothesis is unlikely, but if that happened, it could still be dealt with under the current system.

I want to deal with a few of the myths. Opposition Members say that European defence will weaken NATO and undermine relations with the United States. Better European capabilities will strengthen the contribution of European nations to NATO as well as to the EU. Most of the Opposition's arguments are not really about defence capability or our ability to deal with conflict—although their proposals would inhibit that—but about a political objection.

Let us consider what Opposition Members have said in the past. The Maastricht treaty, which was signed by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), said:

"The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions related to the security of the Union, including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence."

Sir Malcolm Rifkind said:

"The recent NATO summit agreed that European allies should take a greater responsibility for common security and defence. This will be achieved through the development of a European security and defence identity expressed through the WEU, which will in turn strengthen the European pillar of the alliance."

Statements from a previous Secretary of State for Defence and the current Opposition Foreign Affairs spokesman fly in the face of what has been said by Opposition Members today.

I repeat that what has been said today has nothing to do with the defence of the EU, or NATO; it has a lot to do with the opposition to the proposals for the further development of the EU.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I shall address my brief remarks to the issues raised so eloquently by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). I did not entirely agree with him, but I most certainly did agree with some portions of his thoughtful speech. He struck a chord with me when he spoke about defence expenditure, because there will be no capability unless there is defence expenditure.

If we cast our minds back to the general election, none of the three major parties committed itself in the course of this Parliament to any material increase in defence expenditure. There is a certain amount of creative accounting going on around Europe that justifies some officials saying that defence expenditure is going up. I do not believe that, because the way in which expenditure is allocated is often done differently in different countries. The real question is not what is being spent, but what we are getting for the money that is being spent; to use an expression that was current about 10 or 15 years ago, how big a bang are we getting for the buck?

If there is a strong European security and defence policy, it will strengthen NATO; if there is a weak policy, it will most certainly weaken NATO. Those of us who

support a European security and defence policy have an overwhelming obligation to ensure that what is put in place does not damage or affect NATO's capability. We must also argue the case as persuasively as we can—within our parties and this House, and outside—to ensure that sufficient expenditure is made available to make a European security and defence policy a reality.

Respectfully, I say to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) that to characterise the problems in the Balkans as being related entirely to US intransigence is not to take a sufficiently broad view of what took place, especially in the period when Bosnia was the source of such difficulty. I have been critical of the fact that the US has been unwilling to commit troops, but we must recall that there was a critical—to use the word in its alternative sense—meeting of the EU here in London at which a lot of warm words were expressed and commitments given. However, there was then no follow-through action or deployment of the necessary forces.

Another element of the Bosnian situation that cannot be avoided is that the mandates handed down by the UN Security Council, and the terms upon which the UN was first operating in Bosnia, were, to say the least, ambiguous. We need a longer historical perspective on Bosnia to see why the international community found it so difficult to deal with something that, as the commemoration today in Srebrenica reminds us forcefully, was horrific to an extent that people thought we were unlikely to experience after the end of the second world war.

On the relationship between NATO and the EU, I adhere strongly to a view that I have persistently expressed in the House; persistently is perhaps the right adverb to use. What we need is a formal protocol between NATO and the EU in which NATO is given a formal right of first refusal. The annexe to the Nice treaty talks about where NATO is not involved. On that point also, I agree with the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood. We need to locate operational planning in NATO, and I would go further and argue that strategic planning should also be located in NATO.

I part company with the hon. Gentleman on a further point and I shall try to explain my logic. If NATO decided not to become involved in an issue, it would be standing back not only militarily, but politically. If the EU, in furtherance of the provisions we are discussing, decided that it would proceed militarily, it would make no sense to look for political direction of that EU activity from NATO. Some form of political direction must be available on occasions when NATO declines to become involved. We need a structural element in addition to what we have at the moment.

On the issue of scrutiny, we have heard much special pleading for the Western European Union in the House in the past 18 months, but if we are to scrutinise the provisions before us, the place for that scrutiny is in this domestic Parliament. I feel strongly that decisions about sending young men and—increasingly—women to war should be taken in a forum in which I, as an elected representative with a front-line air base in my constituency, have the right to hold Ministers to account for their decisions. Whatever the merits of the WEU or the European Parliament, I am not willing to cede my responsibility for that scrutiny to a body that has no real constituency—as the hon. Gentleman suggested of the European Parliament—or is essentially an appointed body like the WEU, however distinguished it might be. I disagree with the suggestion—made, I think by the Prime Minister in Warsaw—that one possible feature of a second chamber for the European Parliament would be the exercise of scrutiny on defence matters, because that scrutiny should rest with the House of Commons.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not the point that while ultimate responsibility for sending British troops to war remains with the House, we nevertheless benefit from the fact that our colleagues in the House and in the other place are members of the WEU? In that body, which provides another forum for transnational responsibility in Europe, our colleagues are informed of the obligations, stresses, strains and problems of other member countries that impinge on our national security decisions. The WEU can exert a common will to persuade other Parliaments to do things to our mutual benefit, such as creating heavy lift and other capabilities.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman and I may be moving, slowly but inexorably, towards agreement on that subject. It may be a question of emphasis, but the WEU and other such bodies—I speak as someone who has been a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly for some 10 years—have a tremendous role to play in allowing us to understand the principles and priorities of the other countries involved. However, formal scrutiny is our responsibility and it should not be ceded.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: No, I wish to make progress because I know that others wish to speak, including the Minister.

I believe that Turkey should be a member of the European Union—a view not always popular in my party—but it has considerable obstacles to overcome, not least in the conduct of its police and its army and in relation to the universal recognition of human rights. However, Turkey overplayed its hand at first, because it appeared to believe that it could influence the opinion of the EU on its application for membership by displaying a mailed fist on the proposals for the European security and defence policy.

I shall end by referring to new article 17.2 of Command Paper 5090, which is the document that sets out the treaty. It states that the policy

"shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation . . . under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with a common security and defence policy established within that framework."

That shows that NATO is recognised in that part of the treaty. Moreover, article 17.4 states:

"The provisions of this Article shall not prevent the development of closer cooperation between two or more Member States on a bilateral level, in the framework of the Western European Union . . . and NATO, provided such cooperation does not run counter to or impede that provided for in this Title."

Those provisions show that the primacy of NATO is not affected, and that the capacity for bilateral arrangements between two or more states in the WEU and NATO is also provided for.

Finally, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis)—east is east, and west is west, and ne'er the twain shall meet—spoke of the deadly prospect that a war

[Mr. Campbell]

might break out and that the Americans might not be willing to come to Europe. That is a prospect that we must consider, as it is more possible now than for a long time. However, a further deadly prospect exists: that if we do not have in place the arrangements that we are discussing, a war may break out in Europe, the Americans might decline to come and the Europeans could be left unable to do anything about it.

As long as the money is spent and the capability is achieved, I believe that we can make a contribution to NATO, and offer the capacity for the European Union to operate when NATO declines. That is why I believe that these provisions are worthy of support.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I call Mr. William Cash.

Mr. Cash: I am sorry, Sir Michael, for not rising immediately to my feet, but I was distracted by a representative of the usual channels. My eagerness to engage in the debate means that such tardiness is very unusual for me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) has already made it clear that the amendment deals with a matter of immense importance. It is a matter that I have raised with the Prime Minister and the former Foreign Secretary, now the Leader of the House, several times. At issue is the movement towards a European army represented by the establishment of the rapid reaction force.

My noble Friend Lord Tebbit used to be the Member of Parliament for Chingford. He and I opposed the then Conservative Government—our own Government—over the Maastricht treaty, and we made compelling speeches on the treaty's defence implications. Those speeches have subsequently proved justified.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood also made a valuable and important contribution in the Maastricht debates. Indeed, he and my wife managed to transport another hon. Member—whose name must remain undisclosed—away from a secret location a few hundred yards from here and into the Lobby to vote, with the result that we won a crucial Division. I therefore owe my hon. Friend a great debt of gratitude for his sterling—indeed, Special Air Service—assistance at that time.

Let there be no doubt that the genesis of where we are now is the Maastricht treaty, which contained provisions that we do not need to go into, and indeed cannot go into today. It was followed by Amsterdam, whose provisions were negotiated by yet another Conservative Government and handed over to the present Government under the chairmanship of another distinguished Minister for Europe. I do not think that I need to mention his name, but he was one of the revolving chairmen of the Westendorp group.

I wrote a pamphlet in reply to the White Paper that Sir Malcolm Rifkind and the said Minister for Europe produced. It was called the "Blue Paper"; it was 25 or 30 pages long and took the White Paper apart line by line, because I felt so strongly that the Government were going in the wrong direction.

The said Minister for Europe is currently competing strongly for the attention of other Conservative Members of Parliament. I have a letter written in 1995 from yet another contender for the Conservative party leadership, in which he set out his reply to me with respect to the questions that are before us under the Nice treaty. It shows the evolution of the thought processes and policy making en route to the present debate.

The letter went, "Thank you for your letter" I am paraphrasing a little bit [*Laughter*] "about the mischievous piece in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 12 November, which you also raised with me in the House last week." So, it is all on the record. He went on, "I trust I set your mind at rest then"—some chance—"I and the Government remain totally opposed to any suggestion of a separate European army. Nothing that Malcolm Rifkind and I agreed to in Madrid moved us one jot in that direction. As for our memorandum on European defence which the Prime Minister launched in March, the article misses the point completely. The essence of our position is that the defence of Europe is founded on NATO. NATO also has a role in smaller scale missions like peacekeeping—witness Bosnia."

Now the House may understand my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood. My point has always been that keeping the peace in places such as Bosnia and making the peace according to the Petersberg tasks—on which I have tested the Foreign Secretary on many occasions—cannot be distinguished from the greater development not merely of a rapid reaction force but the panoply of warfare. Such equipment was exemplified by the stealth bombers, smart bombs and heavy-lift operations provided by the United States under the umbrella of NATO, although attempts were made to claim that such action had been carried out by a chameleon of the Western European Union.

The letter continued that it was unreasonable to expect the North Americans always to want to get involved in such smaller scale missions, such as peacekeeping, and that that was where WEU came in. It stated, "It cannot really do the job at present, so we want to make it more capable, but it has no military forces separate from NATO, nor is it subordinated to the EU. That is how we want to keep it. Hardly a slippery slope to federalism, I think. Yours ever."

The significance of that is that I argued in the House that it was a slippery slope to federalism. Now that we have the Nice treaty, I think that I can reasonably say that the predictions made in those days of rebellion by me and my hon Friends the Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) and for Ruislip-Northwood about what would happen after Maastricht demonstrate that we are now in the business of having a European defence capacity.

We could call it by one of thousands of acronyms—ESDI, CFSP, or whatever. However, the question is: what is the function of that body? What is it intended to do and what does it actually do? Does it have the properties and the resources to enable whatever has been created to perform effectively in the interests of whatever defence capacity is being provided?

9.45 pm

I hold a simple view. I believe in alliances and in co-operation, but in no circumstances will I subscribe to those points of the compass that take us into the single, autonomous capacity described in various statements such as the one made at Feira, which annoyed the Turks

beyond endurance. I attended a meeting held under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office at the Institute for Strategic Studies with a Turkish general, the ambassador and others. There was a heated exchange of views. I was very much on the side of the Turks, because—bluntly—they had been cheated. There is no time to go into every detail, but the bottom line is that the Turks felt cheated and they were extremely angry—with justification, in my judgment.

Subsequent meetings took place, including at Cologne, followed by the Nice arrangements. The important point is that under those arrangements, we are talking about a single autonomous structure, which dovetails with the single structure prescribed by the treaties and from which there is no escape. I look at the Minister for Europe with great interest and concern at this point because there is no way in which he can escape the unequivocal wording of the treaties. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green was able to visit the Pentagon before the Secretary of State for Defence did so. That is why he was able to see Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Cheney before the Foreign Secretary. I am open to correction if I am wrong, but that is my understanding.

The bottom line is that hosts of indicators have been given by the most distinguished US generals, advisers and senior members of the Administration. My hon. Friend had opportunities to give evidence to the Senate and to Congress on these questions. There were some attempts to retrieve the situation, prompted understandably but regrettably by the Labour Government. However, if one weighs up all the comments that have been made, one realises that my hon. Friend established an international reputation in this field, and that was recognised by the United States Administration.

Dr. Palmer: Is the hon. Gentleman absolutely sure that leading US military figures will welcome his attempt to involve them in the Conservative leadership campaign?

Mr. Cash: I have no idea. The matter is one of historical record. Indeed it is already on the record, so I am saying nothing that has not been said already.

The significance of all this is very simple: through Feira, St. Malo and Cologne we are moving towards not merely a rapid reaction force or enhanced Petersberg tasks, but a European army. I believe that it was Romano Prodi who said—I am paraphrasing—"You can call it Mary or Marianne or whatever you like", but his emphasis was that it would be a European army. That is why he is asking for all those billions of pounds from the European Union, to fill the gap in order to fulfil the functions that will be provided.

There are honest Members of Parliament on the Labour Benches, and they know the truth. Some of them are prepared to say that there should be a European army because they genuinely believe that. I wait with interest, as the debate proceeds, to hear what they have to say. However, it is impossible to provide the defence or military capacity that is needed without providing the money to go with it. As I pointed out in an intervention, it is rubbish to say that the Americans are at fault, when the bottom line is that it was the Americans who provided the mechanics, operational lift and the capacity to bring to an end the tragic warfare that ensued for a range of reasons that we do not have the time nor the opportunity to go into tonight—

Mr. Hendrick *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. I wish that I could remember the name of his constituency.

Mr. Hendrick: Preston.

Mr. Cash: I was brought up at school only 15 miles from Preston, so perhaps I should remember that from now on. *[Interruption.]* Well, the school produced seven VCs, so we did not do too badly. The hon. Gentleman attacked the United States. He mentioned intransigence, and he was extremely critical of the US. He referred in derogatory terms to its concern about body bags.

Mr. Hendrick: I will not be as aggressive in my response to the hon. Gentleman's speech as he was to mine, but although the Americans did eventually broker an agreement at Dayton, they did so only after very many months of violence, attacks on civilians and massacres throughout Bosnia, and with hundreds of thousands of people dead from ethnic cleansing. I would have liked to see the Europeans broker a deal in Europe, but the common foreign and security policy had only just been drafted and the means and capability did not exist. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should have those means and capability, because that is what Nice is all about?

Mr. Cash: No, I am afraid that I really do not, because the problems of the Balkans have an immensely long history and will not be resolved by trying to stitch up arrangements for the sake of what has been described as a moment of glory. I believe that it was Mr. Poos who, during the Bosnian or Kosovo crisis, said, "This will be the moment of glory for the European Union", or words to that effect. It was a moment of disaster, because the EU does not have the capacity to deal with such a crisis. There are too many national interests at work to be able to create the necessary so-called identity or co-ordination. The hon. Gentleman, in his ideological mind, does not seem to understand that. It is not a workable proposition.

If I may, I shall glance at Edward Gibbon for a moment. In 1787, in "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", he wrote about the Balkans in the fourth century AD in a manner that was no different from the commentaries that we would see today. It is a very difficult problem, and it will not be resolved on the back of ideological or wishful thinking. It is a practical problem, which even at this stage has not been resolved properly, and may yet not be resolved. Therefore, I am afraid that I really cannot give any credibility to the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Roger Casale: The hon. Gentleman and I served together on the European Scrutiny Committee and, with the greatest respect to him, surely what is rubbish is scuppering the opportunity to strengthen European defence co-operation, thereby compromising this country's national defence interests on the specious argument that, by strengthening European defence co-operation, we are

[Roger Casale]

building some kind of European army. All we are doing is trying to get other European nations to contribute more to actions that are in our national defence interests.

Mr. Cash: First, those contributions are not forthcoming on the scale required and, secondly, those nations simply cannot catch up with the technology, the rocketry, the capacity for heavy-lift aircraft or any of the fundamentals required in modern warfare. Furthermore, they will not catch up for perhaps 15 or 20 years, or more.

Surveillance is also important. Again, I raised that issue with the Prime Minister and the then Foreign Secretary. I asked them about the exchange of confidential defence information between the United States and the United Kingdom. Let us remember that during our involvement in the early part of the Balkan crisis, it was clearly understood that the French had disclosed secrets. The United States is simply not prepared to provide information to the EU that will then be leaked. That is incredibly important—it is not just a semantic argument; it is about the reality of warfare. We cannot have the sort of defence system that is being devised when any of the parties is liable to divulge information, as that completely undermines the trust and confidence of the main ally, which provides all the operational equipment, personnel and the surveillance system itself.

Peter Hain: If there is a crisis in the Balkans, for example, and the US is not willing to provide assistance and NATO is not willing to intervene, do we just turn our backs? Is there not a role for a European capability? Is it not the case that a European security and defence policy provides exactly that capability? What would the hon. Gentleman do?

Mr. Cash: I have raised that very point with the Prime Minister, and the words "where NATO as a whole is not engaged" are the very ones that I used. The Minister will recognise those words, but their use presupposes the involvement of the United States in the reference to NATO, so it is not a credible policy to turn that on its back by asking what we shall do in the EU. The bottom line is that without the involvement of either the US per se—or through article 5, the US and NATO—the EU is capable of producing no such defence capacity. By the way, it is also well understood that, time and again, the British forces are regarded as the linchpin to enable the delivery of a European capacity. So we are in deep territory.

I know that the Minister is extremely intelligent and well versed in such matters—at least, he soon will be. *[Laughter.]* Therefore, I have great confidence that he will extend his capacity, as Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to a real understanding of the role that he must adopt in relation to the treaty and the defence capacity. We need to get the balance right. The truth is that, under the treaty and under the representative role of the new Secretary-General, Javier Solana, who—I say this with respect, although I wrote an extremely tough article about him in *The Times* when he was appointed because it struck me as a little odd that the Secretary-General of NATO had campaigned against NATO—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *resumed the Chair.*

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 2001–02

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 55(1) and (4) (Questions on voting of estimates, etc.)

Resolved,

That, further resources not exceeding £1,250,531,000 be authorised for use for civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a further sum, not exceeding £2,853,190,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to meet the cost of civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, as set out in HC 46.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolution: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Andrew Smith, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and Mr. Paul Boateng do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Mr. Paul Boateng accordingly presented a Bill to authorise the use of resources and the issue of sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the service of the year ending on 31st March 2002 and to appropriate the supply authorised in this Session of Parliament: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 7].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

SPORTS GROUND AND SPORTING EVENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Football (Disorder) (Duration of Powers) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 June],

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM CTTEE

Motion made,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. David Chaytor, Brian Cotter, John Cryer, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Paul Goodman, Andy King,

Dr. Ashok Kumar, Mr. Andrew Love, John McDonnell, Mr. Denis Murphy, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Andrew Rosindell, Mr. Anthony Steen, Ian Stewart and Brian White be members of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform.

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Sentencing

10.2 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): In my capacity as national patron of the charity RoadPeace, which looks after the families of the victims who die on our roads, it is an honour to present this petition.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons.

The Petition of supporters of RoadPeace,

Declares that court sentences for offences which result in road death and injury do not take into account the fact that such offences involve the killing or hurting of fellow human beings.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to bring forward legislative proposals which will ensure that road deaths caused through negligence or law breaking are prosecuted as homicides; that serious injuries so caused are prosecuted with appropriate severity; that all such offences should be prosecuted before a judge and jury; and that sentences for such offences should properly reflect the level of culpability involved.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

White Waltham Airfield

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

10.4 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I am grateful for the opportunity not only to complete the trilogy of Berkshire MPs who have spoken in Adjournment debates this week but to bring to the attention of the House a matter that is of considerable concern to my local residents. I believe that it is also of concern to residents in other parts of the country. The issue in question is the need to control noise from light aircraft.

White Waltham airfield in my constituency is one of the oldest and best-known airfields in the country. It is one of the few remaining grass airfields and is reputed to be the largest such airfield in Europe. It started in 1928 when the de Havilland family bought the land and set up the de Havilland flying school. In 1939 the airfield was taken over by the Ministry of Defence and became the headquarters of the Air Transport Auxiliary—the renowned ATA.

I am proud to count among my constituents several former members of the ATA—redoubtable ladies whose expertise and courage in transporting aircraft across the country during the war deserves our recognition. To digress slightly, among their number is one lady who went on to learn to fly a helicopter when she was in her seventies. The maidens of Maidenhead are indeed a force to be reckoned with.

The airfield was retained under Royal Air Force control until 1982. It is now controlled and operated by West London Aero Club and up to 150 aircraft of different types are based there, including Tiger Moths and other pre-war aircraft. It operates as a traditional flying club, but anyone who lives near such an airfield will know that, pleasant though the open space is, such airfields bring problems for local residents—notably, noise.

Noise from White Waltham airfield has been a recurring theme during my time as Member of Parliament for Maidenhead. Many residents knew about the problem, in that the airfield was operational and they were aware of the flying activity when they moved into the area. However, the problems become greater if noise levels increase.

Let me quote some comments that I have been sent by local residents. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson of Lambourne drive, Cox Green, say:

"we did enjoy seven years with almost no overflying from their planes, but since early last summer, we have had numerous planes flying over/adjacent to our bungalow daily. In fact, sometimes there is less than a minute between planes, and when we devoted one afternoon to actually noting times, it was either one or two minutes between each plane for the greater part of that afternoon."

Mr. Isherwood, also of Cox Green, says:

"The noise from light aircraft circling overhead from White Waltham Airfield at weekends is intolerable. They have little or no engine silencing and apparently there is no legislation requiring it. If my car was that noisy I would quite rightly be pulled over by the police in minutes."

Mr. and Mrs. Brown, also of Lambourne drive, Cox Green, write:

"to be honest, unless Central Government introduce legislation to control this problem, or give councils the authority, nothing is going to happen. We cannot understand in this modern world, that no one is controlling local airfields in terms of noise, air pollution and circuit flying."

[Mrs. Theresa May]

It is the issue raised by Mr. and Mrs. Brown that I want to draw to the House's attention.

Residents are frustrated: not only do they suffer the problem of noise, but when they appeal to authorities to do something it appears that nothing can be done because nobody has the power to enforce any controls over the nuisance from which they suffer. Residents expect their local council to be able to do something, but find that it is powerless to do anything.

I should say at this point that, although residents are worried about the noise, they want the airfield to stay. Having such a wonderful open space on the outskirts of Maidenhead is welcome and, as I said, many of them moved into the area knowing that the airfield was there. Residents need a balance to be struck between their needs and the needs of the airfield and its users.

West London Aero Club has taken some steps itself. It has circuits for flying, details of which are posted to its pilots and made known to visiting pilots. The club offers a free instructor to work with pilots who are unsure of the procedures operated by the club. Other measures include a voluntary decision not to engage in night flights or helicopter pilot training, both of which previously caused my constituents concern in terms of noise nuisance. The club has also been active on the issue of silencers. As I understand it, a silencer cannot be fitted to an aircraft in the United Kingdom unless it is approved by the Civil Aviation Authority, even if it is approved by the relevant authorities in the country of origin. Over the years, that has been used by many fliers as a smokescreen for not doing something about the problem. This year, however, West London Aero Club paid the CAA to approve silencers for its training aircraft, and has now fitted them to those in use at White Waltham. Silencers could be fitted to similar training aircraft elsewhere; the club is now considering using them for multi-bladed propellers.

The club has taken action, but problems still remain for local residents. There have been agreements in the past; when I first took my seat, a voluntary flying agreement between the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and West London Aero Club covered night flights and matters such as the use of helicopters. That agreement was reached following the council's decision to withdraw two enforcement orders that had been imposed in 1996, and it ran until November 2000. It then lapsed and has not been renewed. It was voluntary and it is for West London Aero Club to negotiate a further agreement. However, such an agreement has no statutory enforcement beyond the council going to court for an injunction. As that is at the court's discretion, there is no guarantee that enforcement action can be taken if the controls in the voluntary agreement have not been met by people using the club.

At White Waltham, the issue of noise control has often been taken alongside planning matters and applications. Following the withdrawal of the voluntary agreement, which, as I said, lapsed last November, the council received a planning application for development on part of the site that also included a proposal for a further voluntary flying control agreement. The council's legal advice was that, as the proposed agreement was part of the planning application, it was not suitable for inclusion in the planning decision. The application for development has now been refused, which perhaps has affected the opportunities for voluntary agreement.

The council is right in its fundamental point that it should be possible to separate the control of noise and flying at such an airfield from planning decisions. When planning applications are made, councils should not have to rely on planning conditions as a means of offering control on flying to local residents; it should be possible to have powers to offer that control separately.

There is one further point about whether there should be statutory or voluntary control at White Waltham. As the Minister will be aware, there are statutory consultative arrangements for designated airfields under section 5 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. However, White Waltham is not a designated airfield, so it is not possible to have a statutory consultative procedure, even though the council established a voluntary consultative committee. Questions about the chairmanship of the committee and whether certain local councillors took residents' views into consideration properly were recently followed by discussions about the constitution of the committee and the fact that it is only voluntary; again, it has no statutory power.

There is no statutory power, either for consultative arrangements or for noise and flying controls, except that on which the council relied in its previous agreement—section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The issue that I wish to raise with the Minister is whether the Government intend to follow their proposal last year to introduce legislation to allow local councils to control flights of light aircraft at such airfields. As the Minister might imagine, I have been in correspondence about the issue with a number of Ministers over the years, and depending on what he says tonight I dare say that I will be in correspondence with him in future.

I refer to a letter that I received on 18 January this year from the then Under-Secretary of State at the then Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who has returned to a more traditional and recognisable role for him and freedom on the Government Back Benches. He referred to the consultation paper that the Government issued last July, following their White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport". He wrote:

> "We are proposing to provide aerodromes with clearer powers to regulate flying behaviour. The preference will still be for local solutions and, where existing arrangements are working satisfactorily, the expectation will be that such arrangements will carry on much as before. However, where the Secretary of State believes that these have been ineffective, he would, under our proposals, be given a new power to designate an aerodrome requiring it to agree a noise amelioration scheme with an appropriate local authority. That authority would then have powers of enforcement. Independent arbitration is proposed as one way of resolving any disputes that may arise."

That intention to legislate was more recently reiterated by the Government when the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead asked the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when legislation might be introduced. The reply stated that there had been almost 600 responses to the consultation paper on control of noise from civil aircraft:

> "These reflected a wide range of views from a broad cross-section of interested groups, organisations and individual respondents. They are currently being carefully considered. Our intention is to announce our conclusions and bring legislation forward in due course."

The reply continued:

"I cannot give a timescale when a legislative slot will be found... However, I can assure you that the Government's commitment to introduce legislation remains."

It is on that issue that I press the Minister tonight. My constituents feel strongly that powers should be available to enforce controls on noise from light aircraft using airfields such as White Waltham. As I said, no one intends to stop activity from White Waltham or to stop the airfield existing. It has a long and proud history, and we wish White Waltham airfield to stay and to provide opportunities for flying for those who enjoy that leisure activity or who use it for business purposes, as do some who use the club.

However, residents want the comfort of knowing that when the nuisance becomes too great, someone can take action. At present, that does not seem possible. Residents expect their local council to be able to take such action. The royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead wants to be able to take action, but it cannot do so on its own. The matter is in the hands of the Government. They have promised legislation. They say that they recognise the problem and that they will act to resolve it.

I hope that when the Minister responds he will be able to give comfort to my constituents and let them know that they can enjoy the benefit of the open space, but that the noise nuisance can be controlled so that they do not constantly have to suffer from a nuisance that they believe their local council should be able to control.

10.18 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate, and on the fluent and comprehensive way in which she presented her case, largely without notes, which is unusual in late-night Adjournment debates. She is probably fleeing from the attentions of the canvassers for the various candidates, and the Chamber may be one of the few safe places in the Palace of Westminster.

Aircraft noise is, as the hon. Lady rightly said, a subject of great concern to airport neighbours. The Government take aviation noise seriously and support measures to limit its disturbance of communities around aerodromes. Although I shall respond as far as I properly can to the points made about White Waltham specifically, much of what I say will be equally applicable to many licensed and unlicensed aerodromes around the country.

Let me make clear the role of my Department in respect of aircraft noise policy at aerodromes. Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports are designated under section 80 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 for the purposes of section 78 of that Act, for noise regulation. Elsewhere, circumstances vary greatly between larger airports and the many small local airfields. The policy of successive Governments has been that aircraft noise is a local issue that is best resolved locally. We recognise the legitimate right of general aviation pilots to fly, but as the hon. Lady said, that right should always be balanced with the interests of the communities that are disturbed by aerodrome activities.

General aviation is an activity that is not only legitimate, but important. It would be wrong to conceive of it as a matter purely of weekend leisure flying, although that has its place. The Government are also mindful of the contribution of general aviation to the training of pilots, many of whom move on to commercial airline service, and to emergency operations, business and local economies.

Aerodrome and aircraft operators are expected to achieve as far as practically possible the minimum disturbance to the community. Often, with a measure of good will on both sides, matters can be improved by discussion between the aerodrome management and local interests. For example, such improvements could be made by designing circuit patterns with noise avoidance features when it is safe to do so and when that will not produce worse nuisance elsewhere. Improvements could also be achieved by controlling and notifying the times of relatively noisy operations.

As the hon. Lady said, White Waltham is a long-established airfield with a venerable history. From the early days of the de Havilland flying school in the 1930s, through its wartime and subsequent years as the headquarters of the Air Transport Auxiliary, and afterwards as a base for Fairey Aviation and the West London Aero Club among others, it is certainly well rooted in the community.

The aerodrome's proximity to Heathrow and its location below the congested airspace of the south-east mean that there must be rather tight constraints on its scope for modifying its procedures. However, it clearly indicates noise avoidance areas in its posted circuit procedures and pilots should be well aware of the need for considerate flying that avoids, for example, the residential areas of south-west Maidenhead, Knowl Hill, White Waltham village and other locations.

I understand that the airfield management has recently had silencers approved by the Civil Aviation Authority, whose involvement the hon. Lady mentioned, for the aerodrome's fleet of training aircraft, and that they have now been fitted. The possibility of fitting quieter four-bladed, rather than two-bladed, propellers is also being investigated with the CAA. I am told that the aerodrome has voluntarily restricted helicopter training activity, as the hon. Lady pointed out.

I want to say a little about international regulation of noise at source. Each light aircraft type coming newly into service must be certificated to show compliance with noise limitation standards recommended and published by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. The effectiveness of the standards is kept under review and they are updated as much as is technically feasible and economically justifiable. The Government's policy is to regulate to put those recommendations into practice. That policy recognises that manufacturing and operating aircraft is nowadays a global business that needs global solutions wherever practicable.

The noise problems presented by light aircraft are rather different in character from those produced by large commercial aircraft. Often it is repetitive activities such as circuit flying or compass testing that cause the greatest annoyance. It is important that aerodromes should try to ensure that their circuits and procedures are designed—this must happen within the constraints of safety, of course—to minimise inconvenience to people on the ground. They should specify noise avoidance areas where appropriate and ensure that pilots respect the rules.

Following a UK initiative, the ICAO published guidance for pilots and aerodrome operators on "Considerate Flying", which contained training and

[Mr. John Spellar]

operating measures to minimise noise nuisance for local residents. The CAA has disseminated that guidance to aerodromes here and the British Helicopter Advisory Board has issued guidance on the subject to helicopter pilots.

As the hon. Lady said, it is important that aerodromes consult local amenity groups, local authorities and others about decisions that are likely to affect the noise climate. They should listen carefully to their views, and act on them whenever possible. The best forum for that is often a consultative committee. Sensitive and responsive handling of concerns is in everyone's interest, including that of the aerodromes. Many aerodrome managers already order such matters well, but there is sometimes room for improvement.

Although noise control measures at White Waltham and other aerodromes are the responsibility of the aerodrome management, our policy is to encourage consultation as a means of reconciling local difficulties that arise from aerodrome operations.

Approximately 50 aerodromes nationally have been designated under section 35 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. That requires the aerodrome management to provide adequate facilities for consultation for specified categories of users, local authorities and local representative organisations on any matter concerning the management or administration of the aerodrome that affects their interests.

White Waltham has not been designated under section 35. However, I understand that the management has voluntarily established a consultative committee, which is structured along similar lines to the committees at many section 35 aerodromes.

All pilots have to comply with the Rules of the Air Regulations 1996, which relate to height limits for aircraft. They require that an aircraft must not fly within 500 ft of

"any person, vessel, vehicle or structure",

except when landing or taking off, nor below 1,500 ft over a congested area, unless written permission has been obtained from the CAA. They also prohibit aerobatics, which can be a source of significant annoyance, especially over highly populated areas.

No legal action can be taken against pilots for noise disturbance, provided that they observe the rules of the air and fly in accordance with normal aviation practice. I stress that the regulations primarily cover safety, but the height restrictions give some collateral noise benefit.

It is important to stress that the establishment and use of aerodromes are subject to normal planning controls. Many aerodromes, including White Waltham, predate current planning legislation. Even so, many have had to seek planning permission for subsequent expansions and alterations over the years. The planning authority may grant permission, subject to the relevant conditions, which might include noise-related requirements, that it considers appropriate. Conditions may, for instance, stipulate the number of flights permitted by day and limit the use of the site at night. The local planning authority has powers to take enforcement action if the terms of the planning permission are breached.

If a local authority's purpose cannot be achieved through a planning condition, it may seek to enter into a planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to restrict or regulate the development or use of the land. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) points out, that clause is well known to Members of Parliament.

Local authorities can also require use of land to be discontinued by making a discontinuance order under section 102 of the Town and Country Planning Act. Such an order would have to be confirmed by the Secretary of State, and may involve the local planning authority paying compensation for the loss of existing use rights.

I understand that White Waltham sought planning permission for office and hangar developments, and in connection with the application proposed additional controls on flying activities. As the hon. Lady said, the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead recently refused planning consent. I am sure that she understands that it would not be appropriate for me to enter into a debate about the details of the case. I am outlining the objective circumstances that relate to it.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the use of silencers on light aircraft. Certification is carried out independently of the aircraft manufacturer, either by the CAA or its designates, and it is agreed internationally. It deals with noise on flyover, sidelines, the take-off phase and final approach. Some countries, such as Germany, have adopted national noise standards for light aircraft that are more stringent in some respects than the ICAO recommendations. However, it is our policy to use ICAO standards, and to work through that body to achieve more stringent global noise standards. National variations merely undermine the benefits of global standards.

Additionally, the safety regulation group of the CAA has concerns about safety when certain types of silencers are fitted to existing light aircraft. We would not want to take any risks on safety to achieve marginally lower noise levels. To comply with current requirements, some light aircraft may need to be modified by fitting silencers or mufflers. Such modifications require approval by the CAA to ensure that the modified aircraft continues to meet all the applicable safety requirements. The hon. Lady mentioned proposed new legislation in this regard.

The long-standing policy of maintaining a balance between the rights of general aviation pilots to fly and the interests of the communities that are disturbed by aircraft noise has generally proved successful. Nevertheless, the Government accept that aircraft noise can be disturbing and that sometimes more should be done.

Last autumn, we completed a public consultation entitled "The control of noise from civil aircraft". We think of some stunningly original titles. In this, we proposed providing aerodromes with clearer powers to regulate flying behaviour. The preference is still for local solutions and, where existing arrangements are working satisfactorily, the expectation will be that such arrangements will carry on much as before. However, if the Secretary of State believed that they had been ineffective, he would, under our proposals, be given a new power to require an aerodrome to agree a noise amelioration scheme with an appropriate local authority. That authority would then have powers of enforcement. Independent arbitration is proposed as one way of resolving any disputes that may arise. There were many detailed responses to the consultation, reflecting, as one would imagine, a broad range of views. They are being evaluated and considered, and our conclusions will be announced in due course.

The legislative proposals were intended not to supplant existing planning powers, but to strengthen the hand of aerodromes in controlling their existing operations, and to allow intervention when necessary if voluntary arrangements have failed. We would certainly not expect a local authority to regard itself, in anticipation of such legislation, as inhibited from exercising its current powers—for example, to pursue planning obligations or conditions in respect of noise either from, or affecting, new development.

I hope that that has been helpful to the hon. Lady in the pursuit of her cause on behalf of her constituents. She suggested that she might wish to write to me on further points, and I await that with interest and anticipation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

EDUCATION

That the draft Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 293, Noes 195.

Division No. 18]

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Cassle, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*

Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bourn'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Greg
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit

Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 482, Noes 10.

Division No. 19]

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Barker, Greg
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Peter
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey

Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallober, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliver, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Beggs, Roy
Burnside, David
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Gale, Roger

NOES

Paisley, Rev Ian
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*

Question accordingly agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 483, Noes 10.

Division No. 20]

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Barker, Greg
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Callon, Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Cassale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapplson, James
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain

Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallober, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul

Beggs, Roy
Burnside, David
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Gale, Roger
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Waller, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

NOES

Paisley, Rev Ian
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 July 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

World Trade Organisation

2. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): If she will make a statement on the future work of the World Trade Organisation. [2032]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The next ministerial conference of the WTO will take place in Doha from 9 to 16 November. The United Kingdom Government seek a broad-based new round. We believe that that is the best way forward for a world trading system that will benefit all countries, including developing countries.

David Taylor: Unprecedented public hostility and civil disorder have been provoked by the WTO plans for further liberalisation of trade, because they fail the basic tests concerning environmental sustainability, cultural diversity, the eradication of poverty and respect for human rights. This autumn in Doha, will our Government stand shoulder to shoulder with the poor and dispossessed peoples of this planet against the mega-rich corporate lobbyists, so that smoke from the streets of Seattle does not drift into the conference chambers of Qatar?

Ms Hewitt: I understand the concerns that many people have about the exploitation of workers and the environment in developing countries by some multinational companies. The answer, as I know my hon. Friend agrees, is not violent protests such as we saw on the streets of Seattle; nor is it to cut developing countries out of world trade. The answer is to develop a rules-based system for world trade that will help developing countries—and that is what the Secretary of State for International Development and I shall work to achieve in partnership not only with our colleagues in the European Union, but with our colleagues in developing countries. I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to support us in those endeavours.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): What reassurance can the Secretary of State give the House today that the conference planned for the autumn will be conducted safe from the rioting that we have seen on other such occasions? Mindful of the incidents during recent football matches in Copenhagen, can she reassure the House that the Government will convince their partners that the conference will be held in absolute safety and that conclusions will be reached?

Ms Hewitt: I know that the Qatari Government are doing everything possible to ensure that the conference is indeed held in conditions of safety and security. Naturally, they are backed in those endeavours by the United Kingdom Government and our partners in the EU.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Does my right hon. Friend understand that for many of us the other side of the coin to the WTO is the International Labour Organisation? What efforts will she make to ensure that discussions at the WTO take account of the many unfulfilled obligations of this and other Governments attending the conference to commitments that we have signed up to as members of the ILO? There is a feeling in this House that under both the Conservative Government and this Labour Government insufficient attention is being given to our obligations to the workers whose interests are represented by the ILO.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. Indeed, I have raised that very issue of the discussions that need to happen within the ILO with Mike Moore, the general secretary of the WTO, when I spoke to him recently. Of course we have to ensure that there are fair rules on labour standards and environmental issues as part of a framework for fair trade in the global economy. We must also ensure—this is of considerable concern to India and other developing countries—that the need for fair labour standards and environmental protection is not used as an excuse for protectionism by developed countries against the poorest countries.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): The Secretary of State said that she would co-ordinate her approach with the Secretary of State for International Development. Will she assure me that she will also co-ordinate it with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

Ms Hewitt: Of course.

Manufacturing Business

3. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What steps are being taken by her Department to support exporting by small manufacturing businesses. [2033]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): Among the steps we are taking are £17.5 million of support to more than 9,000 UK businesses attending overseas trade fairs and meetings in 56 countries, £2.2 million on overseas trade missions, and a new £1.9 million pilot programme to support new exporters in each region of the UK. That is part of the Government's £66 million annual trade development and promotion programme.

Mr. Borrow: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. When I visit small manufacturing companies in my constituency, once we have got past the lengthy discussion about the

weakness of the euro we get down to practical talks about what the Government can do to help small manufacturing companies to export. A common theme in most of those discussions is the need for more support for attending trade fairs. In particular, some existing rules restrict the number of times that a company can be supported in attending trade fairs. That should be re-examined. At a time when exporting manufacturing industries are finding things especially difficult, perhaps my hon. Friend's Department could look again at the existing rules to see whether further resources and assistance can be made available.

Nigel Griffiths: I know that my hon. Friend is a doughty champion of manufacturers in his constituency and region. The existing support available is £2,300 for each trip to exhibit abroad. Exporters are entitled to up to three such grants over a set period. Indeed, the result of that spending is trade for UK firms estimated at £500 million. That represents a return of well over 25 to 1, and is money well spent. However, I shall certainly take on board the thoughtful points made by my hon. Friend.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the Minister confirm that Britain is now running the biggest deficit in traded goods since 1697, when records began? Small businesses feel completely frustrated by the extra red tape and regulation pumped out by the Government, all of which damage their competitiveness in international markets, thereby adding to that trade deficit. Is the Minister aware that the DTI's own regulation taskforce, headed by the Labour peer Lord Haskins, has now called the system unworkable and has criticised the Department's efforts—or claims—to be simplifying things as ineffective, and in some cases non-existent? What is the Minister going to do about that criticism? Will his Department simply carry on ignoring the criticism from his own side or will it finally do something about it?

Nigel Griffiths: We certainly intend to take Lord Haskins' suggestions seriously. I note that Francis Maude, when he was a Minister—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Is he still in the House? *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman is still with us—I apologise to him. He will be able to refresh our memory about the fact that in 1995 he used almost the same words as the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat–Amory). I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Wells does not pay tribute to the 170,000 new businesses of the past four years. I am also sorry that instead of going back two or three centuries, he does not go back to 1989. At present, the deficit is under 2.25 per cent. as a proportion of gross domestic product, which is much lower than the 1989 figure of 4 per cent. How does the right hon. Gentleman explain that?

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Under 1973 fair trading legislation, if a multinational company makes a bid for a UK manufacturing firm, it can be referred to the Competition Commission on the grounds of loss of exports. Will the Government retain that condition? If so, will they make use of it on occasion?

Nigel Griffiths: We will shortly be consulting on reform of the competition regime. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's points are noted and considered.

Climate Change Levy

4. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What representations she has received from business about the impact of the climate change levy on UK competitiveness. [2034]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Department has received a number of representations from business about the climate change levy, including its impact on UK competitiveness. The levy has been introduced to help the UK deliver its commitments to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, while safeguarding UK business competitiveness.

Mr. Amess: I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box—and I now realise how old I must be getting—but can he justify placing that extra tax on manufacturing companies throughout the UK, especially when small businesses involved in manufacturing have been brought to their knees as a result of the policies of this rotten Government? Finally, will the Minister justify how those poor hard-working companies will be able to pay the extra £30 million in VAT on top of their existing liabilities?

Mr. Alexander: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the characteristic grace and generosity of his introductory remarks.

The competitiveness of UK business extends beyond the climate change levy. We have established a platform of stability in this country, with low inflation and interest rates, and we have offered incentives to the manufacturing community. On the specific issue of the climate change levy, I merely make the following points: all the revenues are recycled via reduced national insurance contributions and energy support for business; there is an 80 per cent. discount for energy-intensive sectors that deliver energy savings in negotiated agreements with the Government; and modern manufacturing competitiveness requires not only labour productivity, but resource productivity.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): The Minister will be aware that the report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has been published today, shows that global warming is increasing at double the rate that the panel predicted five years ago, with the result of failing crops throughout the world and possibly a loss of a quarter of food supplies in the poorest countries. Does he agree that the issue is not the climate change levy and its impact, but the impact of inaction on humanity in the future?

Mr. Alexander: I thank my hon. Friend for that very timely question. The latest work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms the very worrying trend, and the consequences for the world if we do not tackle the problem of climate change. That reinforces the Government's determination to take action on climate change. It is noteworthy that although the Conservative party was willing to countenance international agreements when it was in government, it seems to have lost that resolve in opposition.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Is the Minister aware of the impact of the climate change levy on investment in

fuel-efficient combined heat and power systems? This week I received a representation from British Sugar, advising me that its investment in combined heat and power was under threat not just from the application of the levy, but from the operation of the new electricity trading arrangements—as the Minister will learn if he can find the appropriate spot in his briefing notes. Will he give me an undertaking for British Sugar that he will carefully consider that matter and review whether, if he wants energy efficiency, turning off investment in combined heat and power is the best way to achieve it?

Mr. Alexander: The position of individual businesses, including the one that the right hon. Gentleman mentions, will depend on the extent to which they take advantage of the various levy exemptions, the new capital allowances for energy efficiency investments, the energy support and the advice on the new carbon tax. If he wishes to write directly to me about the company that he mentioned, I shall, of course, ensure that the matter is dealt with.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Minister consider British Sugar's representations? He will know that bringing new environmentally friendly combined heat and power systems on stream is a Government policy objective, and the present arrangements for the climate change levy on energy exports to the local network are causing very real problems.

Mr. Alexander: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I, too, welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position as Minister. It gives me especial pleasure, as I think that I top him by about a quarter of an inch—*[Laughter]*—at most.

The climate change levy was introduced in April. As the Minister well knows, manufacturing costs rose sharply in May and output fell more sharply than at any time for a decade. Does he accept that, as a matter principle, a tax should not be levied just when the sector that it hits hardest is having the hardest time? What possible justification can he give for adding to the hardship of manufacturers? How can he say today that the tax will improve the sector's competitiveness?

Mr. Alexander: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his characteristic generosity concerning my arrival at the Dispatch Box—matched only by his initial comments on my appointment to the Department of Trade and Industry.

On the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, the Government have indeed worked in partnership with business to consider a range of measures, and significant changes have been made to the climate change levy since it was first introduced. That reflects the DTI's sponsorship work. We need to ensure that British businesses get ahead of the curve by improving the productivity not only of the labour in those companies, but of the resources that they use. Countries and companies throughout the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are introducing similar measures and our challenge is to ensure that we lead on an agenda of manufacturing productivity. The climate change levy makes an important contribution to that as well as to our environmental objectives.

Small Businesses (North-West)

5. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): What steps she has taken to increase the productivity of small businesses in the north-west region. [2035]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): We have established the Small Business Service in the north-west region to help small businesses enhance their competitiveness and profitability. It works with key partners, such as the North West development agency, to champion entrepreneurship and minimise the burden of regulation.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that reply. He will agree that the Small Business Service is very useful. However, could we not also help productivity by cutting some of the burden of red tape? That would assist, and allow small businesses to grow into the medium-sized and large enterprises that we want in the north-west.

Nigel Griffiths: I agree with my hon. Friend in hoping that the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 will make it far easier to tackle outdated, overlapping and overburdensome legislation. Patrick Carter, who has considerable business experience, has been asked to recommend simplifications to the payroll system to help all businesses, especially, I hope, the 3.7 million small businesses.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Further to the sensible and caring question asked by the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle)—it was a good question—is the Minister aware that on Monday, the British Chambers of Commerce announced the result of a survey of the north-west, which painted a gloomy picture for small businesses, particularly those hit by foot and mouth? Is he aware that tens of thousands of people in the north-west have lost their jobs in the textile industry over the past four years and that that trend is continuing, mainly because of the high value of the pound? Is he further aware that the problems and cuts in companies such as BAE Systems, Marconi and Cammell Laird are resulting in further job losses for the small businesses that supply them? The list goes on and on.

In view of that catalogue of woe, will the Minister now recognise that his response was woefully inadequate? Will he listen to the hon. Member for Chorley and come forward with measures for the north-west that will give help and encouragement for the future? Otherwise the job losses that are taking place in small businesses and manufacturing will continue.

Nigel Griffiths: I do not want to take up more time in the House than I am due, but on two of the key issues the hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. The Government have given an additional £3.65 million to the north-west to ensure that small farmers directly affected by the foot and mouth epidemic have access to good business advice through business links and other help. We are doing as much as possible to support businesses in the north-west, which now employ 3.1 million people—119,000 more than in 1997.

I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman says is not generally accepted by workers in the north-west, especially those in manufacturing, whose average hourly earnings went up from about £8 to more than £10.50 in the most recent five years for which we have figures.

Flexible Working

6. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): What action she is taking to help employees obtain flexible working arrangements. [2036]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Last month I appointed a new work and parents taskforce to consider how parents of young children and their employers can be encouraged to agree flexible hours that will suit them both. In addition, the Government's work-life balance campaign works with employers to introduce family-friendly working that meets the needs of both employees and business.

Judy Mallaber: I welcome the establishment of the working parents taskforce. Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the last Parliament the Select Committee on Education and Employment recommended that women returning to work after childbirth should be allowed to go part-time unless employers could show that that was impractical? Does she agree that, as a minimum, a code of guidance should be drawn up requiring employers to give reasons for rejecting any request for flexible working arrangements? Will she also highlight the areas of skilled employment, such as nursing, in which there are staff shortages and in which greater flexibility by employers could help them to deal with the shortages by making it easier for people to return to work?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. She makes an important point about the real advantages that businesses get by extending flexible working hours. I am also conscious of the Select Committee's excellent work on the subject in the previous Parliament. We consulted specifically on how we could help mothers with new babies and parents of young children to work part-time, and we were repeatedly told, especially by mothers and groups that work with mothers, that they did not want to be in a battleground of disputes and employment tribunals.

Parents want a sensible discussion with employers to arrive at a practical solution. They want their families' needs to be taken seriously. Our proposal ensures that parents have the right to be taken seriously, and the taskforce, under the chairmanship of Sir George Bain, will consider the practicalities of how we make that work for parents and businesses.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): In welcoming the establishment of the taskforce, may I remind the Secretary of State what the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union said about it? He commented:

"I am amazed that in the 21st Century the government is portraying the right to ask as a major breakthrough. What if the employer says 'No'?"

Will she clarify the basic issue of principle before the taskforce gets under way? What if an employee makes a reasonable request for flexible working and the employer says no? Will the employee have legal redress?

Ms Hewitt: As I made clear when I announced the establishment of the taskforce, the employee's right to make the request is accompanied by a duty for the employer to give that request proper and serious consideration. We are getting the issue on to the business agenda, so that employers and employees can produce solutions that suit them both. The approach has been welcomed by the TUC and the CBI, both of which are participating in the taskforce.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Another group of workers who need flexible working arrangements are the disabled and sick. At the moment, employers are far too ready to pension off those people on the grounds of ill health. What is often required is a more flexible approach, such as a phased return to work, shorter working hours or a change in the working environment. Will the Secretary of State assure me that she will encourage employers to adopt those practices, and perhaps consider including groups such as disabled workers in legislation on flexible working for women?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. As more businesses consider flexible working and understand the benefits that it brings to them by making it easier to recruit and retain good workers, more employers will extend flexible working hours not only to parents with young children but to people with disabilities or some level of illness.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): That is all very well, but how will it improve flexible working practices for the Government to accept the European Union directive on national works councils, which will cost industry £260 million every year? Does the Secretary of State, as the voice of industry at the heart of the Government, accept that the No. 1 concern of British business is the increasing and intolerable burden of regulation? If she is serious about wanting to tackle the problems, she will find an Opposition who are keen to assist her. However, if she simply continues to add more costs for industry, she will find resistance on both sides of the House, and in the country as a whole, as British business becomes increasingly uncompetitive and people's jobs are put in jeopardy.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman referred to the works councils directive, which applies to multinational companies that work across several EU member states. I have been struck by the number of business leaders from such companies who have said that in practice the creation of works councils has proved very useful. The hon. Gentleman may be thinking of the proposed draft directive on information and consultation. His bigotry about all matters European means that he has not bothered to check his facts. The information and consultation directive, on which we agreed a common position a few weeks ago, will not impose works councils on British companies. We have succeeded in making the directive more flexible to ensure that British businesses will be able to find solutions that suit them.

I notice that the hon. Gentleman has neither told us whether he thinks it is a good idea for employees to be consulted and given information by their employers, nor said whether he thinks that it is good to help parents to balance work and family. We support hard-working families and employees; the Conservative party does not.

Competitiveness

7. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): What steps are being taken to ensure that products resulting from scientific advances made in the UK are competitive internationally. [2037]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): We are investing nearly £2 billion in the science base and about £250 million in strengthening collaboration between universities and businesses to ensure that scientific breakthroughs are turned into commercial success.

Dr. Naysmith: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I particularly welcome the work of the international technology service. What further steps is the Department taking to ensure that UK companies have access to worldwide knowledge and information?

Miss Johnson: We are developing a number of initiatives that will give further momentum to entrepreneurial education for science and engineering students. A £15 million fund is available for a further round of the university challenge to enable good universities to access seed funds, which will assist in the transformation of good research into good business.

In addition, we are doing more to make sure that scientists will be rewarded. We are working to produce a brain gain in the UK—[Hon. Members: "A brain what?"] A brain gain, as opposed to the brain drain that happened under the last Conservative Government. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that my noble Friend the Minister for Science will announce later today that five scientists will be rewarded in a five-year £20 million scheme to attract and retain the best scientific talent in the UK.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am not sure about the phrase "brain gain", but I support the move that has just been announced. Does the Minister agree that scientific progress can be made only if we have free exchange of the benefits of research? To that end, can she tell me what progress has been made in securing international agreements to prevent scientific protectionism, such as the patenting of naturally occurring genetic material or genotypes?

Miss Johnson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is an important issue, and we are in discussion with our European partners so as to make progress on it.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that clustering is one of the best ways to develop scientific breakthroughs? Can she assure me that where clusters, such as the Oxford and Cambridge technology arc, cross regional development agency and Small Business Service boundaries, artificial constraints will not inhibit technological development?

Miss Johnson: I entirely agree that it is important to make clustering work, and I am sure that those working in science are keen that it should. We have been emphasising the role of regional development agencies in technology, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke to the chairmen of the RDAs earlier this week to stress their role in ensuring that business and science in the UK are successful.

Packaging and Production Waste

8. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What representations she has received from the labelling industry as to what constitutes packaging waste and production waste. [2038]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Department has received six letters from businesses in the UK labelling industry which refer to the Environment Agency's decision to issue guidance noting that the backing paper of labels should be treated as a packaging material.

Bob Russell: If the Government want to be helpful to the packaging industry, may I say that that is a very unhelpful answer, and suggest a way to resolve the problem? The Minister, accompanied by a sufficient number of experts and advisers, should get out of London and go to a proper factory where labelling is going on. May I extend an invitation to her to visit Pago Ltd. in Colchester, where she can see at first hand the difference between packaging waste and production waste?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the invitation. I am aware that he has assiduously been pursuing such issues with my fellow Ministers and the Environment Agency, and I believe that they have been dealt with thoroughly to date. We have elegantly transposed the definitions from the EU directive into UK implementation with the result, I am informed, that the cost in the UK is markedly lower than in any other EU member state. We recognise the value of the industry in the UK and we shall continue to work with it to ensure that implementation is as effective as possible.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My hon. Friend will be aware that timber and wood products are not included under the packaging waste regulations. A recovery target only is set for wood products because of the general feeling that timber cannot be recycled. However, there are companies, including one in my constituency, that recycle waste timber products and facilitate their further use. Unfortunately, such companies cannot take advantage of packaging recovery notes to generate income to help to establish the industry and increase the amount of waste wood that is recycled. Does my hon. Friend intend to look again at the regulations with a view to including such companies?

Miss Johnson: The Environment Agency is responsible for interpreting and producing guidance on the current directive, and now that it has done that it is

probably not possible to accommodate my hon. Friend's suggestion. However, a requirement of the directive is that it be reviewed, so it might be helpful if he makes representations to the Department, which I shall take up through my officials during future negotiations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have already raised this case with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on behalf of my constituency company, County Labels Ltd. of Adelphi Mill, Bollington, just north of Macclesfield. I have to tell the Under-Secretary that she really needs to come down to earth and get in touch with the reality of competition from Europe and elsewhere. In Europe, the backing paper on labels is not classed as packaging owing to its functionality and the fact that it forms an integral part of the manufacturing process—article 21, section 8 can be quoted in aid of my argument. Will the hon. Lady ensure that the backing paper on labels is not the subject of an additional onerous burden on our manufacturing industry?

Miss Johnson: I am impressed by the hon. Gentleman's grasp of detail—I congratulate him. We continue to work closely with representatives of UK paper and printing-related industries to resolve outstanding issues, but the fact is that the interpretation placed on the directive by the Environment Agency has been guided by a High Court decision and the agency is duty bound to give UK companies the best possible guidance in the light of legal decisions. May I also point out that the directive was agreed in 1994 by the then Conservative Government?

Steel Industry

9. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If she will make a statement on prospects for the steel industry. [2039]

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): The United Kingdom steel industry has experienced difficult trading conditions in recent years and many jobs have been lost as a result of restructuring and cost cutting. However, the industry has an excellent productivity record, a wide range of high-quality products and a well trained work force. All of that will help its competitive position.

Helen Jackson: I thank the Minister for his answer, but does he accept that there is widespread concern in the steel industry in my constituency and in south Yorkshire that very high energy prices and uncertainty about the euro are making the industry less than competitive in Europe? Is he surprised by the fact that, according to his written answer to me on 9 July, his Department does not even know or collect region by region import and export figures for steel and related industries? Will he ask the Department to sharpen up its act on behalf of the steel industry so that, as Members of Parliament, we can track properly exactly what is happening region by region with exchange rates, imports and exports in our core manufacturing industry?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. She has been a vigorous campaigner on behalf of steel communities, particularly in south Yorkshire. We are aware of the problems of the steel industry, but none of them can be solved instantly. They relate to issues which we are working hard to try to resolve.

On my hon. Friend's specific point, I fully expect not to get the award for best written answer this year. I will look at the matter again, although I have made inquiries of the United Kingdom Steel Association, and it told me that it does not keep figures other than for Customs and Excise. So, it is a mystery why its report to my hon. Friend differs from the information that it is feeding to us. We should be able to ensure that we have better figures that are based on regions, especially since, through regional development agencies and the thrust of our regional approach, we shall need them in future.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): With UK energy prices already higher than those of many of our European Union competitors, is it not insane to pile the climate change levy on the UK steel industry while it is struggling to compete?

Alan Johnson: We have already had a canter round the course on the climate change levy. Corus—and the UK steel industry in general—was very clear that the climate change levy did not lead to its recent difficulties. Indeed, we have negotiated an exemption for dual-use fuels. That is subject to a challenge because there was a complaint by a UK secondary steel manufacturer, but it was widely welcomed by the steel industry. We have struck the proper balance between pursuing environmental targets, on which hon. Members on both sides of the House agree, and ensuring that we have a competitive steel industry in this country.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Has my hon. Friend had any recent discussions with management and unions on the situation in south Wales, where we were particularly severely hit at Newport during the most recent reorganisation of British steel, in order to find out whether the Government can do anything further with Corus management and unions to promote the industry and ensure that there are no further job reductions in south Wales and in Port Talbot especially, which has a lot of good things going for it?

Alan Johnson: We announced a package of measures on 3 May to help steel communities throughout the country, but particularly in Wales. On my hon. Friend's specific point, I will of course be willing to talk to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and other unions, all of which have an excellent track record of taking a constructive approach to such problems. I would be delighted to talk to them to see whether we can assist further in the area that he has mentioned.

Information and Consultation Directive

10. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What reasons underlay her decision to agree to the information and consultation directive. [2040]

12. Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): What recent discussions she has held with business organisations concerning the proposed European directive on information to and consultation with workers. [2043]

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): The Government have always believed that good companies inform and consult their employees. During negotiations on the proposed directive, our concern has been to avoid the rigid "one size fits all" approach. The agreement reached in Brussels on 11 June meets that requirement. We have maintained a close dialogue with business organisations on the directive. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has recently discussed it with the CBI.

Mr. Swayne: The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) assured the Select Committee on 4 November 1998 that he would block the directive. However, the hon. Gentleman has paid for it, albeit with a post-dated cheque. What happened to the Government's policy? Did it go to the Back Benches with the right hon. Gentleman?

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman should lie down in a darkened room and take a couple of tablets; this is not the end of civilisation as we know it. In 1998, we opposed the directive because of its "one size fits all" approach. Perhaps the Opposition should get information and start consultation because, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned, the European works council model appears to be confused with the directive. The directive does not introduce works councils; we have the flexibility to ensure that it can be moulded to each member state's requirements. There is a seven-year transitional period, which is only slightly shorter than the time that it takes to elect a leader of the Conservative party. We have substantially modified the European directive to benefit UK companies and their work force.

Mr. Bercow: That was a pitiful answer. Why can the Minister not see that the directive remains flawed and inappropriate, as the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), said on 18 January? Does the Minister not understand that it is opposed by all major representative business organisations, which fear the £260 million recurring costs? When will he recognise that information to and consultation with workers should be decided either by individual companies or this elected House and are not the proper business of the corporatist dirigistes of the European Union?

Alan Johnson: I am glad to announce to the hon. Gentleman that that is what the directive now provides for; our negotiations in Brussels on 11 June provided exactly that outcome. On information and consultation, the hon. Gentleman may be on another march to the left. If I remember rightly, and to personalise this a little, when he came into the House in 1997, he was against the lowering of the age of consent, he was against the minimum wage—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Those matters do not concern the House.

Alan Johnson: I am only saying that I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is in touch with his feminine side, has read all the recommended books and, very soon, will be a great advocate of information and consultation.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to achieve the brain gain posited by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) is to recognise the truth expressed by the managing director of a global company in my constituency, who said that the company discovered that with every pair of hands it got a free brain? Does that not underline the importance of the information and consultation directive? Will my hon. Friend ensure that nothing like Luton ever happens again?

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend has raised the crucial issue. I agree that you get a free brain as long as you ensure that you extract talent, imagination and energy from the work force. Some companies are better at that than others. However, the initiative will never work unless we bring employers with us. There have been two attempts at it—Whitleyism and the industrial democracy experiment in the 1970s, which did not work because both sides of industry ensured that they did not. With the directive, we are determined to ensure that there is a genuine change of culture so that workers are genuinely informed and consulted at times when that matters; there is an extraordinarily good business case for that proposition.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Following the final point in the observations of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), can we be certain that, as a result of the directive, the kind of nonsense that took place at General Motors, when workers on the German works council were apprised of the company's plans while workers in Britain learned of them on British radio, will not happen again?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend has taken a great interest in this matter over a number of years. My hon. Friends the Members for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) and for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) have made that very point. I think we are all determined that what happened to the Vauxhall work force at Luton does not happen to workers anywhere else in the country in future.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Rather than trying to rewrite recent history, will the Minister confirm that the Government were opposed to the directive, and said so repeatedly in the House? They were opposed to it on the ground that it breached the subsidiarity principle because it applies only to purely domestic firms and has nothing to do with EU trade or multinational companies. That objection remains valid. However, the Government have been outvoted. That happened when the Germans changed sides on the issue shortly after the British general election.

Why are the Government, when they and this House have recently been out-manoeuvred and outvoted on this matter, signing up in the Nice treaty to another 31 areas of policy that will be decided by majority voting, allowing

the will of the House and the Government to be out-manoeuvred and outvoted in new areas and even more often? Where is the logic in that?

Alan Johnson: I reiterate that our aim in all the discussions from 1998, when the directive was mooted, was to avoid a rigid and legalistic framework. Our aim was to avoid the works council model that the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) mentioned. It was in that sense that we argued about subsidiarity.

On 11 June, that changed as a result of our engaging in dialogue. Incidentally, there was not a vote; it was dialogue that enabled us to join the consensus. As a result of negotiation and discussion, we believe that we have a directive that British companies, even if they do not welcome it immediately, once they have read the details will agree takes us forward. That is in sharp contrast to what happened in relation to the European works council directive, when the Conservative Government opted out. The directive was negotiated and it affected UK companies because it applied to companies that had workers in more than one member state, but they had no input and no influence. There is now a different and far more constructive way of doing things in Europe.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): As my hon. Friend has acknowledged, this is a matter of deep concern to my constituents, including Vauxhall employees and former employees who experienced sacking over their cereal without being informed by General Motors of their fate. Will he ensure that as part of the directive there is on-going information and consultation involving employees, not simply at the point of their being sacked, which is far too late a stage? Will he recognise, and perhaps advise Conservative Members who are opposed to any extension of workers' rights, that information and consultation, as the research of the Industrial Society has shown, bring increased productivity to businesses as well as benefits to workers?

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I reiterate that the directive is not only about information and consultation in relation to redundancies. A collective redundancies agreement already covers that. We are talking about information and consultation on all areas where the work force have an interest, such as change of work organisation and future plans for the company.

Every survey shows that if the work force are properly consulted and informed, there is an enormous reward for business. That is the crucial message that we need to get across over the next months and years.

Communications White Paper

11. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What plans she has to introduce legislation to implement the regulatory structure proposed in the Communications White Paper; and if she will make a statement. [2041]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I am pleased to announce that this afternoon the Government will introduce in another place the Office of Communications Bill, which will be a paving measure related to the draft communications Bill that was announced in the Queen's Speech. The communications Bill itself will be published in draft later this Session.

Michael Fabricant: That is good news. The introduction of the Bill is long overdue. Its delayed introduction has been holding back the development of information technology. The Minister will know that many people in the industry welcomed many parts of the White Paper, which was issued in December last year.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many hon. Members on both sides of the House find it extraordinary that while the Government are introducing Ofcom, which will control the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission, Oftel, the Radio Authority and the Radiocommunications Agency, the BBC is once again to be its own judge and jury, with the BBC board of governors being responsible to itself? When will the Government grasp the nettle and finally make the BBC answerable to a third party—the people who pay the licence fee?

Mr. Alexander: Although I am happy to acknowledge to the House that there is close joint working between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the matter, it is a matter with which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is dealing. I shall be happy to pass her observations on to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement this afternoon. Does he agree that the urgency of the matter is paramount, especially for areas such as the Rhondda, where broadband access is still denied to the whole of the constituency, and where the growing digital divide between the information-rich and the information-poor is a problem that should worry every part of the country?

Mr. Alexander: I agree that we should strike an appropriate balance, making sure that there is the necessary consultation with the various partners who will be involved in the detailed discussions concerning the draft Bill, while maintaining the necessary momentum through the paving Bill, which I understand will be introduced in another place this afternoon.

Miners' Compensation

13. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What action she is taking to increase the payment of compensation to former mineworkers; and if she will make a statement. [2044]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We are making real progress in speeding up medical assessments and compensation payments for retired miners. We are paying out about £1 million in compensation every day, and shortly we will have paid out £500 million across our country. I particularly thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) for all the work that they

did when in this Department to ensure that British miners receive the justice which they deserve and which was so long denied to them by the Conservatives.

Mr. O'Brien: What action does my right hon. Friend intend to take in response to representations about claims that have been outstanding for four or five years? Constituents of ours who are in their mid-80s are still waiting for compensation. Some people fear that they will not receive the benefit while they are living. It is unacceptable that claims made four or five years ago have still not been met. Will my right hon. Friend take action to ensure that those long-standing claims are met without further delay, so that our constituents receive what they are entitled to while they are alive?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with the points made by my hon. Friend. We have already put in place a system to prioritise the compensation claims of the oldest miners and the sickest miners, so that they go to the top of the queue for the medical assessment that has to be done before the compensation can be paid. We are determined to ensure that those assessments are made by spring next year. We are carrying them out as quickly as we can, because that is the right thing to do.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I entirely accept the right hon. Lady's good faith, but will she be a little more expeditious and try to ensure that all the claims are settled by spring next year? It is extremely important that they should be.

Ms Hewitt: The scheme is the largest personal injury compensation scheme that has ever been established in our country. No one has ever done that before. We have already received 150,000 claims. We do not know how many more will come in—they are still coming in every week. If those cases had been pursued individually through the courts, the miners would have waited up to 15 years to get their compensation. We have prioritised them. We will deal with the oldest and sickest miners first. We have recruited more medical specialists to carry out the assessments. We will go on dealing with the matter as quickly as is possible, but I cannot give an end date by which we will have finished dealing with all the cases, because in some cases we have not even received the claims.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that more than 300 lawyers are involved in the settlement of the claims—a lot more than would have been involved if the NUM areas had remained intact? They include a lot of fly-by-night lawyers. Will my right hon. Friend tell me how much they are likely to get out of the £4 billion that has been set aside for claims in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema and vibration white finger? Can she tell us whether some of them are dragging their feet deliberately? All of them receive a handling fee that is provided by the Government and comes from the taxpayers' pocket. When my right hon. Friend looks into ways of speeding up the claims, will she deal with those legal people who are holding up a lot of claims in order to line their own pockets?

Ms Hewitt: I think that the problem of having 300 lawyers involved in the claims has been very real. We are now dealing better with the solicitors' group and agreeing a faster way forward to get the cases resolved and money paid out. Mr. Justice Turner, the High Court judge who has been hearing the case, confirmed last November that we had to have a complex system in order to achieve fairness. That means, for instance, that we have to pay lawyers for up to one and a half hours' legal advice to help claimants to fill in the assessment forms, which are necessarily complex. Our objective is to get fair compensation to those miners as quickly as possible. We will pay the lawyers a fair fee, but we will not let them hold up the process.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House please give the business for the coming week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 16 JULY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

Motions to approve the membership of Select Committees.

Motion to approve the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001.

Motion to approve a report for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

TUESDAY 17 JULY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill (2nd Day).

WEDNESDAY 18 JULY—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill (3rd Day).

THURSDAY 19 JULY—Consideration in Committee of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

Motion to approve the Police (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 2001.

FRIDAY 20 JULY—Motion on the summer recess Adjournment.

The provisional business for the week following the recess will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Football (Disorder) Bill.

TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the European Communities (Finance) Bill.

Motion to approve the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 2001.

WEDNESDAY 17 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

THURSDAY 18 OCTOBER—Opposition Day (2nd Allotted Day).

FRIDAY 19 OCTOBER—Debate on drugs strategy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

For the convenience of the House, I should announce that the topics for debate in Westminster Hall when we return from the recess will be:

THURSDAY 18 OCTOBER—Debate on the report from the Education and Employment Committee entitled "Early Years".

THURSDAY 25 OCTOBER—Debate on the report from the Science and Technology Committee on genetics and insurance.

THURSDAY 1 NOVEMBER—Debate on third world debt.

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER—Debate on the reports from the Education and Employment Committee regarding higher education.

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Debate on housing.

Mrs. Browning: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. We welcome the opportunity to debate the Select Committee nominations on Monday. Will he confirm that there will be a free vote for Labour Members on both the Front and Back Benches? The business motion tabled today in respect of the debate seeks to finish the deliberations at 7 o'clock on Monday, so if a statement is made, we will be left with only two and a half hours to debate this important matter. The House will appreciate that the Opposition are very interested in these procedures. I do not expect him to commit himself now, but will he agree to be flexible in terms of that particular business motion if a statement is made? Obviously, we all look forward to hearing from the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I hope that the curtailment of time will not preclude hon. Members on either side of the House from contributing to such an important debate.

Yesterday, along with colleagues on the Opposition Benches, I voted against the draft special educational needs code of practice because it was flawed and did not recognise the individual and specific needs of children. I am pleased to see that the Government withdrew the code later in the day. Will the Leader of the House outline how the Government will now proceed with the code, particularly as we are coming not only to the parliamentary recess but to the long summer holidays in the educational world? Parents, teachers and Members of Parliament would be anxious if the Government were to publish their changes to the code during the summer weeks when there is no proper opportunity to scrutinise them. How do the Government intend to proceed with this matter?

Earlier this week, the press reported that there are to be significant changes in the Cabinet Office in respect of the way in which the Government deal with national crises. Apparently, as a result of the way they handled the fuel crisis last year and the foot and mouth crisis this year, there are to be changes in the way COBRA—the Cabinet Committee that deals with crises—is run. When the Deputy Prime Minister returns to these shores, could he be asked to come to the House before we rise for the summer recess so that we might all be apprised of the Government's thinking on the way in which national crises are dealt with?

Finally—I am sure that I do not need to ask this question—will the Leader of the House reassure us that the Prime Minister will be available in the coming week to make a statement to the House on the talks on Northern Ireland?

Mr. Cook: I look forward with the keenest of interest to our debate on Monday. I am happy to give the hon. Lady the assurance that she seeks. On the Labour Benches, the vote on who should be a member of a Select Committee will be a free vote. This is a House of Commons—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) will let me finish my sentence, I think that I shall be able to satisfy him.

This is a matter for the House and it is right that the House should decide who should be members of the Select Committees. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cook: I was pleading with the right hon. and learned Gentleman to let me finish but, as he is bursting

with enthusiasm, I shall repeat what I have already announced to the world this morning, which is that there will be no payroll vote on any of these issues on Monday. It is for my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, and those behind me, to decide how they will vote in any particular case. I note that the right hon. and learned Gentleman may force a large number of votes, having counted his amendments.

In response to the question about timing, I must stress that this is, so far as we can discover, the first time that any Government have scheduled a debate about the setting up of Select Committees in prime time. Such debates are usually taken late at night. This debate will be held in prime time between the end of questions until 7 pm, and I am sure that that will provide plenty of time for the House to explore the issues of concern. I should be extremely surprised if my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) did not contribute to that debate.

The Government have announced their intention to amend the educational code and to bring the matter forward for debate after the summer recess. There will, therefore, be an opportunity for the House to consider it when we return in the autumn.

On Northern Ireland, I am absolutely confident that the Government will take every possible measure to ensure that the House is kept informed of the progress of the talks. Indeed, as the hon. Lady will have noticed from the business statement, there will be opportunities for us to explore Irish issues next week, starting on Monday when we shall debate the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001.

I note the hon. Lady's request for a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister on the new arrangements for responding to national crises. It is sensible that we should examine ways in which we can achieve an integrated, co-ordinated and prepared response, although we do not seek national crises. I note and log her request for a statement, but I would gently remind her that the first point she made was that she did not want a statement on Monday. As always, I have to balance the requirement of the House for a statement with the wish to protect the business of the House.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I thank my right hon. Friend for being so effective after my intervention yesterday afternoon when he was carrying out his caretaker role. I asked for an early decision on the Hastings bypass, and it was made at about 12.30 pm today. Unfortunately, it was the wrong decision. *[Interruption.]* It may be amusing, but not for my electors in Hastings and Rye, who are devastated by the decision not to proceed. Despite unanimous support from the local council, the county council and the south-east region, the Government have made a different decision. Can we have an early debate on the matter so that the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions can explain how it could have overlooked the poverty of my constituency, which includes the 28th poorest town in Britain, local democracy and overwhelming public support for the bypass, and reached the wrong decision? When will such a debate be possible?

Mr. Cook: I promised my hon. Friend an early decision, and he got one. However, as he knows, the Hastings bypass has been a contentious matter. All the evidence collected at the public inquiry and the expression of public opinion did not point in one direction. I regret that the outcome disappoints my hon. Friend, but it is in the nature of public inquiries that pleasing both parties is often impossible.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On the subject of the treatment of Government Back-Bench Members, I draw the Leader of the House's attention to the leading article in today's *Evening Standard*. It states that the names of some Labour London Members of Parliament have been attached to a motion in support of public-private partnership for the tube, apparently without their approval. Will he urgently investigate that serious matter, which pertains to the respect of the House for its Members and vice versa, as well as to the respect of Government for their Back Benchers?

Will the Leader of the House consider the way in which effective opposition to the Government is provided largely from the Government Back Benches as well as from the Conservative Back Benches and the Liberal Democrats? Will he particularly examine the way in which Opposition Front-Bench Members are financed? In the provisional business last week, he announced that the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 2001 would be considered next week. It includes an increase in the amount paid by the taxpayer to the Conservative leader in the House of Lords to £60,961 and to the Conservative Chief Whip in the House of Lords to £56,224. Will that be backdated now that the increase will be postponed until October?

Will the Leader of the House take into account the fact that those increases are on top of the considerable sum already paid to the leader of the Conservative party? I presume that that is why five people are still interested in that ludicrous job. The Conservative party leader receives £63,000 and the Conservative Chief Whip receives £35,500, although he cannot control his Back-Bench Members. In view of the total disarray on the Conservative Benches, does the Leader of the House believe that taxpayers are getting good value for money?

Mr. Cook: The statement on the London tube was an initiative by London Members, not the Government. Any Member who feels misrepresented will have plenty of opportunities to make that clear. We welcome support for a proposal that will enable investment of £13,000 million to proceed. That will provide a basis on which commuters and travellers on the London tube will have trains that run on time, new, more comfortable trains and cleaner stations. Those are important gains, which will be secured without changing London Underground's responsibility for managing, running and ensuring the safety of the service.

The hon. Gentleman tempts me sorely to comment on value for money considerations, for not only the tube but Opposition Front-Bench Members. However, the increases that he mentioned follow from previous references to the Senior Salaries Review Body. As I said recently when we debated pay and rations, I believe that our pay and increases should be independently assessed. Once that has happened, we should accept the assessment.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Does my right hon. Friend know that a public inquiry is about to start into the proposed development of an international airport

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

on the former RAF base of Finningley in Doncaster? Does he know that the main objector is Manchester Airport plc, which also owns Humberside airport and East Midlands airport? Does he believe that it is right and acceptable that a company owned by council tax payers in one region is trying to thwart regeneration in another region? Will he ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to hold an investigation into the use of public funds?

Mr. Cook: It certainly would be a matter of legitimate public concern if public funds rather than proceeds of the trade of the airport were to be used in such ways. Having said that, I was asked that very question yesterday and I responded by assuring the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is considering ways in which he can expedite the public inquiry. The best way forward is to have a public inquiry during which all interested parties can express their views. I am sure that my hon. Friend will robustly express the views of his constituents.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House, bearing in mind his interview in *The Times* today, which tells us how he will take Parliament more seriously, arrange for an explanation to be given to the House as to how a Minister recommended approving a code on Tuesday evening, with the House approving it in a Division yesterday afternoon, while, at the same time, the Department for Education and Skills was withdrawing it?

Mr. Cook: I see no conflict whatever between what I have said about modernising the House and improving scrutiny. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has responded to criticism and to concern, which was expressed from the Opposition Front Bench only 10 minutes ago. I think it absolutely right and proper that she should listen to those representations and consider them.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Will my right hon. Friend consider holding an early debate on the recent report "Sea Changes", which has been produced by the seaside resorts taskforce? That fine report contains excellent recommendations for seaside towns. There is so much concentration on rural tourism at present—I am equally concerned about it, as I represent a rural constituency—but it is important that we do not forget the seaside resorts and the problems that they have faced over the years. I would welcome an early debate on that.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes a legitimate point, and makes it with force on behalf of the constituency that she represents in the House. It is important that we consider all the significant elements of the tourism industry and all the different communities that depend on it. One of the obvious lessons of the past few months is that decline in tourism in one part of Britain can affect tourism in the other parts, as many of those who take holidays use more than one centre.

I shall certainly draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who will want to reflect on how we ensure that we have a balanced tourism policy that covers those seaside resorts that find it a challenge to maintain their tourism industry in the modern world.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Given that, since the general election, the axe has fallen on a Foreign Secretary who believed in Europe, a junior Home Office Minister who believed in telling the truth about a telephone call from a senior Cabinet Minister and two independent-minded Select Committee Chairmen who believed in doing their job—holding the Government to account—is there anything that anyone can believe in under the aegis of this Government without facing the sack?

Mr. Cook: I note that the motion on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that we shall debate on Monday includes the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), whom I seem to remember being, to use the hon. Gentleman's phrase, a vigorous teller of the truth. My hon. Friend will recall many exchanges and his survival is a clear example of the Government's commitment to open scrutiny.

I note also that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) is again on the Select Committee on Health—he was robust and vigorous in his scrutiny in that Committee in the last Parliament—and that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has been appointed to the Select Committee on Home Affairs. *[Interruption.]* Well, he is on the list for approval by the House on Monday and I have no intention of moving an amendment to his inclusion or that of either of the other two. My hon. Friend has distinguished himself by his outspokenness since the general election and the House can take confidence from that. The Government are committed to having successful Committees carrying out scrutiny.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May we have a free vote on the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 2001? Some of us have a constitutional objection to the growing disparity between Back Benchers' and Ministers' salaries. It is unhealthy, and discourages principled resignations.

My right hon. Friend's suggestion, canvassed in *The Times* today, that Chairmen of Select Committees should receive salaries might commend itself to us, provided that the anointing of Chairmen was not at the disposal of Government Whips.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has fully lived up to my expectations.

The proposal for payment for Select Committee Chairmen has been made from within the House on a number of occasions. It was made by the Liaison Committee in the last Parliament, and was made again in the report of the Hansard Society, whose conference I shall address later today. It is not unproblematic. One of the principles that we have advised the SSRB to follow is that all Members except Ministers should receive the same pay; but we should examine the proposal, if there is support for it, and refer it to the SSRB for its consideration and advice.

As for ministerial salaries, my hon. Friend is wrong about the widening of the gulf: proportionately, it remains the same. Nevertheless, I look in hope towards the day when my hon. Friend will be in a position to carry out a principled resignation.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): We have heard that the Prime Minister has set up a crisis management unit to scan the horizon for political black clouds. Have those sharp-eyed folk focused on next Monday's business? Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise the risks of trying to compress into a fairly short debate the vital issue of how the House is to hold the Government to account—a process made more necessary by what was done in the last Parliament? If he really wants to put an end to cynicism in the political process, could he not give a lead by voting for the reinstatement of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions?

Mr. Cook: As I have said, Monday's debate will mark the first occasion on which we have discussed such nominations in prime time rather than in the small hours. That is a major gain for the House, as I hope Members will recognise.

It is important for us to complete Monday's business, so that the Select Committees can meet next week and decide on their business priorities before the recess. I gave the House that commitment, and I am delivering on it. The specific membership of the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee is a matter for the House. As I have promised, there will be a free vote for members of the Government as well as Members of the House.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for an early debate on the criteria for the selection of successful bids under the Government's regeneration schemes—which, I must say, are very good schemes? Jaywick Sands, in my constituency, has 2,000 residents, 81 per cent. of whom live in households without a wage earner. They are living in 1930s holiday homes made of wood, and they are desperate for help. There are no proper roads in the area, and there is no proper street lighting and no proper drainage.

The residents have applied for neighbourhood renewal, and have been told that they do not meet the criteria. They have applied for help under the new deal for communities, and have been told that they do not meet those criteria either. They have applied for neighbourhood management, whose criteria they did meet, but they have just failed again.

What my constituents now want is not to know when the next round of bids will be presented, but when they will receive the support that they desperately need from the Government.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for the regeneration scheme. He has put with force and clarity a case in his constituency in which renewal and regeneration are plainly needed. I shall happily draw his remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and will invite him to consider with my hon. Friend whether there is any problem with the criteria that is causing the difficulty.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am trying to reconcile the stunning words of the Leader of the House about Select Committees in *The Times* with the shambles that he will preside over next Monday. Can he honestly tell the House from the Dispatch Box that Labour Members have not been removed from the Whips' nominations because of their independence of mind and spirit? Secondly, can he explain how the system can possibly be fair to minority parties when they have no representative on the Committee of Selection and the party that is meant to represent them, the Liberal Democrat party, blatantly pursues its own interests with no consultation in order to substitute its Members for those in other minority parties?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman tempts me into far too hot water when he asks me to intervene between other parties and the Liberal Democrats. That is a matter for them to resolve between themselves. It has been a long-standing convention for the Liberal Democrat party to represent the interests of itself and other minority parties. It is a matter for the hon. Gentleman to resolve with the Liberal Democrat party. I cannot intervene—

Mr. Salmond: It is the right hon. Gentleman's job.

Mr. Cook: No it is not my job to run the Liberal Democrat party, nor do I aspire to it.

On Monday the hon. Gentleman will have plenty of opportunity to comment on the list and on any unsatisfactory treatment of his or another minority party. Indeed, if he wishes, he may comment on what he regards as unsatisfactory treatment of any Labour Member.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on our architectural heritage? This year's English Heritage buildings at-risk register includes the Mechanics' Institute in my constituency. The building was once glorious. The people of Swindon used to learn there, spend leisure time and court each other there. It is now in total disrepair. Last year English Heritage found only £5.7 million in grant aid towards 98 buildings on that register. To put right all the buildings which will be found in many hon. Members' constituencies £400 million is required. May we have a debate so that we can all put our heads together and see what money can be found, so that these precious buildings, loved by so many of our constituents, can be preserved for the future?

Mr. Cook: I am familiar with the building that my hon. Friend mentions. I have passed it on many occasions. I fully agree with her on its importance not merely as part of our architectural heritage, but as part of Britain's wider cultural heritage. My hon. Friend drew attention to the funds available for these buildings. I do not disagree that those funds are stretched, given the large number of buildings concerned. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will have heard what she said. My hon. Friend may wish to pursue this with the Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): May we have an early debate to discuss the failures of the

GREAT BRITAIN HOUSE OF COMMONS
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)
2001/2002

Published on microfiche by Chadwyck-Healey (a ProQuest Information and Learning company)
The Quorum, Barnwell Road
Cambridge CB5 8SW
England

Distributed in the USA by ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Rd
PO Box 1346
Ann Arbor
MI 48106 1346, USA

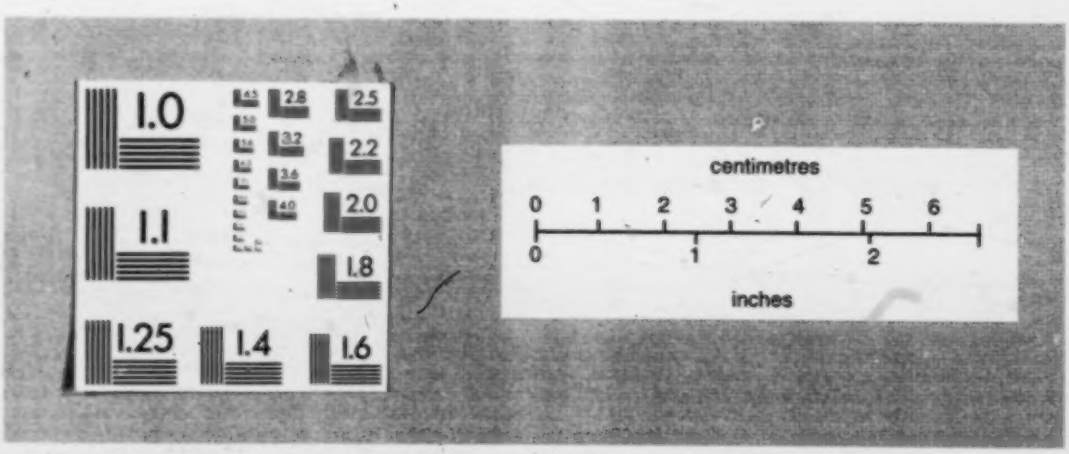
Date of publication: 2002/2003

Reproduction rights: © Parliamentary copyright 2001/2002. Reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Microfiche edition: © 2002/2003 ProQuest Information and Learning. All rights reserved.

Technical data: Film type: positive silver halide, archivally permanent microfiche conforming to AIIM and BSI standards.

Producing laboratory: Bell & Howell



[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

health service in Lincolnshire? Is the Leader of the House aware that my constituents have to wait 68 weeks for an appointment with a consultant neurologist at Pilgrim hospital, Boston? Is he further aware that my constituents in and around Sleaford cannot get on to national health service dental panels, so cannot get NHS dentistry? Is he further aware that my constituents suffering from multiple sclerosis cannot get beta interferon? Is not that a scandal and should not the Government now be held to account for their failure?

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to inform the right hon. and learned Gentleman that not only have waiting lists fallen by 125,000 in the past four years, but waiting times have also fallen. I am sure that he will wish to express full support for our NHS plan which proposes to cut the average waiting time of 13 weeks for an out-patient appointment.

I am rather surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have the gall to complain about the provision of NHS dentists. During the 18 years in which he supported a Conservative Government the NHS dentistry service went through a massive reduction. This Government have increased the dentist panels and are looking for an increase in and return to NHS dentists across the land in the way that should have been maintained under the Conservative Government.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): May we have a debate on early-day motion 93?

[*That this House is concerned that Financial Services Authority research proves that nearly five million endowment policies may not grow sufficiently to repay their mortgages; regrets that only 10,500 people have been compensated out of at least three million who were mis-sold endowments 'guaranteed' by salespeople to pay off mortgages fully; and calls on the Government to instruct the FSA to launch a mis-selling inquiry funded by companies' shareholders and to write to those facing possible shortfalls with details of how to claim compensation.*]

It is about the plight of 5 million endowment policy holders whose endowments will not mature and pay off their mortgages, let alone pay the nest egg that they were promised by the sales people who made huge commissions. Only 10,000 of those 5 million people have been compensated. Can we ask the Financial Services Authority to send its leaflet advising on how to claim compensation to all those families who have received amber or red letters?

Mr. Cook: All endowment mortgage holders should have been sent the FSA factsheet explaining the situation, and their right to complain and to take it forward if they are concerned. Indeed, I can confirm that the factsheet has been sent to a number of endowment mortgage holders because I received one myself.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Today, the Home Secretary is meeting 80 chief constables to talk about ways in which the performance of the police service can be improved. Will the Leader of the House invite the Home Secretary to make a statement on those matters in the light of the disturbing headline in the *Lancashire Evening Post* on Wednesday 11 July:

"Besieged police operators 'cannot cope' with 25,000 emergency calls each week."

The police admitted that they have do not enough staff to man the 999 call system. In the same article, the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is in the Chamber, states:

"Our area has been failed. The biggest complaints that people bring to me are that people can't get through to the police."

This is a scandalous situation and it needs to be probed. The Home Secretary should come to the Dispatch Box and answer for it.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that, come the autumn, there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss questions as to the competence of the judicial system and criminal procedures, because there will a number of pieces of legislation on those matters and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be at the Dispatch Box on a number of occasions.

In the meantime, I am pleased to tell the right hon. Gentleman and the House that he can take encouragement from the fact that in the past year, for the first time in a decade, which also embraces the period when his party was in office, we have seen a reversal of the decline in police numbers. Police numbers went up by 1,350 in the past year. I am even more pleased to tell the House that the number of people being attracted into training for the police has gone up by 75 per cent., so we can look forward to a much greater increase in future years, which will assist with the problems that he identifies.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Will my right hon. Friend consider holding an early debate on the wide implications of a recent Court of Appeal judgment? The court has decided that private trusts to which public tasks, such as care of the elderly and disabled, are transferred are not subject to the Human Rights Act 1998. Apparently, that is the case even though they are clearly carrying out functions hitherto undertaken by public authorities and are often subsidised by public funds. If there is to be a great increase in the use of private entities in public service delivery, will that not mean that our brand new, much-coveted human rights legislation will have less and less relevance to ordinary people?

Mr. Cook: I am not aware of the judgment to which my hon. Friend refers, but I will happily inquire into it and ensure that she receives a response. Plainly we take pride in the fact that we introduced the Human Rights Act for Britain—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Ghastly!

Mr. Cook: Obviously, not everyone agrees with us: in a sense, the hon. Gentleman's opposition fortifies me in the view that we were right to introduce the Act. We want to ensure that all citizens, whatever their condition and wherever they are, have proper and fair access to its remedies.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Will the right hon. Gentleman be kind enough to offer the House guidance about his views on Select Committees? Does he believe that they are a happy and convenient retirement place for sacked Ministers? Alternatively, does he believe that Select Committees perform a useful function in the

House? If so, has he remonstrated with his Whips about the removal of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)? If it is true that her removal was in order to get fresh blood into the Committees, does he recognise that there is more vitality running through the veins of the hon. Lady than many of the yes men and women with whom he seeks to replace her?

Mr. Cook: I would not seek to differ from the hon. Gentleman in his description of the vitality of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich. On his first point, I do not think that we should exclude the experience, energy and knowledge that those who have served in government can bring to the work of Select Committees. Indeed, I recall that when the hon. Gentleman's party was in government several of their former Cabinet Ministers also served on Select Committees. If I may so, I think that the then right hon. Member for Guildford, now Lord Howell of Guildford, performed well as the Chair of a Select Committee and served the House with distinction.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): May we have an early debate on the implications of the Government's devolution policies on the structure of government in Whitehall? Surely it is no longer justifiable for Scotland and Wales to continue to have Secretaries of State representing their interests in the Cabinet, given that they have their own Parliament and Assembly. Does not that further disadvantage the English regions, which do not yet have an assembly, let alone a Cabinet member, to represent their interests?

Mr. Cook: It is very important that the House and the Government should ensure that they have proper channels of communication to the devolved bodies. I have often found my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales to be of great value in ensuring that we work in partnership with the devolved organisations that represent the people of those two countries. I fully share my hon. Friend's concern to ensure that the north-east is fairly represented. That is why the Government have created the prospect of a regional assembly for the north-east and any other region that wishes to have one. That is the best way forward to ensure that the people of the north-east and other regions can have a direct say in who runs the local services that are directly relevant to them.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a ministerial statement or an early debate on the measures to prevent a repeat of last year's floods in Sussex? Is he aware that when the House returns in October a full year will have passed since those devastating floods, which affected Uckfield, Buxted and Hellingly in my constituency alone, and that there is growing dismay and despair that no work has been carried out to prevent their recurrence? May we have a statement to discover why so little money has been spent and why it has taken so long for anything to be done?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman a debate or a statement in the week that remains before the House adjourns for the recess, but I assure him that the Government will continue to function during the recess, that my right hon. and hon. Friends will continue to work and that I will ensure that they are aware of his concerns.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Will my right hon. Friend consider holding a regular debate, possibly yearly, on the work of delegations from the House to international bodies, which would allow them to report back to the House? I am a member of the delegation to the Council of Europe, which is not to be confused with the European Union. It is a completely separate organisation, with an important role as the parent body of the European convention on human rights. Our role on the delegation is multifaceted; we are ambassadors, diplomats and politicians, but most of all we are delegates from the House to that body, yet we never return here to report.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes an interesting and important point. I am well aware of the excellent work done by the Council of Europe. Since the collapse of the Berlin wall and the end of the cold war, the Council of Europe has played a very important part in encouraging and supporting the countries of central and eastern Europe into democracy and adopting the important principles of freedom and human rights, in all of which it can take a lot of credit. I shall reflect on what my hon. Friend says, but I am reluctant to make a commitment to hold further annual debates, which already reduce the flexibility of the House to carry out its important business of scrutinising the Government. However, there may be ways—for example, in Westminster Hall—in which we can allow those involved in the Council of Europe to report, and it is right that they should have an opportunity to do so.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The right hon. Gentleman will remember that last week the House voted by a margin of 289 to 33 to instruct the trustees of the parliamentary pension scheme—a statutory scheme—to extend bereavement benefits to unmarried couples, including same-sex couples: indeed, he supported that decision. Has he held any discussions with colleagues about how other public sector statutory pension schemes such as those for NHS staff and teachers, which do not offer those benefits, can be amended to ensure that those benefits are available? I think that he will recognise that less well-paid people will not understand how Members of Parliament and Ministers can vote for those rights for their bereaved partners, yet prevent those benefits from being made available to public servants in the teaching profession, the NHS and other professions.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman invited the House to vote for that measure, and I was very pleased to support him. He should not therefore now criticise those who supported him in that vote. I have not had an opportunity to pursue this point with the trustees, and the House will be aware that other issues that arise from last Thursday also engage me. However, I hope that the trustees will be able to reflect on the will of the House and develop the means by which it can become part of the Commons pension scheme. Once they have done that, it may be possible to learn lessons elsewhere, but the first step must be to interpret the decision that the House has taken and to put it into practice.

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the unfortunate consequences that flow from the

[Mr. Alan Hurst]

European Community's personal protective equipment directive? I raise the issue because my constituent, Mr. Lindsell, suffered a severe accident in 1979, as a result of which he has to wear specially adapted industrial boots. Hitherto, those boots were adapted in the local hospital for his particular needs, but since the directive came into force there has been some uncertainty about whether that is still lawful. I have been in correspondence with our right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health for more than a year but I have received no satisfactory response on this issue. Will my right hon. Friend agree to an early debate to consider this important question?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a constituency case that is of great importance to him and to his constituent. My hon. Friend should be congratulated on pressing vigorously and openly on the Floor of the House the claims of his constituent. I will happily draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and shall invite him to consider further the correspondence.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the appropriate Minister—the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), I believe—to come to the House to make a statement on the working of the emergency business rate relief scheme that resulted from the outbreak of foot and mouth? My area of Macclesfield is the only borough in Cheshire not to be eligible for the relief, which is causing great unhappiness and anger among retail businesses, hotels, pubs and other outlets that tourists and visitors normally frequent and patronise. Those businesses are in grave financial difficulties and it appears to be an anomaly and an injustice that an area that is 90 per cent. rural and agricultural and has a population density that meets the criteria should not be eligible for emergency business rate relief.

Mr. Cook: I know that my right hon. Friend continues to keep the working of the scheme under review. It has been in operation for only a few weeks, so it must be kept under review. I do not want to encourage the hon. Gentleman to imagine that a scheme that was devised to provide assistance to the countryside is one that we can readily apply to an urban area, even if it is surrounded by countryside. None the less, I shall happily draw his remarks to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be aware of yet another tragic and premature death. A woman in Scotland died from deep vein thrombosis after recently travelling on an aircraft. Given the growing public concern about the incidence of this condition and the apparent unwillingness of airline companies to carry out proper research into the matter, will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate in the House on the subject? We do not definitely know whether the condition affects just a handful of people or is of epidemic proportions, so does he now think that we should have a public inquiry into the matter?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue that concerns many air travellers. I am not immediately persuaded that a debate in the House would necessarily throw further light on the scientific issues involved. I welcome the fact that the airlines are now providing considered advice on how people can avoid deep vein thrombosis when flying. It is in the airlines' interests, as well as those of their passengers, that there is confidence in the use of the airlines.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): The right hon. Gentleman did not confirm that the Prime Minister will come to the House next week to make a statement on Northern Ireland. Given the gravity of the situation, does he not agree that despite the burdens on the Prime Minister's time it is right for him to make such a statement before the recess? Will he guarantee that his right hon. Friend will do that?

Mr. Cook: I have been very careful not to anticipate the outcome of the talks, which recommence tomorrow. I remind the hon. Gentleman that twice next week we will debate Northern Ireland orders and the Prime Minister will, of course, be answering questions in the House on Wednesday.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my right hon. Friend consider holding a debate on the introduction of free school meals for youngsters whose families receive the working families tax credit?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend proposes an extension of the working families tax credit, which has been a very successful scheme. For many low-paid households, it has provided an additional £20 to £30 a week. That has made a real difference to those families and the standard of living of their children. The policy is consistent with our commitment to lift another 1 million children out of poverty, as we did in the last Parliament. I would be much more comfortable with our continuing that strategy of lifting children out of poverty than reverting to means-tested benefits, which would keep them trapped in poverty. Let us work on our strategy to ensure that we end child poverty within a generation. That has to be right and it is one of the most important priorities for Britain.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions make a statement to the House next week on the Government's decision on the proposed development of a fifth terminal at Heathrow airport? Is he aware that with every week that passes its competitive advantage over gateways such as Charles de Gaulle and Schipol is being eroded? The Government have no excuse for procrastinating any longer.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): They should reject it, but they will not.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend helpfully makes it clear that there is more than one view on this matter, and I am grateful for that observation. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, it was a clear bid for a job.

My right hon. Friend has to proceed with care. He has a quasi-judicial capacity that is open to judicial review, so I would not want to press him to cut corners or act

hastily. He will certainly reach a considered and careful conclusion that reconciles the differing views as best it can.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): May we have an urgent debate before the recess on the public-private partnership that is being foisted on the London tube? It is not a proper partnership but the backdoor privatisation of chunks of the tube, which involves breaking up the network in a way that could be deeply dangerous to the travelling public, many of whom are my constituents. The Minister for Transport should come to the Dispatch Box before the recess and tell us what he is playing at.

Mr. Cook: The Government would very much wish to find a way to make progress as fast as possible. That is why we have asked London Underground to enter into negotiations with the bidders. I stress that the proposals will leave London Underground managing and running services. It will be responsible for safety and will manage an integrated service.

My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the Health and Safety Executive has a double lock on the safety of the proposals. First, it will report, probably by the end of the month, on the safety of the package; secondly, it will report, probably towards the end of the year, on the safety of each contract as it proceeds. I urge him to reassure his constituents that the safety issues are a priority for the Government and are fully safeguarded in the plans for the tube.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): One of the national crises that the Government are dealing with is that of foot and mouth. A week ago today we had our first case in Vale of York and we now have five. North Yorkshire, with 107 cases, is the third worst affected county. What assurance can the right hon. Gentleman give that the issues that we have raised with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be responded to before the recess? Will the problems that may arise should the epidemic escalate—it is clearly not under control—be brought to the attention of the Department and the Government during the recess?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the hon. Lady that during the recess she will have plenty of opportunities to raise the matter with Ministers.

Miss McIntosh: The House will not be sitting.

Mr. Cook: The House may not be sitting, but I can assure her that my colleagues at DEFRA will continue to work on foot and mouth through the recess, and I am sure that she will find ways to communicate with them, even though she will be unable to attend the Chamber.

The hon. Lady has a point when she says that we are not yet at the end of the outbreak. That is why we have continually stressed that it is important that everybody, including the farming community, take all possible steps to make sure that the biosecurity mechanisms are in place and are observed. We have made good progress. There are now half a dozen or fewer new cases a day, which is a big improvement on the 40 to 50 cases a day that were confirmed at the height of the epidemic.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My right hon. Friend will be all too aware that on Tuesday BAE Systems announced that 1,150 jobs will be lost on the Clyde and in Barrow. Scotstoun, the biggest yard on the Clyde, will bear the brunt of the losses. Will he call an urgent debate, not only on the Clyde but on shipbuilding in the country as a whole?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue for his constituents and the wider Scottish public. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement to the House earlier this week, which has increased the orders available to the yard and, in the longer term, should provide security of employment on the Clyde. We are disappointed about, and very much regret, the short-term situation in which there will be a number of lay-offs on the Clyde. I assure my hon. Friend that the Scottish Executive and the Employment Service are fully engaged in trying to find ways in which they can meet the needs of those facing redundancy.

I cannot offer my hon. Friend a debate before the House rises next week because of the pressure of business, but I assure him that Ministers, both here and in the Scottish Executive, are following the matter very carefully.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In the light of the concern among hon. Members on both sides of the House about Government interference in the appointment of Select Committee Chairmen, may I remind the Leader of the House about the scandal of the last Parliament in which the Liaison Committee report "Shifting the Balance" was never subject to a free vote in the House? Will he make time available now for the House to express its views, on a free vote, on that vital report?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I see the way forward as reverting to a vote on the document from the last Parliament, as the Liaison Committee itself may well have a different composition in this Parliament. *[Interruption.]* It is perfectly true, and unless we make it a rule of the House that the Chairmen of Select Committees never change, that is bound to follow. However, I have already indicated to the House that I want to revisit some of the issues in the Liaison Committee report. I look forward to consulting and working with the new members of the Committee, and I intend on Monday to include the Modernisation Committee in the Committees that we set up. Among the issues that the Modernisation Committee should address are some of the recommendations in "Shifting the Balance".

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): On that very point, on Monday we will agree the membership of the Select Committees for a full Parliament, and there is great disquiet among hon. Members on both sides of the House and in the Hansard Society about the way in which that will be done. Is there not a case for agreeing the membership of the Committees for, perhaps, 12 or 18 months, so that in the interim we could debate and vote on the second report of the Liaison Committee, "Unfinished Business", which was published in March but has never been debated or voted on? The way in which we appoint members of Select Committees is highly unsatisfactory. In the words of the Select Committee, the

"present system for nominating members of Select Committees must be changed",

so why do we not do so?

Mr. Cook: I have said to the House before, and I am happy to repeat it for what I think is the fourth time, that I am very willing to examine the process of appointment to Select Committees when we return in the autumn, when the Liaison Committee has been set up and when we have a Modernisation Committee to consult. However, I have also stressed to the House that to meet the genuine will of the House that the Select Committees be up and running before the summer recess, there is no alternative but to act under existing Standing Orders and procedures. Members on both sides of the House urged me to get the Select Committees in being before the recess, and we have delivered on that: the Committees have been set up faster than in any previous Parliament. I could not have done that and at the same time reformed the process.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Further to the highly pertinent inquiries of my hon. Friends the Members for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) and for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), I appeal to the Leader of the House to reconsider and to facilitate a full day's debate next week on the operation of Select Committees. Does the right hon. Gentleman not accept that such a debate would allow scores of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to testify to their belief that the contribution of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) has always been marked by intellectual rigour, devotion to the House and an unfailing readiness to stand up to the motley crew of third-raters who dominate the Government? Why does he not accept that?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must use temperate language.

Mr. Bercow: That was temperate language.

Mr. Speaker: It might be temperate by the hon. Gentleman's standards, but not by mine.

Mr. Cook: I was just going to say that by his standards the hon. Gentleman's mode of expression was very moderate.

For half a day in prime time on Monday the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to expatiate at length on the issues he raises. I understand that two and a half hours might not be long enough to exhaust his rhetoric, but it ought to be long enough for the House to have a considered debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on.

Points of Order

1.27 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Reference has been made in business questions to terminal 5, in which I have a direct constituency interest. Both the previous Speaker and you have made it clear to the Government that any announcements about major decisions should be made on the Floor of the House. Will you express your view that an announcement on such a major issue as this should be made on the Floor of the House rather than during the recess?

Mr. Speaker: My view is that at all times when Parliament is in Session Ministers should endeavour to get to the House to make statements. However, we are talking about a three-month recess and it would be unfair of me to say that no statement should be made by any Minister during the recess.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you take a look at the question of ministerial accountability in the context of answering for London Underground? I fear that, come the autumn, Ministers will not answer questions or appear at the Dispatch Box in respect of London Underground, but will say instead that the private infrastructure companies that they set up are responsible for maintenance, London Underground is responsible for operations and Transport for London is responsible for policy, yet their fingerprints will be all over—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to extend business questions.

Harry Cohen *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows how to take up such matters, even during a parliamentary recess.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The better regulation task force today issued a report condemning the role of the regulatory system, but that report is available in neither the Vote Office nor the Library. Will you look into the omission?

Mr. Speaker: I shall look into the matter.

Opposition Day

[1st Allotted Day]

Post-16 Education

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) to move the first motion, I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.29 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the importance of post-16 education in schools and colleges, in offering new opportunities to young people and in improving the nation's skills base and international competitiveness; regrets the hasty introduction of the new AS levels, which has resulted in organisational chaos for schools, a reduction in extra-curricular activities and had a severe effect on the lives of young people; considers that the interim response of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Government on this issue is inadequate; recognises the important role played by further education colleges in providing opportunities for young people and widening participation; deplores the current low pay, status and morale of further education lecturers; condemns the Government's failure to meet its targets for expansion of further education student numbers; and urges the Government to retain the financing of school sixth forms in the schools sector, address urgently the problems in the further education sector and reconsider the spectrum of qualifications post-14.

No one who in the past year has had any contact with students in year 12—the lower sixth form—in any of our schools or colleges, or with their parents or teachers, can be in any doubt about the impact of the introduction of AS-levels on those young people. There are increased work loads, more stress, fewer study periods and fewer extra-curricular activities. Those pupils have been guinea pigs throughout their school careers, and will continue to be so into year 13, with the new A2s. They deserve our thanks, and I offer my best wishes and support to all who have been sitting AS-level examinations this year.

It is important that we conduct the debate on the future of the AS-level in a way that does not leave the young people involved feeling that the qualifications that they have received are in any sense to be discounted. It is also vital that the Government, working with higher education institutions, ensure that the problems surrounding those examinations do not impact on the future academic opportunities and careers of those students.

AS-levels and key skills were introduced with the best of intentions: to broaden the curriculum offered to young people post-16. However, there was too little time for their introduction. Examinations boards complained that they did not have enough time to prepare the syllabus or materials; schools did not have enough time to prepare; timetabling was a nightmare.

Most schools did not receive any extra funding for AS-levels. The Government announced more money, but schools said that local education authorities did not pass it on. LEAs said that the Government had not given them any extra money. Without the clarity of a national funding formula, who knows? All that most schools know is that they did not receive any extra funding. At a time of teacher shortages, more teaching hours were needed. In addition, of course, we still do not know how universities will view AS-level results.

Far from broadening the experience of students at such an important time of development in their lives, the extra work load of the AS-level means that the very extra-curricular activities that used to provide breadth of experience, such as sports, drama, music and voluntary work, are being written out of school life in year 12 owing to lack of time.

At last week's Education questions, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), quoted some head teachers as saying that they agreed with the AS-level. The quotations were from that day's edition of *The Times*, but he quoted somewhat selectively. He failed to quote, for example, Elspeth Insch, head teacher of King Edward VI Handsworth school in Birmingham—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): A very good head teacher.

Mrs. May: As my hon. Friend says, she is a very good head teacher. She said:

"AS-level students have worked so hard they are shattered and have had little time for independent study, which is bad news . . . Exam papers were too variable in standards and exam time too short. It is yet another sign that the whole system is geared towards a mass dumbing-down."

Rick Moore, an English teacher at Manor Park community school in Nuneaton, said:

"AS levels put far too much pressure on a generation of schoolchildren who are already being examined to exhaustion."

It is not only teachers who complain. Kate Dyer, a 17-year-old pupil at Rosebury school in Epsom, said:

"I have taken four AS levels in design technology, art, maths and business and found the experience stressful and unnecessary. It has been a nightmare trying to cram the syllabus into four months so we could finish the course work by half time—in time to start the exams immediately afterwards."

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): Half term.

Mrs. May: Half term; I am grateful to the Secretary of State.

Kate Dyer continued:

"Since last year I have felt as if I have been running flat out on a treadmill."

Those were some of the quotations that the Under-Secretary did not cite in Education questions. He did refer to the entry in *The Times* of that day from Chris Henstock, the head teacher at Lutterworth upper school in Leicestershire. The Under-Secretary quoted him as saying:

"Fundamentally I think the curriculum changes are a good thing—I have seen a lot more of my pupils doing a greater variety of subjects."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 395.]

What the Under-Secretary did not say was that that head teacher went on to comment:

"But I do believe there are less positive knock-on effects. For example, the community involvement programme we used to run has suffered as a result of the extra workload."

If the Government are to treat young people fairly, they will have to recognise and address all those problems—far from being broadened, the curriculum for those young people is being narrowed—and not just the issues about which they, the Government, want to talk.

[Mrs. May]

There is no doubt that the Government's rush to get the reforms through is at the heart of all the problems. Young people, parents and teachers have suffered because the Government simply did not think things through or provide enough time for proper preparation. As John Dunford, general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, said:

"The introduction of the AS-level was a reform that we called for during the 1990s . . . Unfortunately, the implementation timetable has been rushed and this has left inadequate time for examination boards and schools to put the reforms in place".

The current problems are not an inevitable result of reforms to widen the variety of post-16 academic experience, but are the direct consequence of the over-hasty manner in which the Government rushed into reform. While we welcome the setting up of a review of the crisis, from the first interim report it appears that the Government have not learned the lessons of the past. Their response so far merely addresses one part of the problem.

We shall of course wait for the full Qualifications and Curriculum Authority report that will appear towards the end of the year, but I was concerned about the Secretary of State's attitude when she talked about the matter in her interview on the "Today" programme. Despite the fact that students interviewed before her said that the main problem facing them was the increased work load throughout the year, she insisted to John Humphrys that the key issue was the timetabling of exams.

We are used to a Government who are out of touch with what happens in schools and refuse to listen properly to what teachers and others are telling them. I had hoped for the sake of young people that this Secretary of State would be different; sadly, it seems she is not. It is vital that the Government do not regard the recommendations of the first report as a panacea for all the problems encountered in the new system; indeed, there may be further problems.

Yesterday, the Leader of the House said that he was not in a position to give a guarantee to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) that all AS-level results would be published as intended on 16 August. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), refused to answer the same question a week ago. With some estimates suggesting that exam boards are short of 1,000 exam markers, that is causing concern to parents and students. I hope that, in her response this afternoon, the Secretary of State will give the House a guarantee that all AS-level results will be published on 16 August. But we need to go further, as the question is not simply about how many exam papers the students should sit at one go, which is what the Government have addressed so far. The real question is whether the interim exam is needed or whether it is an exam too far.

For a long time, I have been a strong advocate of the gold standard of A-levels. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] So are some of my hon. Friends, from the sound of it. In a world where young people will be expected to be more flexible in their working lives, we need to look at whether further breadth is necessary. Whatever the exam structure, maintaining standards of academic excellence and rigour is important, and we should be able to point to those exams as a gold standard of such qualities. However, we must also look at how much breadth is necessary. Some may say that I have been on quite a journey in coming to that conclusion. We should nevertheless root principles of excellence and rigour in our examination system and recognise that we should not support a system simply because it has always been a certain way. We must be willing to adapt to the needs and requirements of today's world.

I hope that the Secretary of State is willing to initiate a proper national debate on our post-14 examination and qualification system, as we need to consider more than just AS-level exams. As well as AS-levels, we now have the new vocational GCSEs—GNVQs are now vocational A-levels—A2s, the new advanced extension awards or AEAs, world class tests, key skills and S-levels. A document provided by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service tries to explain the AS-levels. It explains that AS and A-levels will be graded and says:

"Once sufficient units have been completed to constitute a qualification . . . candidates will be provided with a qualification result and an opportunity to decline certification at that point . . . Candidates who have accepted an AS certificate can still resit AS units and the better result counts towards the full Advanced GCE, but in such circumstances candidates will not be issued with a new AS certificate. They can, however, resit all the AS assessment units, in which case a new AS certificate will be issued based only on their resits because the earlier AS assessment units are 'used up' for AS purposes by the act of the original AS certification."

When the Secretary of State replies, I hope that she will feel free to explain that.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) *rose—*

Mrs. May: Perhaps my hon. Friend is about to explain it.

Dr. Lewis: I cannot enlighten my hon. Friend on the difficulties either of the alphabet soup of examinations or of the quagmire of regulations that the Government are laying before the country.

I am slightly troubled by a remark that my hon. Friend made earlier, and perhaps she will expand on it for my benefit and that of the House. If we are saying that we have something as a gold standard for excellence, and if we are saying also that we nevertheless want other examinations at a different standard for breadth, what was wrong with the system that we had before any of the new examinations were introduced? Those who were not particularly likely to shine academically were trained up vocationally in apprenticeships, rather than gaining paper academic qualifications at a lower level than the gold standard, and were more qualified.

Mrs. May: I am happy to answer my hon. Friend. That is exactly the route down which we should be going; it is the very point that I was about to make. With all the present challenges, there is the danger that we end up with a pick-and-mix system of exam qualifications. There is a mish-mash of examinations, and no one knows what any exam qualification stands for or what the standard of the qualification is. AS-levels are in danger of falling between two stools. They are not providing breadth, and will possibly not provide the necessary academic rigour either.

For those who are academically inclined, a gold standard of academic rigour is essential. It is essential also that we have proper vocational skills-based training for

those for whom that is the right route through education. We need a proper review of qualifications post-14, so we can ensure that there is a structure that provides young people with qualifications that they and future employers understand, and in which they can have confidence. Merely tinkering at the edges, with AS-levels, will not do.

The problems with AS-levels are not the only issue in post-16 education. As a matter of urgency, the new Secretary of State must give some form of assurance to schools with sixth forms that their budgets and their very existence are not under threat. The Government claim to be guaranteeing funds to school sixth forms, but they have been careful with their words. In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), the Government made the following statement on school sixth-form funding:

"all school sixth forms have a guarantee that their funding will not fall below the funding level of 2000–01 in real terms, provided their sixth form numbers do not fall".—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 389W.]

What happens if numbers in 2002–03 are below those in 2001–02, but above those in 2000–01? We all know that sixth form numbers do not come in neat little packages. Numbers change over the years. That is not because of the inability of schools to attract sixth formers, but simply because the cohort coming through in any one year might be smaller than previous cohorts.

What will happen to schools if they lose a significant number of their students? On what basis will they then be funded? Schools are asking the Government what number of pupils the Secretary of State thinks a sixth form needs if it is to be viable. Numbers have been bandied around by the Department. I hope that the Secretary of State will be willing to put her neck on the line and tell us the number of pupils that she believes a sixth form should have if it is to be viable. If she does so, sixth forms will know whether they are under threat from the new process of closure set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

More pupils go on to further and higher education at schools with sixth forms. There is evidence that pupils attending schools with a sixth form do better in GCSEs than pupils at schools without sixth forms. We believe that the Government should be doing all that they can to support schools with sixth forms. They should recognise that school sixth forms are different institutions from further education colleges.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills said:

"I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's comparison between further education establishments and schools. In many ways, schools are different institutions with different problems."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 383.]

But the similarity between school sixth forms and further education colleges is the very premise that underpins the Government's new funding arrangements. The Minister's words during Education questions last week led to concern in FE colleges, which thought that the Government were working on a system of convergence of funding. The Secretary of State should clarify the position for them today. What exactly do the Government want? Are they committed to convergence of funding? If so, when will that be achieved? Sixth form colleges also want reassurance that their funding is not under threat.

Further education colleges deserve to know where they stand. They deserve support from the Government, not more uncertainty. Our FE sector is in dire straits, with a possible industrial dispute later this year arising from the real problems that lecturers have, given the low pay in FE. Indeed, a complaint that I often hear from FE college principals is that lecturers are leaving FE to achieve higher salaries in secondary schools. That speaks volumes.

One of the problems that FE colleges face is the way in which the Government choose to fund them. The Government claim that they have put more money into FE, but as the colleges point out, the bulk of that funding is not available to colleges to use as they wish. It is earmarked funding for Government-identified purposes. The real-terms index of participation funding—the core funding for FE colleges—having stood at 100 back in 1995-96 has now fallen to 91.

For earmarked funds, money is linked to meeting targets. Failure to meet any one of those targets means that none of the extra money comes through, so a college could meet a target for increasing numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds, but if it missed its target for increasing numbers in adult education, it would not get money for increased numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds either.

The colleges' problems do not stop there. Money has been allocated for the teachers' pay initiative to recognise the problems caused by the threshold payments in schools. The allocation was due to be received on 1 April. To date, no college has received any of that money. What will happen to TPI funding after year 3? Will it be consolidated? What about the support staff, who in most colleges make up 40 to 50 per cent. of the staff? Many colleges find that it is difficult not only to get lecturers, but to find support staff as well.

Colleges were concerned about the new structure of funding through the learning and skills councils, and the evidence shows how right they were. The Learning and Skills Council has still not settled the mainstream funding allocations for FE colleges for the next academic year, which starts in three weeks, so they face funding uncertainty and a real-terms cut in core student funding.

The Government make much of their target of expanding numbers in FE by 700,000 by 2002–03, but the number of students in FE has fallen by 189,000 under the Labour Government. Yet again, the Government are failing to deliver. The FE sector is an important part of our education system. It offers opportunities to young and old and it deserves to be treated better than it has been by the Government. Welcomed freedoms have been restricted; funding is more complex; training opportunities are being denied. A sector that should be a major part of any agenda to widen participation is under siege from the Government. It deserves to be treated fairly, as an integral part of our education system.

The Government have failed to deliver on post-16 education. They have plunged the exam system into chaos, failed to guarantee the future of school sixth forms, and presided over a staffing crisis, a crisis of morale and a fall in student numbers in further education. Far from widening participation and broadening opportunities post-16, Labour in government, with its utilitarian attitude to education, is reducing the opportunities for young people to benefit from a truly broad range of educational experience post-16.

We are in danger of seeing young people forced into an identikit mould of the Government's choosing. The Government will be judged in this term not just on the

[Mrs. May]

numbers, but on the provision of choice, the standards of qualification and the quality of education post-16. On the evidence of the past few weeks, they will be seen to have failed to deliver.

1.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'welcomes the Government's achievements in post-16 education which will drive up the nation's skills and extend opportunity for all; applauds the substantial extra resources secured for further education and the reforms through the Learning and Skills Council and rigorous inspection arrangements, which will radically improve standards and the guarantee to all sixth forms that their funding will be maintained in real terms if their pupil numbers do not fall; commends the broadening of the 16-19 curriculum which is widely supported and the timely and measured response of the Government to improve delivery in schools and colleges; welcomes the early success of the Connexions Service and of Education Maintenance Allowance pilots in encouraging more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay in full-time education after the age of 16, the extra resources secured for the university system and the expansion in the numbers of students in higher education; and endorses the strategy to reduce the number of adults lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills which will tackle a problem which has been neglected for far too long.'.

Although I welcome the opportunity for the House to debate post-16 education, I must admit to being a little disappointed by the narrowness of the approach taken by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). I thought that she might share with us her views about the 7 million adults who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, and about plans to deal with that problem. I thought also that she might at least express concern about the fact that, although we have one of the best higher education services in the world, access to it from some sectors of our community is just not good enough. However, we heard none of that and nothing about diversity of further education.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): It is worse.

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman says that it works. That means that he is satisfied.

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall give way in a moment.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead did not mention the fact that there are twice as many students from middle class backgrounds as from working class backgrounds in higher education. We have 7 million adults with no basic skills because the education system failed them in the past, as there was no planned way of improving their skills when they left school. We heard nothing from her about work-based skills and training, and the progress that can be made in that respect.

The hon. Lady made three clear points to which I shall confine my remarks, so that I can respond properly to the debate.

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I should like to make some progress on AS-levels, but if the hon. Gentleman has a point of correction, I shall give way.

Mr. Brady: The Secretary of State misheard my earlier remark. I said that the Government had made it worse, as they reduced access by taking grants away.

Estelle Morris: The last point is not true, but I suppose that I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for at least raising some concerns about children getting into higher education—a matter that was not mentioned by the hon. Member for Maidenhead.

Many of the hon. Lady's comments related to AS-levels. I am happy to say to the House what I said yesterday: this was not the best implemented set of curriculum reforms that has ever been introduced. She did not mention the tragedy of other major curriculum reforms that have not been well implemented. I cast my mind back to the national curriculum reforms of the 1970s and 1980s, when syllabuses were sent out to primary and secondary schools time after time. The schools bought books and trained teachers, but then had to start again. In the end, our good friend Lord Dearing was called in to try to make something out of the mess that the Conservative Government had created.

I do not make those comments with any sense of pride. If we look throughout the education service—I am prepared to reflect on this matter—there must be something wrong with the fact that each of the major curriculum changes introduced in the past quarter of a century has not got it right first time. That is a lesson to reflect upon. It is with sadness that I admit that the introduction of the AS-level reforms last year did not do credit to anybody who had responsibility for their implementation.

We must admit that fact and learn from it, but I want to go further. In arguing about implementation, it is the easiest thing in the world for the Opposition and opponents elsewhere to say, "You've got it wrong, so take responsibility; it is all no good." But, with respect, that achieves only the scoring of cheap political points. There is something fundamental that is more important. More than four years ago, in 1996, when the first look was taken at widening the post-16 curriculum, there was unanimity throughout our learning community on the view that our sixth-form curriculum was too narrow.

I stand by that view. I think that we let down our sixth-form students. I have not moved from my belief that it is important to acknowledge that a narrow curriculum of three A-levels is insufficient to prepare our students for the world that they must enter. It is not only the Government who are expressing that view; I think that general agreement remains on the need for a broader post-16 curriculum.

The saddest aspect of the hon. Lady's comments—I shall give way to her immediately if she was not saying this—was that, for the first time, she called into question the Opposition's support for a broader post-16 curriculum.

Whatever the inadequacies of implementation in the past year, I would welcome her support for the view that a narrow curriculum of three A-levels is not sufficient and that we are right to keep to the drawing board. That includes, from this September, a commitment to the broader curriculum.

Mrs. May: It is obvious from what the Secretary of State has just said that she did not listen to a word of my speech. I specifically referred to the issue of a broader curriculum. Having presided over the implementation of AS-levels, does she understand that students, as well as teachers, parents and the Opposition, say that the impact of AS-levels has been not to broaden the curriculum but to narrow it?

Estelle Morris: If we accept the need for a broader curriculum, we have two choices. Either we ask students to study more subjects in less depth or we accept that we are asking them to work harder. We asked them to work harder. The hon. Lady talked about the burden of work in the sixth form, and the fact that it had cut out a lot of extra-curricular activities. We want to keep the gold standard of the A-level. Everyone wants that: it is a good examination that gains credit with universities and employers and is respected throughout the world. If we are to broaden the post-16 curriculum while keeping the gold standard of the A-level, the bottom line is that we must ask students to study more, harder and across a greater breadth. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot broaden the curriculum and then turn round and say to students, "Hang on, you're working too hard."

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I want to make some progress.

Saying such things will not work. Last year, we told sixth-form students that we thought that they could cope with more studying and a broader curriculum in the first and second years of the sixth form.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Estelle Morris: I want to finish this point. Things went wrong because the assessment was organised in such a way that it disrupted the flow of learning and teaching.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead mentioned my interview on the "Today" programme yesterday. I want to make two points. I think that the burden of assessment was too great. I also think that when assessment is too frequent during the school year, with the best will in the world, students stop studying and start to prepare for revision, and once they have had their assessment, they go over the papers again. The biggest complaint that I heard was not that students did not want to do more subjects, nor that they did not want a broad curriculum, nor that they did not accept that they could spend more time studying in the first year sixth, but that the flow of teaching and learning was interrupted by too frequent assessments.

Our proposals, which will come in two stages, will show that we have addressed that problem. We want to make progress from this September because we want to ensure that students who are studying from next year have another option. Believe it or not, many students wanted to keep the end-of-module assessment and the January assessment but, for those who did not, there need be no reason to take assessments on any of their modules before the end of the first year sixth. Many schools chose that option last year, and many could have left their assessments until the end of the second year sixth—if, as I have to admit, the guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and others had been clearer.

The hon. Lady also asked about the interviews. Some students and teachers have said that the problem was not only the assessment but the prescription in the syllabuses, and that there was just too much to cover in the courses. I think that they are right about that in some subjects. Having spoken to David Hargreaves, the chief executive of the QCA, I understand that his impression, following his first review, was that that was the case in two subjects; the one that was cited to me was mathematics.

It would have been foolhardy, after asking the QCA to look at the matter for three weeks, to say yesterday, "I announce that we are going to slim down all the programmes of study." The evidence from the three-week review did not suggest that that should be the case. I am happy to give the hon. Lady the acknowledgement that she asked for today. If she had read the report that was issued yesterday, and the Government's response to it, she would have seen that we have asked the QCA to look at the subjects slowly so that we do not rush things and have implementation next year as inadequate as it was this year. We have asked the authority to take its time and report in due course on whether some of the subjects were over-prescriptive. I acknowledge that some were, but it is not my instinct that every AS-level subject asks too much of students. We cannot say on the one hand that we are dumbing down and that we have lowered standards, and on the other that we have asked too much of students. Many mixed messages are being conveyed.

Let me outline several important principles. The broader curriculum is necessary. It is not too much to ask of our sixth formers that they study more than three A-levels; it is important that they do. It is also important to keep the gold standard and the rigour. We have not done that properly this year, but we will improve next year. By the year after that, we will have totally revamped the assessment system. I am happy to state in the House, as I did in writing yesterday, that some study programmes that have been announced for syllabuses need reconsidering. However, although that applies to mathematics and one or two other subjects, it is not true of all subjects.

Mr. Bercow: The recognition of error is welcome but belated. What does the Secretary of State say to my young constituent at Aylesbury high school, Emma Clark, who wrote to me on 12 June to say that the Government's handling of AS-levels was "a complete mess", and that the timing of the announcement of the review was "particularly insensitive"? She strongly objected to being sacrificed on the altar of political experimentation. In response to that hard-working and intelligent student, will the right hon. Lady personally apologise?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman doth protest too much. Again, I say that the implementation of AS-levels was not as good as it should have been. How many times

[Estelle Morris]

must I say that? If the young lady to whom he referred is 17, she was educated mostly under a Tory Government. If 17-year-olds have been guinea pigs since the age of five, I know who carried out most experimentation. It was not us.

I do not believe that students who have just done their AS-levels have wasted their time to gain a worthless qualification that will not be respected by higher education and the outside world. I share that view with the hon. Member for Maidenhead, who began her speech well by congratulating and thanking those students. She said that the important message to them was that their studies in the past year were worth while and will be credited. I admit that I wish for Emma, as for the others, that life and the assessment had been easier in the past year. However, I always wish that policies could be implemented perfectly first time round. When we realised that the implementation was not perfect, we took action as speedily as possible.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) first. Then I must move on because there is a danger of the debate becoming a discussion about AS-levels.

Neither Conservative nor Labour Administrations should be satisfied with the history of curriculum implementation. I have therefore asked the QCA to consider the matter and ensure that we understand why the information was unclear, and not sent out in a timely fashion. The examination timetables were not organised to avoid clashes and schools did not have sample texts or examination papers in sufficient time. That was possible but did not happen.

We have conveyed a clear message about what will happen in schools in September and beyond. We have to consider matters slowly and calmly and ensure that our education service is better able to implement curriculum change.

Diana Organ: What would my right hon. Friend say to further education lecturers and teachers in my constituency whom I met two terms after the introduction of the AS-level? They said that it was excellent, created good study habits and allowed students to progress to the gold standard of A2 because, in the important first two terms, the students were busy. They claimed that it did not have a detrimental effect on the retention rates of children in year 12.

Estelle Morris: I am delighted to hear what my hon. Friend's constituents said. When there is a problem, the people who write in or complain tend to be those with an axe to grind. The irony of this brief consultation is that I received lots of heartfelt letters from educationists, students and parents who wanted to keep the thrust of the reforms. Equally, we received lots of letters from people who were unhappy with the implementation.

The important point is that a lot of people out there think that the curriculum reforms have achieved a welcome widening of the curriculum, a greater retention rate and greater motivation; we do not want to lose that. Indeed, although I have mentioned the problems of end-of-module assessment, I also have a file of letters welcoming the ability to assess at the end of the module, because it motivates students. Some students need that recognition. They need to know how they stand at the end of the module, so that they can make an assessment and move forward. I do not want to take away from that and there is a real danger in the debate that we will lose sight of the problem that we want to address.

Perhaps I am the one to say this in the House: someone who studies for A-levels but fails at the end of two years leaves school with no piece of paper or qualification to show for it. That happened to me. I did two years' study in the sixth form, but I did not manage to pass the end of term exam. Somewhere along the line, I probably did quite well in an essay or two, but I have no qualification or bit of paper that tells me that. The challenge that we face is to recognise that cohort of students and to ensure that their needs can be met as well. That, honestly, is what we have tried to do.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) *rose—*

Mr. McLoughlin *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I must make a last point, then I shall move on and say more about post-16 education.

We have tried to provide flexibility, but the problem involves teachers, because they are hard working and always try to do their best for students. The real difficulty with the first year was that what was set out was a series of options: exams could be set in January, but need not; end-of-module exams could be taken, but need not. Too many teachers got the message that they would let down their students if they did not do every option. That is our fault for not being clear enough and for not giving teachers the confidence to read the regulations and guidance and choose the course most appropriate for their students. I have confidence that the guidance that we shall publish by September will give teachers that confidence.

Mrs. Anne Campbell *rose—*

Mr. McLoughlin *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), but I give notice that I shall not give way again for a good few minutes.

Mrs. Campbell: I want my right hon. Friend to deal clearly with the point, which was apparently made in *The Times*, that the Government are about to eliminate the January examinations. Concern has been expressed to me by one of my local sixth form colleges that that would disadvantage students who might want to resit in January. What are her plans?

Estelle Morris: We want the January examination to remain available, so there will still be the option of doing the January assessments. We want a diverse and flexible system that allows teachers and students to make decisions that suit them. I have to tell my hon. Friend that the thrust of the comments is that the January assessment came too early and that students had not settled down to sixth-form learning. Today, I have tried to send the

message that the January assessment will remain an option, but to return to the point that I have just made, we would not usually expect students to have to be assessed until the end of the first year sixth. That strikes a balance of the comments that were made.

I want to give the teaching profession and those aged between 16 and 19 the confidence to study the assessment options that we have given them and to make decisions in the light of their needs, knowing that those decisions will be recognised. Nobody will say that students are doing wrong if they do not take January assessments. Nobody will fault them for taking end-of-module assessments. Nobody will criticise them for leaving the assessments to the end of the two years, as some schools did. The irony is that those options were always available this year, but we did not get it right and we did not press that message sufficiently.

From the debate so far, people might think that all post-16 learning takes place in colleges and schools and that it is all about AS-level.

Mr. McLoughlin *rose—*

Estelle Morris: No, no. In the remaining few minutes, I want to acknowledge other learning, other places of learning and flexible routes in post-16 education.

We have talked a lot about the gold standard of A-level and the broader curriculum. Some students, including adults, do vocational work. I feel that we as a nation have never given vocational studies the esteem and recognition that they need. The Government have made a huge improvement in expanding modern apprenticeships, and giving them the status that they deserve. For the first time, students have a real opportunity to gain vocational GSCEs. That will feed into modern apprenticeships, vocational A-levels and a more flexible and all-embracing higher education sector that recognises vocational degree-level courses.

If we can get this right—if, in years to come, we can stand up in the House and be as proud of the vocational gold standard as we are, rightly, of the academic gold standard—we will have gone some way towards being able to lay claim to an education system that teaches the basics well in primary schools, gives all our young people access to a broad and rich curriculum, and has the confidence to tell 14-year-olds, "We now want to tailor what we provide so it can meet the needs of you as individuals, which will offer you the opportunity to study in academic groups, vocational groups or both. Whichever option you choose will be given status and recognition, and you should be proud of your achievements, in whatever field they are made."

We will go further. We will be able to tell those 14-year-olds that, regardless of which route they take, their learning will end not at 16 but at 19—and that, in a sense, it will continue throughout their lives. It will take place not just in schools but in high quality further education institutions, and in the best higher education universities that the world can offer. As for those who do not want to learn in any such institution, preferring to go to work or stay at home, we will give them the opportunities that they require.

Only if we can offer that commitment will we have gone some way towards ensuring that we have the learning community and learning culture that we want, and that we have put learning at the centre of all that we do.

2.12 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): We are grateful to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and her colleagues for raising this issue. I am usually not particularly generous to the hon. Lady, but I thought her speech struck many of the right notes. We have not tabled an amendment to the motion, because we think that many of the messages it conveys need to be debated and need a response.

The hon. Lady will, however, not be surprised to learn that although many of her comments returned to familiar territory, I was surprised that her party had chosen to debate this matter. The debate may, of course, serve as a distraction from the Tory leadership contest—dubbed rather generously by yesterday's *Mirror* "the flight of the living dead"—or it may arise from a sense of guilt, and the acceptance of a chance to atone for past sins. If I may misquote Monty Python's "Life of Brian": after all, what did the Conservatives ever do for further education? The answer is "Very little".

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I want to make some progress first.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead said twice that she considered further education to be an integral part of our education system, yet the Conservative party manifesto, which is only a month old, made no mention of it. The lack of any policy on FE meant that the 676,000 under-19s studying in FE colleges were totally ignored. Moreover, the manifesto featured no policy on adult learners, thus effectively ignoring 1.9 million such learners in those colleges. It is, in a way, quite a tribute to the Tories that they have managed to write off the 2.6 million learners supported by FE provision, and then criticise the Government for their lack of progress.

Mr. Boswell: Now that the hon. Gentleman has finished his little soundbite, may I respond to his earlier rhetorical question? Will he reflect on the fact that the Conservative contribution to the expansion of FE, historically, was to increase student numbers by 3 million to 4 million? Had he been able to attend sittings of the Standing Committee considering the Learning and Skills Bill last year as assiduously as I did, he would have heard in some detail exactly what our concerns about further education were, and exactly what we proposed.

Mr. Willis: If any of my remarks hit home on the Conservative Benches, they were not directed at the hon. Gentleman, whose record as a speaker on behalf of further education is impeccable. It is a great pity that the Conservatives did not consult him when they were writing their manifesto.

May I finish my explanation? The manifesto does not mention the 250,000 college lecturers and the 200,000 support staff, either. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) requires a response to my question about what the Conservatives ever did for further education, and he is right: there were an extra 1 million students between the time of incorporation and the beginning of the Labour Government.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): What really happened, surely, was that there were 1 million extra

[Mr. David Chaytor]

enrolments, resulting entirely from changes in the funding methodology that increased the likelihood of individual students being enrolled for multiples of different courses. We are not talking about real people; we are talking about a change in the funding methodology.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman is right. Indeed, he has stolen the next part of my speech. Enrolments rose by some 33 per cent. during those years, but that did not equate to any increase in the number of full-time equivalent students. The figures often bandied about by Conservative Front Benchers are highly misleading.

I return to my question about what the Conservatives did for further education. During the period of that 33 per cent. increase, funding for full-time equivalent students fell by 35 per cent., and 20,000 FE lecturers were effectively driven out. Today, however, we are hearing a defence that tells us that we must protect sixth-form funding in the traditional sense, but that it was perfectly all right to subject the whole FE student population to the regime introduced by the hon. Member for Daventry and now supported by the Conservative Front Bench.

In considering FE issues we should look back to 1993 and incorporation, for most of the problems result from those days. I am thinking of indebtedness, a lack of capital investment, failure to invest in staff, pay differentials, "casualisation", franchising, over-complication of funding arrangements and a lack of strategic direction. Those problems typified further and post-16 education from 1993 onwards.

A Labour Government came along in 1997 and instantly recognised the problems with post-16 learning. We saw the wonderful book "Learning Works" by Lady Kennedy, and also "The Learning Age—A Renaissance", which promised a new understanding and a new beginning. We saw the national skills taskforce reports and the Moser report, which highlighted unacceptable levels of skills, and in particular, unacceptable levels of adult numeracy and literacy. Sadly, however, there was no real response to any of those problems, only a structural reorganisation, with the creation of learning and skills councils. That was the net result after four years of the first Labour Government for some time.

The Secretary of State's predecessor acquired a £6 billion central fund enabling him and his successors to do what they wanted in the FE sector. The Government introduced unprecedented levels of bureaucracy. Any FE college today will say that the arrangements involving the new Learning and Skills Council are horrendous because of the bureaucracy. We must look into that.

We now have new inspection regimes. The first area inspections are just coming through, led by Ofsted which is clearly following the traditional Woodheadian pattern of highlighting the issues that the Government want raised. Not surprisingly, more colleges have failed those inspections since Ofsted came along. We must ask why. During the past four years, student-staff ratios have been unacceptable; they are now far higher than those to be found in the 14 to 16 sector in schools, and certainly higher than those in any sixth form. Again, that is unacceptable.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead was spot on when she described how over the past few years college funding has been disguised. The previous Secretary of State made it clear that there has been an increase in funding from £3.13 billion in 1997 to £4.29 billion this year. We accept those figures; they are on the record. But starting from the level six years ago in 1995, that is pro rata funding. Despite the hype, and four years of a Labour Government, all that has been achieved is a return to 1995 levels of funding.

If the special grants are stripped away—they are earmarked by the Secretary of State—

Estelle Morris: That is real money.

Mr. Willis: Of course it is real money. I am not contradicting that. I have already admitted that to the Secretary of State, who is grumbling from a sedentary position. I am never dishonest with her, as she knows.

Mr. Boswell: I suspect that it is my turn to agree with the hon. Gentleman for once. Does he accept that no responsible further education corporation can shell out pay increases on the basis of special grants that are subject to conditions that may vary from year to year, as opposed to an assured stream of core funding?

Mr. Willis: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but that is no different from what has happened under previous Labour and Conservative regimes, certainly since 1988. I will return to that specific point because it does need to be addressed. The ministerial team must put on the record their response to the appalling accusations in last night's debate and during Education questions last week.

The real problem for colleges is that the level of core funding for addressing the issues that need to be addressed is decreasing. It is now 5 per cent. lower than when Labour came to power in 1997, and 10 per cent. below the magical 1995 figure. Although 96 colleges were facing bankruptcy in 1997, and one in three colleges has serious financial difficulties, colleges are having to bid for money. The money is targeted directly, and colleges cannot spend it as they want. Lecturers believe that a flood of money is coming into the colleges, and ask why it is not reflected in their pay scales. The colleges, the principals and the lecturers all feel let down.

We accept that there is no way to satisfy the funding demands of any sector in education. Even if we Liberal Democrats were in power, we could not do that—but we would have a better stab at it because we recognise some of the problems. Given the growth rate of the Liberal Democrat party and the support for us in the country, it will not be long before we are sitting on the Government Benches.

It is not surprising that in the first few weeks of a Labour Government there should be problems with the teacher unions over pay. Neither my party nor any political party should be involved in direct negotiations or in supporting strike action or any other action. Such matters are between employers and employees. Problems with the unions over funding in the post-16 sector were inevitable. We cannot have, on the one hand, the Government targeting funding, some of which cannot be spent on staff pay, and constantly looking for further efficiency savings, and on the other hand, college principals being allowed to negotiate openly on staff pay.

Lecturers have delivered huge increases in productivity. Despite the appalling comments of the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for

Wentworth (John Healey) at Question Time last week about the quality of the courses and lecturers in the colleges, I believe that they are doing a substantial job in difficult circumstances. The lecturers' fight is not with the college principals; it is with the Government. The Government have created a funding system under which the colleges cannot meet the demands of their staff.

It is all very well for Ministers to talk about professionalism and increasing skills and levels of participation. Those of us who have had any involvement in FE know full well that the most difficult group of young people to bring into college are those with no qualifications. They demand far more attention and time from staff, and far more resources. Yet they are the very group that is so grossly underfunded.

How can the Secretary of State justify the 29 per cent. funding gap between a sixth form college delivering a three A-level package and a school sixth form? How can that be justified? Can she explain why a package of four AS-levels plus two A-levels in a school attracts average funding of £3,530 while exactly the same package in an FE college attracts £3,030—a difference of 14 per cent.? Is it any wonder that college lecturers are underpaid and under-resourced?

I agree with the hon. Member for Maidenhead that we must not allow the introduction of learning and skills councils to lead to the underfunding of our sixth forms, as we all worried that it would during the passage of the Bill. We were promised a levelling-up, but exactly the opposite has occurred.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) handed me a letter this morning from her local sixth form college, Barton Peveril, which illustrates exactly what that means on the ground. It is a relatively small college with a relatively small budget, and because of the funding arrangements, it is £1.6 million less well off than a similar sized school. That is unacceptable, and when the Minister responds later, I hope that she will address that specific issue.

Finally, I shall touch on two further issues. The Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Maidenhead had a protracted debate over the AS-level debacle. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and comment on that. The Secretary of State admitted that mistakes had been made. That is an honourable position, and we, and most schools, will thank her for that admission. However, that was not what concerned me most. Having made mistakes—having considered the 16 to 19 age group in isolation from the 14 to 19 age group—does the right hon. Lady not agree that if we are to take up the challenge issued by the hon. Member for Maidenhead we need a comprehensive overhaul of the whole of that curriculum and qualifications structure? To tinker around with the post-16 sector without considering the rest is ridiculous. Back in the 1990s, Lord Dearing made a clear commitment to movement on that front.

Surely the idea that there can be a review, but that we will retain the "gold standard" for A-levels irrespective of what comes up in it, must give the right hon. Lady cause for reflection. That would rule out the introduction of the baccalaureate as an alternative. It rules out the whole idea of considering a more appropriate way of delivering vocational education in schools and colleges.

Mrs. May: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the sad things about the Secretary of State's response was that she completely failed to listen to my point about the need for a proper national debate on post-14 qualifications? A range of qualifications is available. We need to consider what is right for young people. This is not merely about tinkering around with the number of exams taken at AS-level.

Mr. Willis: I confess that I agree with the hon. Lady—and I have made the same point. However, I hope that she agrees that we cannot say that we will reconsider the curriculum and qualifications for everyone apart from the relatively small group of students who do A-levels. The Secretary of State and I know that every year 10 per cent. of young people leave school with no qualifications—they simply drop out. Indeed, most of them have dropped out well before they get to the end of year 11. That is the reality.

How do we keep those young people in the system? How do we create a curriculum and qualifications structure that not only brings them into schools but into colleges and onwards? That is why we must have a radical overhaul. If the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Government can actually agree on that, this debate will be momentous in relation to the next four or five years.

Mr. Bercow: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although there is undoubtedly a case for considering a broadening of the post-16 curriculum, it is essential that we at no stage devalue the academic content of what is undertaken simply to achieve the Government's politically correct totem of 50 per cent. participation in higher education?

Mr. Willis: That is an insulting intervention from such an ostensibly intelligent Member—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ostensibly?"] I use my words advisedly. Nothing has been said during this debate from any Bench that suggests that we want to undermine academic excellence. That is not the case—*[Interruption.]* It is certainly not what we want. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the baccalaureate is used in some countries, in some areas or in the private sector as a route to academic excellence and broadening, I should like to explore that in this debate—*[Interruption.]* I should like to respond to the hon. Gentleman, if he will stop shouting at me.

Mr. Bercow: I am not shouting.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman is speaking rather loudly from a sedentary position.

We also need to consider that army of youngsters who achieve nothing and gain nothing from the system. We must not think in terms of an exclusive either/or decision.

One of the greatest omissions from the Learning and Skills Act 2000 was that it completely ignored higher education. If there is to be a genuine continuum of lifelong learning, higher education must be part of it. Last week the Minister for Lifelong Learning—who is deep in conversation at the moment—said that she was prepared to examine the relationship between FE and HE and between the Learning and Skills Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Our party is on record as saying that we want the Learning and Skills Council and the HEFCE to be combined, except for

[Mr. Willis]

research fund moneys. It is important that we do not create a new 14 to 19 structure and then find that there is a barrier when people try to move between the FE and HE structures.

I hope that the Minister will agree that we are trying to make progress by holding this debate, rather than merely picking a fight with the Government.

2.35 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome the Opposition's choice of this subject for debate, but it is especially surprising given that, as the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) pointed out, the Conservative manifesto made no reference to a policy on post-16 education. During their past four years in opposition, the Conservatives put little emphasis on the subject. Furthermore, their record during their last four years in office was dire.

I associate myself with some of the hon. Gentleman's critique of the period between 1993 and 1997, although given that his criticism of the Tory record was so strong I am disappointed that the Liberal Democrats did not feel able to table their own amendment to the Tory amendment. Unfortunately, they seem to agree with the substance of the Tory amendment.

Between 1993 and 1997, following the incorporation of further education colleges, funding for the post-16 sector was squeezed, year on year, in a way that it never had been in any UK public service during any four-year period. The result was tremendous staff demoralisation and an enormous exodus of further education lecturers from the profession. There was a huge rundown of the staffing base, leading to the recruitment of a large number of part-time, temporary contract staff, with inevitable instability and uncertainty for the institutions.

There was a continual struggle with a funding methodology that was more arcane and complex than any that had been used for any UK public service. The management of colleges throughout the country struggled day to day as they grappled with that funding methodology in a constant effort to beat the system.

I hark back to the oft-cited fact that 1 million extra students were recruited during that period of Tory Government. In fact, the figure was entirely the result of creative accounting. The real number of students fell as the system started to fall apart. The impact of competition between colleges led to greater confusion about what was on offer. The numbers were maintained on a wholly notional basis. I speak with some feeling on that point, because before I became a Member one of my jobs was to beat the system in exactly that way.

During that period, we saw the introduction of a pseudo-enterprise culture in the post-16 sector. Sadly, as the years passed, some of the Conservatives' heroes of that enterprise culture finished up running pubs in north Wales with their girlfriends rather than the colleges they should have been running. Some of them are still fugitives from justice. Others ended up in jail—if they did not end up there, they should have done. The record of the last Conservative Government is dire. Many of the problems currently facing the sector are entirely attributable to that period.

It was depressing that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) concentrated most of her remarks on AS-levels and on schools. She made passing reference to further education colleges and sixth form colleges, but made no reference to adult training. There was no reference to young people who leave school with no qualifications. There was minimal reference to students who continue along the vocational route.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that head teachers, parents and sixth formers are greatly concerned that the Government's approach to post-16 education ignores our sixth forms and treats them as second-class citizens and that the Government are much more interested in colleges and other aspects of post-16 education? Would it not be appropriate for the Government to send a signal to our sixth forms, which deliver so much quality, that they do matter?

Mr. Chaytor: I am very aware that the vast majority of 16 to 19-year-old students are taught in colleges, not in sixth forms. The overwhelming majority of post-16 students are taught neither in sixth-form colleges nor in sixth forms, but in general further education colleges or tertiary colleges, or they study outside the institutional framework. We have to set the importance of sixth forms in that context, and I shall return to them later in my remarks.

In contrast with what happened between 1993 and 1997, the Government have recognised the importance of post-16 and lifelong learning in the past four years. That recognition has been supported by remarkable new investment in the sector, by record new numbers of students—I am talking about real bodies, not the creative accounting of students entering the sector—and by the widening of participation and the extension of educational opportunity to different social groups.

Mrs. May: I am somewhat surprised by the hon. Gentleman's claims of record increases in student numbers in further education. In fact, the number of students has fallen by 189,000 under this Labour Government.

Mr. Chaytor: I remind the hon. Lady that we are debating post-16 education, not simply that for 16 to 19-year-olds. I include the number of students who are 19-plus, and I am talking about the increases in higher education and in the number of students who stay on beyond 16, which is higher than ever before.

Mrs. May: I am happy to inform the hon. Gentleman that there has been a net fall of 110,000 in the total number of students in further education and in higher education.

Mr. Chaytor: We could spend all afternoon trading statistics. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to do so, but all I can say is that in the past four years more young people have remained in education than ever before, partly because we are now moving forward to a much broader definition of what constitutes post-16 education. We are no longer hung up on the sixth form or the A-level as the only significant post-16 qualification. We are continuing towards the Government's target of getting almost 50 per cent. of

18-year-olds into higher education by 2010. Such a continuous extension of educational opportunity was simply unthinkable during the Tory years.

I do not want to reinforce the obsession with AS-levels. Although it is clear that there have been difficulties with implementation and serious questions remain for the QCA and the examining boards, that is not the most serious issue in post-16 education today. Nevertheless, I welcome the fact that a consensus appears to be emerging that AS-levels alone are not the issue and that the more profound issue is the importance of a coherent curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds. I look forward to the Government doing more work on that as the months pass, so that we can quickly have such a curriculum, which exists in many other European countries whose levels of achievement and participation are far higher than ours.

I cannot be the only Member in the Chamber who has a 17-year-old son who has spent the past 12 months studying the first year of curriculum 2000. I have been able to observe at first hand the differences between his experience and that of my daughter, who studied traditional A-levels two years ago. Frankly, I observe comparatively little difference in the work load, although I accept that the frequency of assessment is a problem and that the concept and implementation of the key skills programme has been almost an unmitigated disaster—a point that the hon. Member for Maidenhead did not mention at all. The QCA's interim report contained serious criticisms of the key skills programme, and there is a need for urgent reform, preferably for year 2 of curriculum 2000. I will pass on to my son the hon. Lady's generous remarks to all those students following curriculum 2000 this year, and I am sure that he will be very grateful for them.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The hon. Gentleman's experience is totally different from mine if he thinks that no more work has been involved, and I have a child in the age group that he mentions. Did he not notice that the Secretary of State made it absolutely clear that the expectation was that the students would be involved in a lot more work? If the hon. Gentleman's son or daughter has not experienced that, they are not experiencing what the Secretary of State expected.

Mr. Chaytor: We could spend all afternoon trading individual experiences. I could cite my visit to the two excellent colleges in my constituency. In the past few months, I have spent a considerable amount of time talking to students, especially those at the Holy Cross sixth form college. Without exception, their response to the first year of curriculum 2000 was, first, that they welcomed its greater breadth. Secondly, they found that it involved a large amount of work but that, by and large, they were coping and they would have the opportunity to drop a subject in the second year. Thirdly, the major problem was the teaching and the concept of key skills, which they recognised as unsatisfactory. Fourthly, they approved of the continuous assessment, but they wanted it to be perhaps less frequent. They approved of assessment throughout the year, rather than being solely dependent on one form of assessment at the end of a two-year programme. I think that that is enough trading of individual experiences.

On sixth forms and differential funding, it is completely unacceptable that we continue with such a gap. The precise gap is disputed, but it is indisputable that a gap exists between the per capita funding for students taking A-levels in sixth forms or in sixth-form colleges and those taking them in tertiary colleges or general further education colleges. That is indefensible. I welcome the fact that the Government have recognised that and that they have given a commitment that the differential will be closed over time, by levelling up the college sector.

I ask the Minister to refer in her winding-up speech to the fact that uncertainty remains about the Government's response to the consultation on sixth-form funding, which, I think, closed in March. It would be helpful if she could say when the Government will respond to that consultation document. It would be helpful if the Government could give some information on the method by which the standard spending assessment will be top sliced and redistributed to the Learning and Skills Council, so that we know exactly what the funding will be.

Having said that, the Opposition have done young people and their parents no service at all by continuing their obsession with sixth forms. Their thinking is mistaken. They would establish the A-level as a gold standard, regardless of the nature, the quality, the size and the location of the sixth form, or its curriculum provision. That is a classic example of an issue in which the standards and structures dilemma needs to be pursued. The real issue about post-16 education is not that sixth forms are good and colleges are bad; nor that all college provision is good and all sixth form provision is bad: what matters are the standards and the level of achievement, not the structures.

I want to remind the House of the figures that relate to the size of sixth forms in the United Kingdom by putting on record a parliamentary answer of 24 May 2000. We were told that, of the 1,834 sixth forms in England, 115 had 50 or fewer pupils; 319 of them had between 51 and 100 pupils; and 409 of them had 101 to 150 pupils.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead asked the Government to give an indication of the minimum viable size of sixth form, but I do not think that any Government would do that. However, in the mid-1980s, Her Majesty's inspectorate issued a document that spelled out fairly specifically what the minimum viable size for a sixth form would be for it to be able to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum under the old A-level system. My recollection was that it was about 150 pupils.

The figures that I was given in the written answer show that almost 45 per cent. of sixth forms in England have 150 pupils or fewer. If we are moving towards a baccalaureate system—regardless of whether it is a full baccalaureate system or whether we stay with curriculum 2000—I wonder whether smaller sixth forms can adequately provide the breadth and balance of the curriculum and richness of experience without plundering the budgets for years 7 to 11 in those schools.

I also received an answer to a written question on 13 June 2000 and it analysed the A-level points score according to the size of sixth form. It showed that schools with 50 or fewer pupils obtained an average A-level points score of 7.4; schools with 51 to 100 pupils obtained a score of 9.4; those with 101 to 150 pupils obtained 11.9; those with 151 to 200 pupils obtained 14.6; those with 201 to 250 pupils obtained 15.7; and those with more than 250 pupils obtained 15.8.

[Mr. Chaytor]

As the average A-level points score for the whole country is 15.3, we might be able to draw two important lessons from those figures. The first is that achievement at A-level is directly proportionate to size of sixth form. Secondly, only two categories of sixth forms—those with 201 to 250 or with more than 250 pupils—actually achieve an A-level points score greater than the national average.

I do not instantly draw such conclusions, but it is important information and we need to debate it. We must get away from our hang-ups about the importance of structures and institutions and must consider levels of achievement across the country. Even though I accept that A-level point scores are not the only criterion by which we should measure achievement, we need to design our structures to maximise achievement.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because he has been most generous in giving way to my interventions. He is in danger of stereotyping school sixth forms. He talks about 150 as the Ofsted-set level for viability, but what would he say to the head of the secondary school that I visited in West Bromwich and that has a sixth form with fewer than 50 pupils? The school does not offer A-level courses, but it has set up a sixth form specifically to provide a very limited range of courses that were not available to pupils in colleges in the locality. Pupils were otherwise falling through the net and were not being given the opportunity to undertake courses that might benefit them.

Mr. Chaytor: I would say that the head teacher is probably doing a very good job; I never take on head teachers as that is a dangerous thing to do.

I take the hon. Lady's point exactly. That is why I do not draw sweeping conclusions about the achievements of small sixth forms. I am certainly conscious of the fact that the remoteness of some parts of the country and their sparsity of population—I do not think that West Bromwich falls into this category—means that small sixth forms are the only way forward.

In many urban and suburban parts of the country, however, the legacy of the Education Reform Act 1988 coupled with the legacy of the Higher and Further Education Act 1992 mean that we have far too many schools for 11 to 18-year-olds struggling desperately to hang on to tiny unviable sixth forms for reasons that are entirely understandably to do with the preservation of the staff and their sense of identity in the school. It is a classic example of a producer-led system. In such areas, schools, head teachers and governors are doing no favours to the young people who, in many cases, would be far better-off in a sixth form college system, in a tertiary college or in a federal system in which the school for 11 to 16-year-olds is far more closely linked with the local college.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): There is much merit in my hon. Friend's arguments, but will he consider areas such as mine? It is made up of mining villages in a rural setting and a number of sixth forms keep young people in education even though they do not necessarily take A-levels. What does he think of a system in which providers work with other providers to ensure that young people have choices to continue their post-16 education and opportunities to do one part of a course at a venue that is linked to a college in the town centre?

Mr. Chaytor: That is the way forward for many parts of the country. As I said, we cannot draw sweeping conclusions from the information that I cited earlier on the relationship between the size of a sixth form and academic performance, but we must start a far more serious and mature debate, free from preconceptions about the particular types of institutions. I hope that such a debate will take place as the months go by.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman has been most generous in giving way. How would he characterise the sixth form at Furtherwick school on Canvey Island, where there was previously no post-16 education provision? Children from Canvey Island had to travel to the mainland. Since the sixth form was established—it is still quite small, but it is growing and becoming more successful year on year—the staying-on rate has increased dramatically. In addition, how would he explain why, when sixth form provision is introduced in competition with college provision to add choice, the results from the colleges as well as from those staying on at the sixth form improve? Sixth forms drive up standards by providing competition.

Mr. Chaytor: I am loth to characterise anything of which I have no direct experience, so I will refrain from answering the hon. Gentleman's question. However, it is important to distinguish between the impact of competition for its own sake or as a result of Government diktat and the need to provide appropriate choice. In the past, this country has been far too obsessed with the issue of choice between institutions and we have been concerned less frequently with the importance of choice within the institutions. The obsession with competition between institutions—competition that is ostensibly designed to provide choice—has led to a diminution of choice within institutions for certain groups of students. We need choice, but we do not need competition for its own sake.

Although I began by saying that I resented the way in which the Opposition introduced the debate to suggest that schools and AS-levels were the big issue in post-16 education, I am conscious of the fact that I have been sucked into considering that issue. However, I hope that when we next have a debate on post-16 education we can ignore sixth forms and AS-levels and consider the overwhelming majority of young people who do not go on to A-levels and who take the vocational route. We should also consider the growing problem of an underclass of under-achieving young people who leave school with nothing and, in many cases, well before the age of 16. They are easily sucked into a life of crime and other antisocial behaviour.

Before I conclude I wish to comment on two or three other points and invite my hon. Friend the Minister to respond to them. One of the Government's major achievements in the past four years was the introduction of education maintenance awards. There are, I think, 56 pilot areas and the scheme is working work well. I urge the Government to continue the concept and extend it nationwide. My area is surrounded by districts that are

part of the scheme, and that throws up enormous anomalies. Unlike students in Bolton and Rochdale, students in Bury are not entitled to the awards. They and their parents cannot understand the distinction. I call on the Government to move quickly to make the pilots a national scheme.

Skills within the adult population are important. I pay tribute to the work of the Moser report on basic skills and the Government's national strategy, published last year, which contains, as I mentioned in the most recent Education questions, an interesting proposal. The strategy suggests that the Government will consider funding the release of employees so that they acquire basic skills. That would help people in low-income, low-status and low-skilled jobs, with poor literacy and numeracy levels. The report said that the Government should consider funding that for one day a week for 13 weeks, which is 13 days a year of paid educational leave. I want to draw the Minister's attention to that important proposal and to the Bill that I promoted last year—the Lifelong Learning (Paid Study Time) Bill—to provide paid educational leave for all employees. I shall introduce the Bill again this year and hope to attract wider support for the concept.

For many people in the adult work force, including MPs, barristers, business people and academics, paid educational leave is a given part of their life. We have no problem in taking almost as much time as we want off our regular daily work to enhance our professional skill and knowledge. However, the overwhelming majority of people are trapped in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. Their lives are a daily struggle to get by, and they have no security and little prospect of advancement. Unless they are extremely fortunate, they are never released from their employer to improve their skills. It is a classic example of where the market alone will not work.

Given a free choice, most employers will choose not to release their staff because they do not obtain an immediate benefit. In this case, it is an absolute responsibility of the Government to intervene in the operation of the market and, although there will be a short-term cost to compensate employers for releasing their staff, the long-term benefits—the life opportunities for low-paid workers and the improved quality of life for their children and families—will be well worth while.

I welcome the Government's work over the past four years and encourage them to continue so that post-16 education remains at the top of the policy agenda and lifelong learning for everyone becomes the norm, not the exception.

3.3 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I have the honour to address the House for the first time this afternoon and the privilege to represent the East Sussex constituency of Bexhill and Battle, which contains the two towns of that name and a large rural area covering some 240 square miles. I was born and bred in Sussex, so to represent that seat means a great deal to me.

I follow Charles Wardle, who represented the constituency for 18 years, held ministerial office and was a diligent and assiduous constituency Member of Parliament, often taking up local causes with extraordinary and effective tenacity, as many residents of Robertsbridge, who suffered yet again this winter from terrible flooding, will readily testify. I hope that people will remember him for that rather than for his unhappy relationship with the Conservative party at the end of his parliamentary career.

I am pleased to say that Bexhill and Battle has been represented by a Conservative Member since 1874, and Charles Wardle was preceded by a distinguished and much respected parliamentarian, Bryant Godman Irvin, who gave great service to the House, not least as Deputy Speaker and Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee from 1976 to 1982. He is still remembered with affection by my more senior colleagues.

Byrant Godman Irvin was preceded by another distinguished Member, a former mayor of Bexhill, Mr. W. N. Cuthbert. He was one of the few Tories to enter the House in the first election after the second world war at the time of the Labour landslide. I feel a strange affinity with Mr. Cuthbert. He, too, must have sat on these very Benches and stared in disbelief at the overwhelming number of Labour Members, but I take great encouragement from the fact that just five years after he was elected, that great majority was swept away.

It is a time-honoured tradition for new Members to make bold and flattering claims for their constituency. However, I can tell the House that Bexhill and Battle is, without a degree of doubt, one of the most beautiful parts of this kingdom. Mindful of the fact that we live in an age of performance indicators and audits, I have the statistics to prove it. Some 74 per cent. of Bexhill and Battle is designated an area of outstanding natural beauty and we have 16 sites of special scientific interest. From the High Weald to the Pevensey levels, from the Kent ditch to Brightling beacon, my constituency is blessed with an idyllic historic landscape and a majestic coastline. My constituents are guardians of a very special environment which I have pledged to defend.

We also treasure something else in Bexhill and Battle, less visible in the tourist guides but just as important—quality of life. Quality of life is a fragile and precious thing which cannot be measured by economic indicators alone. We understand that in the countryside, especially in the patchwork of close-knit rural communities that criss-cross my constituency. In the elegant Edwardian seaside town of Bexhill, I am pleased to say that standards of courtesy and decency still prevail. The De La Warr Pavilion, a modernist architectural gem, may be our most famous landmark, but the public spirit of my constituents, which finds expression in the numerous and highly successful voluntary organisations and charity fundraising committees, is perhaps the town's finest feature. They do a terrific job.

Few people realise that Bexhill was the birthplace of British motor racing and next year we look forward to celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first motor race along the seafront. However, in a constituency that is rich in historical associations, that race was relatively recent. Most famously, of course, in 1066 King Harold was defeated by William of Normandy. The town of Battle is now a charming, historic but vibrant market town. Despite the passing of 1,000 years, the deeds of that fateful day and the personalities of the individuals involved are still stamped on the local landscape. The strong vein of Euroscepticism that runs through my constituency perhaps shows that there are old scores yet to settle.

For all the charm and picturesque qualities, we are not complacent. Even amidst the rolling Sussex countryside, there are pockets of real hardship. As police numbers fall,

[Mr. Gregory Barker]

fear of rising crime is rife across the constituency. Areas of Bexhill still wrestle with problems of social deprivation and antisocial behaviour. Our local hospital is frequently subject to bed-blocking and this afternoon's decision by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to decline to go ahead with the Bexhill bypass will be seen as a kick in the teeth for the town.

The bypass was not just a measure to ease traffic congestion; it was desperately needed to provide land for housing to attract people to the town and to provide homes for local families who are unable to get on the property ladder. It would have opened up land for a business park to provide much-needed, better-paid jobs, and it would have provided land to build a new university, which is one of the proposals of the new Conservative-controlled East Sussex county council. I, for one, shall continue the fight for the Bexhill bypass. However, I welcome any action from the Secretary of State to upgrade the A21 and improve our poor rail links to London.

Many people in the villages and the countryside in my constituency face a bleak, uncertain future, thanks to the crisis in the countryside and the secondary shockwaves from the foot and mouth epidemic. Action is undoubtedly needed, but the imposition of urban values on rural communities is certainly not the answer. However, my constituents know that to prosper they must embrace change. The area must attract investment to bring greater opportunities to young people and the less well-off members of our community. That means embracing new technology, new ways of working, a better skill base and a better transport infrastructure, and creating an environment in which entrepreneurs can prosper. There is no universal solution, but I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that if we can get education right so much else will come right too.

My constituency is fortunate in having many good schools. My son's primary school in Etchingham, with just 130 pupils, is one of several beacon schools, sharing its success with others. We are particularly proud of the fact that Bexhill high school has just won technology college status. I applaud the fact that education is one of the Government's foremost priorities, but as much as I share their ambition to make improvements, I am genuinely concerned by their propensity to over-regulate our schools and further education colleges. In their desperation to drive up results, they chronically overload teachers and students.

Childhood and adolescence are not merely a departure lounge for adulthood, but a time of life that should be enjoyed and relished for its own sake. We do our children no favours by denying them a childhood. We do young adults no favours if, at 16 or 18, they are worn down and worried by a constant work load of public examinations and tests. At the election, the Labour party told the country that "the work goes on", but for the sixth formers at Bexhill college, the work goes on and on and on. After-school sports, clubs and extra-curricular activities are all being squeezed as never before, and in driving our students ever harder, the Government risk quenching the very thing that drives our economy, the ingredient X that gives our nation an advantage over our trading competitors, which is our blend of ingenuity, creative spirit, free thinking and entrepreneurial flair.

Before entering the House I spent two fascinating years working for a large corporation in Russia, at the front line of efforts to reform and reinvigorate the post-Soviet economy. I was lucky to work with numerous highly educated people, whose excellent general management admission test scores were terrifying. The breadth of their knowledge never ceased to amaze me, but all too often, despite that, their ability to think creatively, to be radical and to take personal responsibility and initiative had been completely drilled out of them by an overbearing education system. The flicker of creativity and individualism that is the essential catalyst of wealth creation had been completely extinguished.

Clearly, we have not yet reached that point in this country, but, albeit from the kindest of motives, that is the direction in which our further education system is heading. Indeed, a Russian official making a recent fact-finding visit to a neighbouring education authority, when asked for her impressions remarked that the British education system was very impressive, but seemed to her rather over-centralised.

The current confusion and the U-turns in the new AS-level regime have only compounded that worry. It is no wonder that there is an unprecedented crisis in teacher retention and recruitment. I speak as a director of, and shareholder in, an advertising agency that specialises in that area of public service recruitment. It is time to trust the teaching profession, which has changed greatly in recent years. Those good changes were set in train by successive Conservative Governments. We rightly expect a great deal of our schools, and we must hold to account those who fail to deliver, but surely it is now time to stand back and give our teachers and lecturers some professional space.

Bexhill college in my constituency is subjected to three separate external auditors, and barely a week passes without an audit or official inspection taking place, tying up a huge amount of staff time and front-line education resources. The funding for the college comes from up to 73 separate pots, with all those amounts, including sums as small as £2,000 for governor training, having to be separately tracked. We will never unlock the potential of each and every student by crushing the professional freedom of teachers and lecturers.

I began this speech by praising my constituency, and I should like to end in the same vein. As this is a debate on education, I hope that the House will indulge me if I quote a verse by Rudyard Kipling, who made his home at Burwash in my constituency and was inspired by the wonderful countryside around him. He wrote:

"God gives all men all earth to love,
But, since man's heart is small,
Ordains for each, one spot shall prove
Belovèd over all
Each to his choice, and I rejoice
The lot has fallen to me
In a fair ground—in a fair ground—
Yea, Sussex, by the sea!"

3.17 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I congratulate the hon. Member

for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) on his maiden speech. For those in the Gallery who may think that we new Members have taken too much sun, or something stronger, on the Terrace, I should point out that these speeches tend to follow a traditional form. The hon. Gentleman paid handsome tributes to his predecessor and his constituency, and made a substantial contribution to the debate.

I should like also to congratulate my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State on her appointment. She is a former teacher with a lifelong commitment to education and no need of a belated voyage of discovery.

I am grateful to be called to speak in this debate, because in my constituency we face a challenge in encouraging more of our children simply to remain at school after 16. Two thirds of the high schools have staying-on rates that are well below the county and national averages. That includes my old school, Wolstanton High, where, as a young father knocking on 40, I am still a governor.

That challenge has much to do with the loyal and ancient borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme. For those who are straining to hear a hint of Geordie, a common mistake, may I explain that Newcastle-under-Lyme is indeed in the north—north Staffordshire? Granted our royal charter in 1173, we can rightfully claim to be the first Newcastle, or, for that matter, Oldcastle. We were overrun by the Romans and the Normans long before they reached the Tyne, although of course they reached Bexhill and Battle long before us. It seems that for our 800 years we have always been fighting somebody or other. For much of the past century we have resisted the imperialist embrace of our Victorian new arrivals next door in the pottery city of Stoke-on-Trent.

Newcastle is historically not a potteries town, but many of our folk have toiled in the bottle kilns and our terraces housed their workers. Newcastle's first Labour Member of Parliament was Josiah Wedgwood, a great-grandson of the founder of the Wedgwood company; we have been represented by Labour ever since 1919. We might have got Luton's motor factory, but the pot bank owners fought it—in our area, they did not want to pay car-makers' wages.

Newcastle has always been a market town—the trading centre of north Staffordshire, but above all it has been a pit town: the Staffordshire coalfield is the biggest in the country and the Wolstanton and Silverdale mines were Britain's deepest. In one civil war, Newcastle's roundheads, loyal to Parliament, saw off cavaliers from Cheshire and Derbyshire; sadly, in round two, we lost to the lady from Lincolnshire, so all our pits are now gone. We have lots of parks instead, mind you. Apedale mine is now a beautifully landscaped nature park, Wolstanton a retail park and Holditch a thriving business park thanks to Newcastle's wonderful council, helped now by a Labour Government.

No matter how we fought the industrial challenge, Newcastle's community bears the scars and they continue to show in our schools. I know how hard it is for poorer kids to stay on after the age of 16: my mum left school at 15 and my dad, in Ireland, at 12. I can safely say that I am the only new Labour Member of Parliament to be the grandson of a rabbit trapper from County Meath. I was urged to go to work at 16, but more than a little stubbornness, combined with wiping tables at Keele motorway service station and pouring pints for the world darts championships at Jollees nightclub in between, enabled me to survive A-levels and get the best of educations.

I was the first of my family to go to university—to Oxford. I was lucky. My English granddad—a captain's messenger hopping the trenches in the gunfire of the first world war, a staunch trade unionist all his life and one of the first members of the Labour party—knew the value of education. I am proud to serve Newcastle-under-Lyme for a Labour party that has put at the heart of its second term in government the transformation of secondary education and the expansion of further and higher education for all, not only a privileged few.

Making sure our kids achieve begins in the home, not at school. Labour's family policies are already helping poorer children to break the vicious circle of families surviving on benefit with no incentives, no jobs and no aspirations. We are also giving children a hand directly: my constituency now benefits from the sure start programme, and Stoke-on-Trent is reaping rewards from the education maintenance allowance, which helps poorer children to stay on past 16. I am sure that my hon. Friends from Stoke will understand it when, just this once, I cast my eyes enviously at their patch and urge the Government to extend the EMA to all of Newcastle, north Staffordshire and nationally, so that all our kids benefit from a level playing field. Above all, we must continue to level up education standard spending assessments in areas such as Staffordshire. The Government will, I am sure, continue to do exactly that.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) highlighted some of the holes in the Conservatives' manifesto. During the election I noticed that they had already stolen some of Labour's clothes, but not, it would seem, in education. I hope that during their knockabout leadership election, the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) will undertake another voyage of discovery and abandon foolish and dangerous policies such as so-called free schools. They are not free: someone will pay and it will be the least advantaged of our children who face the greatest challenges to staying on beyond 16.

It is right and proper that, as is the custom, I now pay tribute to my predecessor. Children have been the lifelong passion of Llin Golding, who represented Newcastle for 15 years. Despite Llin's many other onerous commitments, such as the Commons fly fishing club, the Back-Bench horse racing committee and the foxy Middle Way, she always led the parliamentary children's group. She served as a Front-Bench spokesman on education and agriculture. Her creativity in combining her passions has been truly remarkable: for example, she remains a patron of Second Chance, a charity for less advantaged children who need special help—to spend weekends fishing, of course.

The new Baroness Golding's sweet songbird name—Llinos is Welsh for linnet—truly understates her steely determination. To quote another parliamentary incomparable, Andrew Roth:

> "She was a tough Whip and organiser with a warm heart for the underprivileged, especially children in trouble."

My hon. Friend the new Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) has already paid generous tribute to Llin's father, Ness Edwards, former Member of Parliament for Llin's birthplace and a member of Clement Attlee's

[Paul Farrelly]

Cabinet. I am sure that the House agrees that Llin's elevation to the peerage—without inducement, I am ecstatic to say—is just reward for the 60 years of service that she, her father and her late husband John gave the House.

No mention of Newcastle-under-Lyme would be complete without praising the late, great John Golding. Many of my older colleagues will have mixed feelings about my old friend, Labour's witchfinder general and the well named "hammer of the left", but I am sure that everyone recognises John's outstanding contribution to Labour's historic electoral success under my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). John was a tireless champion of the underprivileged and one of the earliest campaigners for the minimum wage. Locally, he was a passionate advocate for Newcastle further education college, which now offers our over-16s a wonderful array of academic and vocational qualifications. He, and we, will not tolerate an education system that acts merely as a sieve of failure at different stages for our children.

In remembering John, I commend the especially dear obituary written by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the Father of the House, whom I wish a speedy recovery. John holds the record for the longest ever parliamentary speech: 11 hours and 15 minutes speaking to a single amendment to delay the privatisation of British Telecom in 1983. With his much missed twinkle in the eye, John once told me that eight minutes was the ideal length for a speech. The House will be glad that, on my maiden outing, I have followed John's advice and not his custom and practice. I commend the Government's record, our manifesto, and the amendment to the House.

3.26 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to make my maiden speech today, a little later and a little hoarser—thanks to a bout of tonsillitis—than I had intended.

The hon. Members for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) have set an exacting standard with their excellent speeches. In particular, I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme for a thought-provoking and well informed contribution. He spoke from the heart and I have no doubt that he will be a credit to his party, his constituency and the House.

I, too, pay tribute to my predecessor. Dr. Alan Williams was a most assiduous advocate on behalf of his constituents. A chemist, he brought to the House valuable expertise, a keen interest in scientific and environmental policy and a reasoned and logical approach to every issue that came to his attention. I wish him every success in future. Dr. Williams had the honour to be the longest serving Member of Parliament for a constituency renowned for febrile campaigning and unpredictability. Among my more colourful predecessors was William Paxton, who in his first attempt to capture the seat in 1802 kept the polls open for 15 days and bribed the electorate with 11,000 breakfasts, 36,000 dinners, 25,000 gallons of ale, 11,000 bottles of spirits—the list goes on—spending £18.18 for milk punch, whatever that is, and £786 for ribbons. He might have had a little difficulty explaining his actions to today's Electoral Commission.

The last Member of Parliament for the Carmarthen Boroughs seat was the nationalist and anti-Lloyd George Liberal Llewelyn Williams, who said of the House:

"You get in to get on, you stay in to get honours, you get out to get honest".

Perhaps his cynical view of politics can be explained by the rather curious Carmarthenshire tradition, which survived well into the 20th century, whereby Tories wore red rosettes and their opponents blue—a tradition that in these days of ideological confusion seems strangely apt.

The political history of the Carmarthen constituency was especially interesting in the 20th century. Carmarthen was the only Labour-held seat—apart from Mile End in London, which went communist—that the party lost in the 1945 election. It was the only Labour-held seat that the party lost in the second 1974 election. I am pleased to say that on 7 June this year it became the only Labour-held seat lost by Labour in Wales.

Above all, Carmarthen was the first seat won by Plaid Cymru—the party of Wales—in 1966. I pay special tribute to my predecessor Gwynfor Evans, the founder of modern Welsh nationalism. His integrity, eloquence and commitment to the cause of Wales set an example to which I can but hope to aspire. He continues to be an inspiration to everyone in my party.

It is no exaggeration to say that the communities of East Carmarthen and Dinefwr have a unique, historic character. They stand on the cusp of rural and industrial Wales, and are the gateway to both. Four main valleys make up the constituency: the post-industrial Amman and Gwendraeth valleys of the anthracite coalfield and the agricultural heartlands of the Teifi and Tywi valleys. The constituency has the only anthracite coalfield in Britain and produces more milk than any other county in the UK.

The interplay and interconnection of the two communities—the coalfield and the milkfield—lie at the heart of the special character of my constituency. The markets of the south Wales coalfield helped to build up the dairy sector. Welsh-speaking peasants and farmers, including my grandfather, huddled into the terraced cottages of the pit villages of Amman and Gwendraeth. Where others try to drive a wedge between town and country, we in Carmarthenshire have a bond of solidarity between village and valley, miner and farmer—from the free milk supplied by the farmers of Carmarthenshire to miners' families during the great strike of 1984, to the enormous concern shared by everyone in my constituency at the human cost of the deepening rural depression.

I was born and brought up in the industrial half of the constituency. My forefathers lived and worked in grim conditions, but they succeeded in sustaining a remarkably vibrant culture, which was characterised by a love of two languages, of religion and of all aspects of popular culture. That is certainly true of sport; the two valleys of Amman and Gwendraeth can boast the likes of Carwyn James, Barry John, Gareth Davies and Jonathan Davies—to name but a few of the greats of the Welsh game—as well as the emerging present-day talents of Shane Williams and Dwayne Peel. In snooker, we have in my constituency Matthew Stevens and Dominic Dale. In soccer, we have the former Welsh international goalkeeper, Dai Davies. Last but not least, my father was a former Welsh middleweight champion and, if I may say so, a formidable canvasser on the election trail.

Other great defining characteristics of the people of Carmarthenshire are their patriotism and democratic socialism. There was no finer an exponent of that than the

late Jim Griffiths. Along with Aneurin Bevan, of course, he was one of the two great founders of the welfare state, having introduced the National Insurance Act 1948 under the Attlee Government. He was also a firm believer in the Welsh dimension of politics. So it was fitting that he should have succeeded in being made the Charter Secretary of State for Wales—a fulfilment of his lifelong ambition for his country. He passionately believed—as I do today—that the villages and valleys had something distinctive to contribute to our shared humanity.

The essence of these values was captured in, of all places, last Friday's edition of *The Times*, in an obituary of the theologian W. D. Davies, who was originally from Glanaman.

"Davies"—

it said—

"had the quiet dignity of the miners he knew as a child, people who knew the depth of economic depression but retained the self-respect that they found in the Christian faith. The social concern of the Nonconformist chapels of the Amman Valley gave him a concern for those he perceived as victims, and this developed into a natural affinity with the Jewish people".

Jim Griffiths was a product of that same tradition, but in the 1960s the vision and the values on which such great communities had been built were threatened—ironically as a result of his own Government's policies.

In an archive in Ammanford, there is a letter written by Jim Griffiths to a Labour party colleague shortly after a Carmarthen by-election, stating baldly that all Labour seats in Wales were vulnerable. Jim Griffiths' particular concern was that the Labour party had lost the support of young people. The cause was clear then as it is now. As Gwynfor Evans declared in his maiden speech 35 years ago, the Labour party boasts of prosperity but the people of Carmarthen

"see no evidence of this prosperity. What they see is mines closing, railways closing, steel workers being made redundant and a decline in agriculture."—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1966; Vol. 732, c. 1498.]

The parallel between those words, spoken 35 years ago, with the Wales of today is chilling in its accuracy.

The Labour party has never really recaptured the energies of young people in Wales. That is why I stand here a Plaid Member, a miner's son and the youngest Member representing a Wales constituency. When hubris threatens to overwhelm some of my fellow Welshmen on the Government Benches, whom I am glad to see present, perhaps they should ask themselves why people of my generation and background have turned their backs on Labour.

The issue of post-16 education possibly offers some clues. There are few issues that for me define more precisely the essence of social justice in an advanced society than access to education. Further and higher education were to me, as to so many hon. Members, the key that unlocked the door to the favoured position that we now enjoy.

Education involves not only individual benefit but social and economic gain for society as a whole. Indeed, according to the recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, almost half a percentage point of the annual average growth rate in the UK in the 1990s was due to educational attainment. More sobering was the finding in the report that, in 1998, the UK spent only 4.9 per cent. of gross domestic product on education compared with an OECD average of 5.3 per cent—still far below the Scandinavian countries and New Zealand, which invest more than 7 per cent. of their annual income in education.

Alongside questions of funding lies the issue of student financial support, on which the Opposition motion is curiously silent. Like many an hon. Member, my training ground for political engagement was the National Union of Students. I particularly remember the presidential term of the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) and the great lobby of Westminster against student loans, which ended in deadlock—unfortunately—on Westminster bridge.

Our policy in the NUS was to defend and extend the principle of the maintenance grant to embrace all those in full-time post-16 education. Our fears then about the effects of the abolition of the maintenance grant have been borne out by a string of recent reports. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales last year published research showing that, following the introduction of student fees, prospective students from the deprived communities of south Wales were up to three times less likely to attend university.

Earlier this year, the Rees report on student hardship, commissioned by the Lib-Lab coalition in the National Assembly, echoed the Cubie report in calling for the abolition of tuition fees and went further in calling for a statutory entitlement to maintenance support for all those in HE and FE. That was the very same policy that many of us were advocating back in the 1980s while in the NUS.

As the youngest of three working-class children to go to university, and one of the last to receive a full maintenance grant, I am passionately committed to ensuring that the same opportunities are afforded to today's generation of young people. Passion in politics, it seems, is no bad thing—even, if the House will forgive me, in a maiden speech.

It is often said that the difference between a Llanelli and a Swansea supporter—those two great rivals of west Wales rugby—is that Swansea supporters wear gloves and Llanelli supporters cannot afford them. I am a Llanelli supporter through and through and I assure the House that my gloves will be off in many of our debates—not out of any enmity for Labour Members, but because I care so deeply about a special place that I love and a special people whom I love. Their demands over the 20th century were modest, but their contribution was immense. They deserve a future that is better than the past. It is our collective duty to ensure that it is delivered.

3.39 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): It is entirely appropriate that in this first Opposition-day debate of the new Parliament, we should discuss post-16 education. We all know that it receives insufficient attention. That is partly because we have a strong relationship in our constituencies with schools, parents and children. At the other end of the spectrum, the university sector commands a great deal of firepower. It is often said that further education is a Cinderella squeezed between those great powers. I have a long-standing commitment to FE, especially to adult education, and acknowledge its importance. Even if our motion is contentious in some respects, I hope that both sides of the House agree on the basic premise that the post-16 sector is critical to improving the nation's skills base and its international competitiveness; by implication, it needs greater attention than perhaps it receives.

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

Our debate has been marked by a number of distinguished speeches. There is never enough time to debate further education, but at least the quality of speeches has made up for the lack of quantity. There was a distinguished contribution from the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), who has great expertise, followed by three exceptional maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) produced a wonderful combination of perception, wit and elegance; he emphasised strongly the positive side of his constituency and his commitment to education. That is not to detract in any sense from the contributions of the hon. Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price). Perhaps we do not hear enough in the House about passion; we do not hear enough from Labour Members about commitment to the socially disadvantaged. Some Opposition Members have such commitment and we are delighted that passion will be brought to bear on the subject, as there ought to be a common commitment to improve the situation.

Apart from those speeches, the contributions were mainly from the Front Benches. I regret the fact that Ministers have not quite addressed concerns expressed in all quarters, not only in our debate but more generally in the national debate, about recent events. I particularly regret the fact that they have not addressed the concerns set out in our motion, which were also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who dealt with the immediate issue for almost all post-16 AS-level learners. The Secretary of State conceded that students were having to work harder and study longer; her prescription for dealing with that situation, albeit an interim one, was to offer alleviation in the timetable for assessment, not mitigation of the range of study. Frankly, she seemed to confuse a broader curriculum, with more subjects to study, with a greater breadth of educational experience. We want the latter, and we worry that producing a broader curriculum may displace rather than facilitate it.

I welcome the Minister for Lifelong Learning, whom I know from previous debates and her service in the Department, to the Dispatch Box and invite her to nail a worry about a specific issue. On 16 August, the first national AS-level results are due to be published. Before our debate ends, can she tell us unequivocally whether those results will be published on time, in full and accurately? We have asked the Government to tell us a number of times, and it is essential that parents and students know where they stand. There can be no ducking the issue and no repetition of the fiasco north of the border last year. Our students have suffered enough problems and cannot go through that as well.

A range of issues have been raised today, including the differential in funding that has already been discussed at some length. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead remarked, schools are different; in saying so, she echoed remarks made only last week by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey). When the word "convergence" is in the air, we must ensure that schools retain their funding for pre and post-16 education and that any convergence involves levelling up, not levelling down. The Government cannot be permitted to use arguments about schools' funding as a cop-out for inadequacies in FE funding.

I want to touch on some issues that have not received enough attention today. One is inspection; we now have the first Ofsted reports and, it is fair to say, further work in that area is required. The reports should be considered carefully and dispassionately. Some of us remain uneasy about the interface between Ofsted, the adult learning inspectorate and the colleges and providers themselves. FE is not the same as school education; it does not have the same skills and motivation base as various types of schools. We need to watch that carefully.

Special educational needs is another important issue which, as the Minister will know, impacts on the difficult transition from school to college. Wisely, the Government responded to representations made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), whose concerns were shared across the House, about deficiencies in the SEN code of practice and withdrew it in another place yesterday. I hope that they have learned from that experience; any more information that they can give about their plans would be appreciated.

Finally, there is the overarching issue of qualifications and public examinations, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead made clear, must be taken very widely indeed, not just seen as a scissors-and-paste job on a present difficulty. What has made it worse for schools is that GCSE changes and other changes took place in parallel. We must all learn that we have to look at the changes ensemble; we should not consider one change without regard for others taking place at the same time.

I mention two other important issues, the Connexions service and the structure and operation of the Learning and Skills Council, only to say that we cannot debate them now. We shall need to return to them later, but I submit to the House some wide general considerations and tests that need to be set out. We must consider whether a post-16 system contributes to education in its widest sense, including providing interpersonal and the so-called soft key skills as well as those that are more easily examinable. Does it build up the appropriate skills base for future employment and in an appropriate setting for the particular elements of that base? Does it capture those who would otherwise miss out on further education, by widening access and participation? Does it contribute to widening the base of pre-university general education, which provides the only realistic prospect of meeting Government targets for participation in higher education, unless the standards for entry are diluted?

Those goals are not being achieved and their achievement seems unlikely under present funding and organisational arrangements for the post-16 sector. The Government set a target increase of 700,000 FE students over two years, but the reality is that in each year of their stewardship student numbers have dropped, albeit by a small amount. They cannot claim even one extra student, yet in our time in government, however much the hon. Member for Bury, North tried to explain it away, we provided for the enrolment of an extra 1 million students. That comparative record bears examination. I do not puff our achievements, which were not without their faults, but the Government's achievements so far have been minimal, if not negative. It is perhaps no accident that they are set against a background of colleges under pressure, with staff under particularly great pressure. Unit

funding per student is falling; the flexibility of colleges and their ability to use their resources are being impaired as they find an ever higher proportion of their remaining funds are subject to conditions. Lecturers are falling behind their school equivalents, and even more so behind their counterparts in outside employment, especially when the skills are transferable.

Further education colleges and the wider delivery of post-16 education—the critical area that we are considering—do great things with diminishing resources. However, somewhere there is a point of failure. The purpose of the motion is to bring that to the attention of the nation before it is too late.

3.40 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): This has been a good if limited debate. It has been constructive and well-informed. I suppose that some of the less well informed interventions from the Opposition Benches can be blamed on distraction. Perhaps Conservative Members have their minds elsewhere. I can assure them that under Labour's commitment to lifelong learning for all they will get the second chance that they denied to so many when they were in government.

I was pleased to hear three excellent contributions from new Members. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) on an eloquent maiden speech. He told us of all the qualities and opportunities that exist in his constituency and of the threats that he saw facing his constituents. I must tell him that I do not apologise for an obsession with driving up standards. I do not accept that in pursuing high standards we are not developing the important skills and enjoyments that make for the whole person.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) made a well constructed and passionate maiden speech that ranged across many issues, which he linked to his own experience. He spoke with fondness of his constituency. I look forward to his contributions in future.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) told us some good history about his constituency. By his account, his predecessors made a colourful contribution to what happened in the House. I am sure from his contribution that he will maintain that good record.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) talked about concern about allocations this year from the additional moneys that are going to colleges and further education colleges. I wish to reassure him that the allocations for 2002–03 and 2003–04 have already been given to colleges. Any money that is still outstanding will be paid retrospectively. The Learning and Skills Council is waiting for the forms to come in so that it can meet the bill.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the radical overhaul that we want from 14 to 19. We are committed to that. In the meantime, I hope that he will welcome, as we do, the introduction of a range of qualifications from vocational GCSEs through to AS-levels, vocational A-levels, the modern apprenticeships and foundation degrees, as a way of extending, deepening and opening opportunities for people in education.

I acknowledge the considerable contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) to the FE sector. He mentioned educational maintenance allowances, which we consider to have been an effective experiment. We are considering their future in depth. I look forward to him pursuing his arguments about paid educational leave for employees.

I shall talk briefly about school sixth forms, which were raised by several Opposition Members. We gave an unprecedented guarantee to maintain funding for school sixth forms. We have given a clear instruction to the Learning and Skills Council that it must pass the money that it receives to the sixth forms in full.

Funding for sixth forms varies considerably throughout the country, from £2,600 per student in some areas to £4,100 in others. Making sense of that will take time, but we have a commitment to do so by funding upwards. The Learning and Skills Council will publish information on funding to schools in July. The provisional allocation will be made in December. I hope that that will reassure school sixth forms.

I can assure the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) that we shall publish the A-levels on 16 August. The awarding bodies have confirmed that the results will be issued on that day.

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Hodge: I am short of time.

Mr. Boswell: I appreciate the extreme shortage of time. Will the hon. Lady confirm that the term "A-levels" includes for this purpose AS-levels? There may be a critical distinction.

Margaret Hodge: I understand that, and can confirm that.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the inspection reports. Schools and FE colleges may be different but quality must be high in both.

I am delighted that we have had an opportunity of a Supply day debate to reflect on the post-16 world in education. The challenges that we face in post-16 education are huge, but crucial and exciting. We must raise aspirations, extend participation and boost attainment for many more people so that British people can equal the peoples of other industrialised nations in their skills and achievements.

On an individual level, we want men and women to enjoy a better life and a better job. At a national level, we want the skills that are necessary to enhance our productivity and competitiveness, and to facilitate the growth that we need to deliver inclusion. To do this, we need to extend participation in all post-16 education, in colleges, at universities and in the workplace. We need to tackle inequality of access, which still bedevils us with our history of class divisions. We need also to raise attainment levels at 16, 18 and 19, and in the universities and beyond.

We must tackle the silent scandal that one in five adults still do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills. We must ensure that individuals attain the key skills that are vital in the new economy. We must work with businesses and trade unions to instil a culture of continuous learning

[Margaret Hodge]

and development in the workplace. We need to improve the quality of all our education and training provision. We still need to maintain our world-class status in innovation and research.

That is a tough and long agenda, but I believe that we have made a good and impressive start. There has been a real-terms growth in spending. In FE, there has been an increase of 12 per cent. compared with the 12 per cent. cut in real-terms spending by the Tories in the last three years of their Government. This year sees the first ever real-terms increase in funding for students in higher education. We are developing the new and important phase for 14 to 19-year-olds, which will be better tailored to meet the needs of each individual student. Vocational qualifications will sit alongside other qualifications. There will be new qualifications such as AS-levels, which give breadth and flexibility. There will be closer co-operation between institutions, which will make it easier for individuals to progress and achieve.

We are providing additional and targeted support for individuals to encourage learning and to equalise opportunity. That is why we have educational maintenance allowances and individual learning accounts and why we are piloting opportunity bursaries. We are tackling inequalities in other ways with our excellence challenge, Connexions service and adult basic skills programme. They are all parts of a concerted and logical effort to widen participation. We are making learning more accessible with learning direct, new online centres, support for Investors in People and the union for learning fund. We are making life easier for students, especially for the less confident students, by establishing better links between institutions.

We recognise that central to our efforts are the teachers in our schools, colleges and universities. That is why this year sees not only a generous settlement of pay in FE—one that is 50 per cent. higher than that which the Tories funded in their last year in office—but the introduction of the £300 million teachers' pay initiative which will reward teachers in FE with up to £2,000 each for their performance.

The House will see from what I have been able to cover that there is an ambitious and comprehensive agenda. Our task is to deliver it. With so much to do and much that is new, we will of course aim to get everything right first time, but where we recognise that change is necessary and that our plans and policies need to be amended, we will not hesitate to do so promptly and openly.

That is what we have done with the AS-levels. We got the concept right in principle but we must make changes in how they work to ensure that the qualification is sustainable, rigorous and lasting. Of course, we wish that we had got it right first time, but we are right to respond quickly to people's legitimate concerns. A serious Opposition would recognise that AS-levels are only one part of a wider picture, and would address the myriad policies and programmes that we are pursuing to raise standards, aspirations and achievements. However, the Opposition prefer not to have regard to that serious agenda. For that reason, we tabled our amendment to the motion.

We have a huge task before us. We are confident that we are putting in place both the resources and the policies to meet the challenges. We are proud of what we have done. We know that we have a great deal more to do, and we look forward to reporting regularly to the House and to our colleagues on the progress that we have made in providing greater opportunity for all in the education and training that we are determined to deliver.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 302.

Division No. 23] **[4 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Greg
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie

O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Phil
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. James Gray.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colley, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Picking, Anne

Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Steele, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's achievements in post-16 education which will drive up the nation's skills and extend opportunity for all; applauds the substantial extra resources secured for further education and the reforms through the Learning and Skills Council and rigorous inspection arrangements, which will radically improve standards and the guarantee to all sixth forms that their funding will be maintained in real terms if their pupil numbers do not fall; commends the broadening of the 16-19 curriculum which is widely supported and the timely and measured response of the Government to improve delivery in schools and colleges; welcomes the early success of the Connexions Service and of Education Maintenance Allowance pilots in encouraging more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay in full-time education after the age of 16, the extra resources secured for the university system and the expansion in the numbers of students in higher education; and endorses the strategy to reduce the number of adults lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills which will tackle a problem which has been neglected for far too long.

The Countryside

4.15 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the Government's neglect of the continuing crisis in the countryside; condemns its failure to produce any programme for the recovery of agriculture and its refusal to accept the need for a full independent public inquiry into the foot and mouth epidemic; further deplores the absence of policies to maintain adequate services in rural areas, including post office and shops, and its failure to address public concern about rural crime; and regrets the pursuit of tax policies which are especially damaging to rural communities and the unsustainable planning policies which continue to threaten greenfield sites.

This debate is probably the last chance that Parliament will have for more than three months to examine the crisis in the countryside. Many of the problems are in need of urgent attention and are likely to get worse by the time that the House returns in October unless action is taken in the meantime. In welcoming the Secretary of State to the Dispatch Box, let me say that I hope that she has recovered her voice and that she will set out the action that the Government propose to take to deal with the crisis.

I am sorry that the right hon. Lady's name does not appear among the principal six names attached to the Government amendment to the motion. It is a matter of concern—this is not merely a House of Commons point—that the Government appear to believe that it is more important for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to appear among those who tabled the amendment, ahead of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The extent of the problems in the countryside is well known. There was already a serious crisis before foot and mouth disease struck. Farm incomes have fallen every year since Labour came to power and they are now less than a third of the 1997 level. Jobs in agriculture are being destroyed at a rate of more than 400 a week, and the number has been falling at that rate for the past two years. Many sectors, such as dairy farming, are running at a loss. Last November's report by the Government's better regulation task force stated:

"Farming has been subjected to a considerable increase in regulatory obligations over recent years."

Foot and mouth has made that situation worse not only for farming, but for tourism, which has also been devastated. The number of overseas visitors to Britain is down. The Council for the Protection of Rural England has warned that 250,000 jobs in tourism are at risk. The British Hospitality Association has estimated that the domestic tourism market is in decline by £2 billion. What a pity that Ministers spent the spring claiming falsely that foot and mouth was under control, instead of concentrating on eradicating the disease, which would have been the right way to help the tourism industry.

To revert to the subject of agriculture, the Secretary of State must understand that many people in the countryside now believe that the Government do not care whether farming survives as a substantial British industry. Many fear that Labour would be happy for British consumers to eat nothing but imported food, even though the Government's own Food Standards Agency has admitted that it is sometimes hard to police the safety of such food. The Government's refusal to introduce honesty in food

labelling and to apply the same standards to food imports as to home-produced food, as well as their reluctance to claim the help available to farmers from the European Union, encourage fears that they are not concerned about the future of farming. The action, as well as inaction, of Ministers in the past four years has made the crisis worse, not better.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) will later deal with agrimonetary compensation in more detail. I shall deal with the foot and mouth epidemic, and in particular with three aspects of it. First, there is a need for a proper recovery plan. If the enhanced farm business advisory service to which the amendment refers, and a bit more rate relief, are all that the Government are going to propose, their actions are ludicrously inadequate. If other measures are on the way, when they will be published? They are needed today.

When will the Government reach a decision on compensating some of those who have suffered irrecoverable losses because of foot and mouth disease? It is more than three months since I wrote to the former Minister of Agriculture at his request, setting out precisely the categories of loss in respect of which compensation should be provided. Those in need of compensation include farmers who have been unable to sell cattle before they reached the age of 30 months. Does the Secretary of State intend to answer my letter? Apart from compensation, what other steps will the Government take to ensure the survival of many rural businesses, including the remaining small abattoirs, for example?

Will the Government withdraw their unworkable proposal for a 20-day ban on livestock movements? I trust that the Secretary of State is aware of the truly devastating prospects in the near future, particularly for the sheep sector but for other sectors of the livestock industry as well. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire will deal with those issues in greater detail later.

What strategy, apart from hope, do the Government have for eliminating foot and mouth disease entirely? Do they expect to eradicate it from the United Kingdom before the weather turns colder? What is the latest scientific assessment of the future trend of the disease? It is now more than two months since the Prime Minister claimed that the Government were on the home straight. When will the end of this very long straight heave into sight?

Many questions arise in the wake of the devastation following the epidemic, all of which point to the need for an inquiry. So far, the Secretary of State has refused to acknowledge that a full, independent public inquiry will be held. However, the Government's handling of the epidemic has so lost the trust of rural communities that confidence can now be restored only by such an inquiry.

I have already published the terms of reference that we propose for such an inquiry: it must examine the origins of the disease; it must make recommendations for a future prevention strategy; and, crucially, it must analyse the extent to which delays and mistakes by Ministers in the vital few weeks after the first case was discovered on 19 February caused the epidemic to spread much more widely than would have happened if Ministers had paid attention to the lessons of the 1967 epidemic, or acted on the advice that I gave in the House at each stage of the unfolding crisis.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is another category of investigation that needs to be included in that inquiry? That is an analysis of the degree to which incorrect evaluations were made of the presence of the disease, causing whole areas to be closed down for specious reasons. Does he agree that a proper objective analysis of the methods used to diagnose the presence of foot and mouth is a crucial element in the inquiry for which he rightly calls?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman is right. The inquiry will have to be wide ranging. It will not have to be lengthy, because the science is relatively simple, compared, for example, to that involved with BSE. The inquiry should indeed deal with the aspect to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

The country needs to know just how many millions of animals could have been saved if the delays and mistakes by Ministers had not occurred. How many businesses might have been preserved? How much money might the taxpayer have saved? The Secretary of State should announce today the Government's commitment to holding an inquiry, even if she is unable to set a date for it to start. Any continued refusal to acknowledge the need for a full independent inquiry will suggest that Ministers are hoping to get away with a whitewash.

I shall now move on to other aspects of the crisis in the countryside. While the decline in agriculture is weakening the whole rural economy, services are also disappearing or being run down as a direct result of Government policy. Let us take the example of post offices. I recognise that village post offices have been closing for many years, but the closure rate has accelerated alarmingly in recent times. Up to 350 post offices a year closed during Labour's first term of office. That rate has increased to more than 500 in the past 12 months. According to figures supplied by the Countryside Alliance, 333 post offices have closed in the past six months alone. That is more than a dozen every week.

The viability of up to 8,000 post offices now depends on the business generated by the payment of social security benefits. However, the Government's decision to axe the previous Government's benefit payment card project has now jeopardised the future of every one of those post offices, and postmasters and postmistresses have made it clear that the Government's proposal for a universal bank is simply no substitute.

We welcome the business rate reductions announced in the last Parliament, but we believe that the threat to the remaining shops, pubs and post offices is so acute that further rate reductions are needed, and that another £1,000 a year off the business rate for vulnerable enterprises in rural areas should be funded by central Government. Equestrian businesses, too, should be exempted from business rates. The Labour party continues its obsession with its wish to ban hunting, but one in 12 of our riding schools closed down in 1999.

It is not only services that are in decline. Rural areas also suffer discrimination over funding. Shire counties lost an estimated £700 million in taxpayer support during

[Mr. Yeo]

the last Parliament because of changes to the local government funding formula made by the Labour Government. As the Labour group of rural MPs pointed out, country people

"are now paying disproportionately more in tax for less services."

The council tax for band D taxpayers in the shire counties rose by an average of £234 a year over the past four years. Inner-London local authorities spend £1,326 per head of population, compared with only £787 per head in the shire counties.

Transport is another source of acute difficulty. Reliance on high fuel taxes as the main instrument of transport policy is uniquely damaging in rural areas, where there is no alternative to using cars for normal social, domestic and business life. As the AA has pointed out, three out of four rural journeys are made by car. As for the Government's much vaunted integrated transport policy, it simply ignores the countryside altogether. Ministers boast of £180 billion in transport spending over the next 10 years, but as the Countryside Alliance has pointed out, of every £1,000 of that spending, just 16p will go to the rural transport fund for expanding rural bus services. That is another reflection of the appallingly low priority that Labour attaches to helping the countryside in its time of need.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): To be fair to the Government, we should recognise the fact that in many local authorities, a lot of the lunatic anti-car policies are the brainchild of the Liberal Democrats who control so much of our countryside. Is my hon. Friend as astonished as I am that the best that they can come up with in their amendment is to urge the Government to take action to establish an advisory commission? That is typical. Is that, perhaps, why the majority in constituencies such as mine went up so much, and the Liberal vote went down? Is that why the Liberal vote went down in the seat next to Romsey, and why they lost control of my district council to the Conservatives in the middle of the election campaign? Hooray!

Mr. Yeo: In the spirit of fairness that my hon. Friend invokes, and in line with the new reasoned approach to debate, to which my hon. Friends and I are publicly committed, I willingly agree with every word that he has said.

Crime, and especially fear of crime, are big threats to the quality of life in the countryside. Last year the NFU Mutual insurance company reported a rise of more than a quarter in thefts from business premises in rural areas. The BBC's "Countryfile" reported that more than half of all farmers had been burgled. More than one in five had suffered arson. Neither the Labour nor the Liberal Democrat amendments refer to crime as part of the crisis in the countryside.

Neither amendment shows any interest in the constructive suggestions that we have made for parish constables, or for improving police accountability by encouraging police use of premises such as shops or village halls. Law enforcement is also a special concern in the areas in which the minority of travellers who are lawbreakers are to be found. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation study found that one third of travellers interviewed had committed benefit fraud, but the Government are reluctant either to enforce existing laws or to assist in the eviction of illegally camped travellers.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): My hon. Friend will be aware that in the rural county of Suffolk, levels of crime have risen in the past four years by 20 per cent., and that levels of crimes of violence have risen by fully 60 per cent. in the past three years. In comparison with the effects of crime in urban areas, the dramatic ripple effect of attacks on sub-post offices and village shops causes huge problems of morale, and difficulties and tensions that are unique to rural communities.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend, who is a notable champion of those with anxieties in the county of Suffolk, is absolutely right to raise the hideous problem of rising crime, especially violence, in our county, whose crime record is, historically, below average. That issue is raised with me more frequently than any other. The problem is the result of four years of a Labour Government in London and a Labour-Liberal Democrat administration in county hall.

I repeat the question that I asked the Secretary of State two weeks ago about planning. What influence will the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have over planning policy? Is it not extraordinary that something described as a Department for the Environment is not responsible for planning? Does the right hon. Lady understand that the decision in last year's rural White Paper to remove protection for the best and most versatile farmland reinforced the fear that the Government do not regard the survival of farming as important to Britain's future? *[Interruption.]* I am citing the White Paper. I realise that the Minister for Rural Affairs was absent from the Government for several years. However, he could have used the time usefully by studying their publications.

Labour's policy of destroying the green belt and bulldozing greenfield sites ignores the wishes of local communities. Ministers ride roughshod over the views and decisions of elected local councils. The regeneration of inner cities is ignored as long as developers get the go-ahead to build on greenfield sites. The Government's approach to planning is unsustainable. By the time they admit that, much irreversible damage will have been done. That is a tragedy.

Few aspects of policy divide the Government more sharply from the Opposition than the countryside does. Few communities have experienced more Government hostility than those in rural areas. Few industries experiencing serious slump have been treated with less sympathy by the Government than farming has. Few generations have seen more of Britain's green and pleasant land go under the bulldozer than the current generation. Few Governments have displayed more contempt for rural traditions than the Labour Government have. Four more years of those attitudes, policies and decisions will inflict terrible damage on our countryside. I commend the motion to the House.

4.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"supports the Government's key priority to eradicate foot and mouth disease as quickly as possible; regrets that the Opposition has failed to notice the Government's recent announcement of an enhanced Farm Business Advisory Service which encourages farmers to

develop new income opportunities and an extension of the rate relief scheme to ensure further financial support to businesses in rural areas suffering most from the impact of FMD which will help councils to grant 100 per cent. rate relief to eligible small businesses up to the end of the year, as well as continuing other measures to help the rural economy to recover from the crisis; endorses the Government's commitment to rural communities as set out in the Rural White Paper and the England Rural Development Programme; applauds the Government's wider record on public service delivery in rural areas; and calls upon the Government to continue pursuing a strategy based on long term policies to regenerate British agriculture, improve rural services and revitalise the rural economy as a whole."

My Department is strongly committed to achieving sustainable development, dealing with economic, social and environmental issues together, and encouraging policies such as re-using and recycling materials. However, there is a balance to be struck, and I regret the Opposition's proclivity for re-using and recycling motions and debates in the House. It is precisely 10 sitting days since we held a debate in the aftermath of the Queen's Speech on a motion that raised almost exactly the same issues, in almost the same terms, that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) raises today.

The Opposition cannot sustain the argument that they have raised the matter again because nothing has changed in those 10 sitting days. Since the earlier debate we have launched a fresh campaign to remind everyone of the need for proper biosecurity. It has been spearheaded in regions of continuing outbreak by visits from multidisciplinary teams led by my Ministers. We have taken steps to tighten the precautions by consulting stakeholders in the farming community and hauliers and others who were involved in movement on and off farms.

During the debate on 26 June, we were urged to consider afresh any steps that could assist other businesses because of the deadline and the criteria for existing schemes such as rate relief. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced the Government's response this week. We accepted the need not only for continuing schemes of support but for wider eligibility criteria, for which there were calls in the debate.

Earlier this week, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary announced concrete plans for an extended scheme of business advice for farmers who are affected by the disease but beginning to plan for their future. Today, the Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Agriculture Ministers and I anticipate receiving advice from the Rural Payments Agency that the over-30-months scheme will be restarted on 23 July in Scotland, where rendering capacity will be free earliest, and a week later, on 30 July, in England and Wales. There are still some details to work out and throughput will inevitably be slow, especially in England, but it is welcome news to those who have been waiting for the resumption of the scheme.

As we tackle those issues, we continue to bear down on the disease and to focus with stakeholders on the shape of a sustainable future for agriculture in the context of a wider rural economy, which is beginning to experience the benefits of our rural development programme.

For the reasons that I have outlined, there is no valid justification for the Opposition's knee-jerk use of "neglect" to describe the Government's response. Even if no further steps had been taken in the short time since our previous debate, such criticism would be invalid as the Government have already committed some £800 million to £900 million to those farms where a cull has been necessary. In addition, some £300 million is being made available to other rural businesses. If that is neglect, what name should we attach to the previous Government's programme?

Listening to Conservative Members, one would believe that Britain's rural areas were a paradise of prosperity until the wicked Labour Government were elected only four years ago. What about all the schools, shops, bus services and post offices that disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s? Were people in the rural communities to blame for that? Did they fail? Is that the Opposition's argument? Unless they argue that individuals and communities whose businesses failed are to blame, how do they have the gall to charge us with neglect?

Between 1983 and 1997, an average of 30 village schools closed every year, post offices closed in rural and urban areas alike, a third of all villages were left with no local shop and three parishes in four with no daily bus service; yet the hon. Member for South Suffolk says, "It's terrible that there are such poor bus services because of the high fuel taxes imposed by the Government." Who instigated the high fuel taxes? The Conservative party.

In contrast, in the past year two village schools closed and a £40 million small schools support fund was established to raise standards in schools with fewer than 200 pupils. The hon. Gentleman acknowledged that the mandatory 50 per cent. rate relief has been extended to all village food shops as well as to all sole village pubs and petrol stations and new, small-scale, non-agricultural enterprises on farms. Other steps have been taken to protect post offices. There is an obligation to prevent the closure of rural post offices unless it is unavoidable. We have set out a rural development programme under the rural enterprise scheme.

Money and support are also available for agri-environmental and farm woodland schemes. Again, the hon. Member for South Suffolk suggested that not enough had been done, although the Government whom he supported and in which he briefly served took no advantage of such schemes. As for rural public transport, some 2,000 new or improved rural bus services have already been provided. The hon. Gentleman made remarks about brownfield and greenfield development. The Conservative party reduced the greenfield sites available in their last year in office, whereas, under the Labour Government, some 30,000 hectares—an area three times the size of Bristol—have been added to the green belt.

We have nothing for which to apologise to the Conservative party, and I have outlined only the record of delivery so far.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Margaret Beckett: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I welcome back to the House.

Alistair Burt: That is kind of the right hon. Lady, and I appreciate it. If she is not in the mood to apologise for the matter that she mentioned, is she aware that in the previous Parliament the number of press and publicity officers in Whitehall Departments increased so that they

[Alistair Burt]

now outnumber police officers in Bedfordshire? The number of police officers there fell in the last Parliament. Is she prepared to apologise to my constituents for that?

Margaret Beckett: I have some respect for the hon. Gentleman's past record. I hope he appreciates that I shall want to check his figures before I comment on them. Let me take a slightly different example, where I am familiar with the figures—I am not familiar with those that he cites. Conservative Members often claim that the number of civil servants in Whitehall has soared. The number of those who deal with the Government has fallen, whereas the number of police officers, customs officers, immigration officers and those who detect social security fraud has soared. Those people carry out policies that the Conservative party claim to support.

I have described our record and what we have already achieved. Of course, there is more to come: investment in the post office network, investment in the renewal of market towns under the rural White Paper, investment in affordable homes and investment not only in more transport, including rural bus services, but in a programme of support for the police. In a variety of ways, we are working to deliver a more prosperous future for the rural economy.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): If the Opposition want to bandy figures around, perhaps they can discuss the £20 billion of cuts that they proposed at the election, which would have cut a swathe through all the services that we are developing in rural areas.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Indeed, when the hon. Member for South Suffolk demanded expenditure on this, that and the other, it struck me that in the run-up to the general election the Conservative party complained we were extravagant and investing too much public money. As ever, that does not apply to any scheme that at any given moment it claims to support.

While we believe that we have the plans and the investment in place to deliver a more prosperous future for the rural economy in the longer term, there remains the pressing need to carry on fighting the disease outbreak, which continues to blight much of our countryside. I want to tell the House of the intensified campaign that we plan in order to bear down more heavily on that disease.

A campaign targeted on disease hot spots is under way, led by Ministers and supported by vets and scientists. It highlights the fact that biosecurity is crucial in bringing the outbreak to an end, not only for farmers but for the supply trade and those working for the Government on disease eradication.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): The campaign that the Secretary of State has touched on is welcomed by my constituents, but they are deeply concerned that the farmers who need the help are not the ones who are already disinfecting. Those who did not disinfect have been through the disease and now have the money, but, going forward, the welfare of the stock will be left to people who do not have the money. Would it not have been better if the money had gone to the farmers who have stock remaining?

Margaret Beckett: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and the concerns that are felt across the countryside. Depending on people's circumstances, they are differently affected and I understand the case he makes. Nevertheless, few if any of those farmers would want to have suffered an outbreak of disease or to have lost their flocks, and I know that that is not what he was suggesting.

We have taken steps to link biosecurity standards with the granting of livestock movement licences. We have agreed new arrangements with local authorities, which will be introduced from tomorrow, on requiring licence applicants to certify that they understand and will comply with the cleansing and disinfection rules and on issuing formal warnings where bad practice is found, leading to the withholding of licences if necessary. Local authorities will also seek better targeting of their enforcement efforts.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham) *rose—*

Margaret Beckett: If hon. Members will forgive me, I want to finish this section of my speech because the House will be interested to hear about the impact.

We are imposing tighter movement controls around new cases of the disease, focusing restrictions on the 10-km area around new cases and bringing movements in those areas to the absolute minimum for 30 days. I have more to say, but I give way first to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

Mr. Tyler: Does the Secretary of State recognise that, although it was understandable in the early days that responsibilities were confused, we are so many weeks into the crisis that it is inexcusable that trading standards departments and her Department seem to have different criteria for their disinfecting and movement licensing responsibilities? How can better co-ordination be ensured?

Margaret Beckett: I was not aware that such disparities were continuing. I say to the hon. Gentleman and every Member that, on this or any other issue that arises in observing biosecurity and treating the outbreak, my Department will be only too pleased to hear concrete examples of difficulties that Members believe are continuing to arise. We shall pursue and attempt to deal with them.

Mr. Atkinson: On movements, can the Secretary of State clear up a problem? Some time ago, she announced that movements from controlled to non-controlled areas would be relaxed, which meant that animals could be taken to more distant abattoirs. One problem with that is that her officials require that the vehicles involved should not stop on the journey. Drivers' hours regulations mean that they have to stop after four and a half hours, so, effectively, the relaxation is helping no farmers in the north-east of England.

Margaret Beckett: I am slightly surprised to hear that because that is a substantial amount of time. Again, if the

hon. Gentleman will be kind enough to give my Department details of particular cases that have come to his attention, we shall certainly consider the issue that he raises.

We shall seek the continued assistance and support of the National Farmers Union and other such groups to improve co-operation between the Department and farmers locally in carrying out culling on contiguous premises as quickly as possible. We are keen to continue to provide farmers with as much information as we can on what they need to do to have the best chance of continuing to avoid the disease and, in the unfortunate event of stock having to be destroyed, how they can help to protect their neighbours by working with the Department's staff at all times.

Looking further ahead, I am also examining ways to improve the incentives for farmers and others to maintain good biosecurity standards. The system that applies in the Netherlands, where levels of slaughter compensation are conditional on farm hygiene standards and other criteria, could not be introduced here immediately because it would require changes to the Animal Health Act 1981. However, it is an interesting idea that I want to consider and discuss with the farming industry and others as a possibility.

In the same context, I want to examine the arrangements for cleansing and disinfecting infected premises. We need to find ways to ensure that farmers and all who come on and off farms have an incentive to maintain high biosecurity standards. It is not entirely clear that the present system, whereby the taxpayer automatically picks up the entire cost of the cleansing and disinfection operation, is the best way to achieve that. I would like to discuss that with farming industry leaders.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the Secretary of State undertake to look into the case of my constituent, Mr. Lewis, who was told by her Department that he could move his cattle and apply for a licence? He was then told by the local vet that the Department was wrong and then told by a trading standards officer that the Department was right. Now the Department has admitted that it was wrong. Is it not vital that the Department gets the information right when it is dealing with people's livelihoods in a desperate crisis?

Margaret Beckett: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is right. It is important that people try to give correct information and I fully appreciate that nothing spreads more difficulty and confusion than people getting a conflicting story. Again, concrete examples brought to the attention of my Department will help to ensure that that happens as rarely as possible.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) *rose—*

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose—*

Margaret Beckett: If the hon. Gentlemen will forgive me, I must give way briefly as I am mindful of time and this is a short debate. I give way first to the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron).

Mr. Cameron: Will the right hon. Lady and her Department give careful consideration to the implications of foot and mouth for zoos and wildlife parks, such as the Cotswold wildlife park in my constituency? The park was badly affected by foot and mouth and had to close. It was not told exactly what to do when the disease broke out. It wanted a decision about vaccination, but no decision was made. It had a meeting with Ministers—the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) has now departed—but nothing seems to have been done.

I know that these issues are small in comparison with the farming industry as a whole, but they matter to wildlife parks and zoos. Should they not be considered, not only by the right hon. Lady's Department but in the full independent public inquiry that the Government ought to establish?

Mr. Llwyd *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I think that, for the sake of good order, the Secretary of State should deal with the first intervention now, and perhaps respond to the hon. Gentleman later.

Margaret Beckett: I shall do so if that is your preference, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that it is sometimes convenient for a couple of interventions to be dealt with together.

I have taken on board the point made by the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron). If we can add anything to what has already been said, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs will deal with it—but this is exactly the kind of issue that we need to look at in the future, irrespective of the form taken by examination of these events.

Mr. Llwyd: May I ask the right hon. Lady to ensure that there will be no further confusion between officials from the Department and officials from the devolved Administration in Cardiff? It has been the devil of a job to obtain correct information, and the problems have been exacerbated by the Department's saying that this is a devolved matter while those in Cardiff have said that it is a matter for the Department. The right hon. Lady's predecessor could not answer a number of the questions either. I am not sniping; I am genuinely asking the right hon. Lady whether the lines of demarcation can be made clear, so that the problems are not exacerbated further.

Margaret Beckett: I assure the hon. Gentleman that our aim is always to maintain clear demarcation lines, clear understanding and clear agreement between us and the devolved bodies. As he knows, my right hon. Friend the Minister is an expert in these matters. He will certainly encourage productive liaison and relationships.

The farming industry and other sections of the rural economy are likely to face further severe difficulties in the autumn, when traditionally there are a large number of livestock movements. However successful we are in bringing the tail of the outbreak to a halt in July or August, there will still be a need for substantial controls over movement of livestock in the autumn and winter to ensure that we keep a grip on the disease, given that undisclosed disease could still be present in the national sheep flock at that time. The more speedily we eradicate the disease, the sooner we can consider greater flexibility of movement.

[Margaret Beckett]

The Government are working hard with industry representatives to plan for the autumn, to establish what movements could take place without an unacceptable increase in disease risk. I hope to be able to say more later this month. At the same time, we are assessing the implications of the likely restrictions in autumn livestock movements for support arrangements in the livestock sector and have had preliminary discussions, which are continuing, with farming leaders.

We shall be using the increased capacity available for serological testing of sheep to continue to the staged clearance of infected areas, alongside a planned approach to testing in disease hot spots. That is designed to help us obtain a better picture of the level of disease in sheep in particular ahead of the autumn livestock movements, and also to make it easier for us to demonstrate to our European Union partners, in due course, that we have a basis for the phased resumption of exports.

Let me say in parentheses that although much is said in the House about how the Government have not done enough or not done it fast enough by those who wish solely to impute blame to the Government, enormous credit is due to all involved in the hugely increased capacity for serological testing, given its scope for tackling the disease. I speak from memory, but I believe that when the disease broke out we had the capacity to run about 400 tests a week. We have now reached the 100,000 mark or thereabouts, and are heading for a target of between 140,000 and 180,000 by the autumn, probably by October. As I have said, enormous credit is due for that, but it has not always been forthcoming.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Margaret Beckett: Yes, for the very last time.

Paddy Tipping: My right hon. Friend has just looked forward to the autumn. Will she look forward a little further? Given the crisis in agriculture that has been happening over a number of years, and the hunger for change that this particular crisis has caused stakeholders in the countryside, can she say a word about the independent commission on food and farming that is currently envisaged?

Margaret Beckett: I can say a word, but it will not be much more than that. I can certainly confirm that the Government have every intention of setting up such a commission and are in continuing discussions about it. I agree that there is a hunger for a more sustained and thorough look at the long-term prospects for the countryside and the agriculture industry, and I assure my hon. Friend that we are more than anxious to foster the debate that is taking place.

We are working closely with our European partners, especially the Commission. Jim Scudamore, the chief veterinary officer, and David Hunter, director of the departmental agriculture group, will be in Brussels tomorrow to update the Commission on what we are doing to eradicate the disease, and to discuss the difficulties that we shall face in the autumn.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Beckett: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I really ought to finish as this is a very short debate.

We have always said that there will be an inquiry when the outbreak is over and that it will be thorough but not long drawn out. We all want to get at the facts and to identify what could have been done better, but also to identify what was handled extremely well—although the exact nature and form of the inquiry remain, as ever, a matter for the Prime Minister

Without prejudice to the issue of an inquiry, we have also always said that there are lessons to be learned from the epidemic, including on disease control policy for future outbreaks. We need to consider the case for better animal identification, especially for sheep, improved movement records, the possibility of controls on the movement of cattle and sheep, as there are already for pigs, and stronger controls on the import of meat. My Department is already co-ordinating a cross-Whitehall initiative to improve activity in this regard. In the longer term we need to look at better biosecurity by markets, dealers and farmers. The Commission has announced a review that will cover some, if not all, of these issues and we are helping to organise a conference in Brussels in the autumn to provide a forum for discussing future foot and mouth disease policy options, including vaccination.

I acknowledge the real problems in rural areas, from the immediate consequences and aftermath of the disease to the long-standing deterioration in rural services over which the Conservative party presided with so much complacency for so long. We are not complacent. We are determined to work with all who have real concern for rural areas to deliver real, long-term improvement. It is on that, not on the empty rhetoric of Opposition Members, that in time we shall be prepared to be judged.

4.56 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am sorry that the Secretary of State could not give way, but I appreciate the time pressures. I have a number of questions to ask and I certainly hope that the Minister for Rural Affairs, will endeavour to answer them in detail.

As the debate is entitled "The Countryside in Crisis" we can acknowledge that the fact that the countryside has been in a near permanent state of crisis in recent years is why the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had to go. Unfortunately, so far—I stress, so far—there is little evidence that the new super-Department has yet undergone a cultural transformation. Indeed, wherever I go people tell me that, under a new name, MAFF lives. Most of us want to see it die. Crisis management remains the over-riding characteristic.

The tragedy is that after the disasters of BSE, the collapse of the pig market and lower grain prices, farming was just beginning to get back on its feet when it was hit by the foot and mouth epidemic. We cannot avoid facing up to the fact that for many years under successive

Governments we have dangerously lowered our defences against monitoring and controlling the spread of disease. So far we have had only crisis response to deal with the situation.

The number of vets in Government service has undoubtedly been reduced. The independence of much of the advice available to Government has been compromised because most of the institutions have been forced to bid for commercial contracts alongside their Government work. As a result it is extremely difficult for those in pursuit of commercial contracts always to give advice that might be required but could prejudice their ability to attract new contracts. I hope that the new Department will address that.

In a crisis an urgent response is needed. Farmers everywhere are understandably becoming anxious about the scale of livestock movement restrictions. The Secretary of State gave some indication of changes to the restrictions, but also made it clear that the restrictions would continue into the autumn and winter. What honest prospect does she have of a timetable for reopening export opportunities? If that does not happen in a few months, we shall have to address yet another crisis. Ministers must be aware that a general 20-day restriction on movements is unworkable for many farms and a more flexible approach is needed.

I hope that in the inquiry the Government will not only look at movement restrictions and vaccination options, but will also consider the possible role of quarantine in dealing with animal disease. There is scope for building that into a system in a way that we have not done to date.

Right now, many sheep farmers face ruin if the ban on sheep exports remains in force during the autumn. In my part of the UK, it is estimated that up to 70 per cent. of the lambs produced are dedicated for export, mainly to France. I am sure that Ministers will understand that, despite the fact that we in the north of Scotland have, to date, remained a foot and mouth free zone, if that market is closed the consequences will be disastrous. Will Ministers consider the introduction of a welfare scheme for unmarketable ewes and lambs? Will they also seek private storage aid for the thousands of tonnes of lamb that currently have no market? At the start of the outbreak, I suggested that such measures would be necessary and, as the months go by, they become more and more urgent. I am concerned that Ministers do not yet appear even to have opened discussions. I hope that they will do so.

The area that I represent is also a major pig-producing region: half the pigs raised in Scotland are produced in the north-east of Scotland. Like areas throughout the country, we have seen a dramatic reduction in the number of pigs due to the market difficulties, although they were just beginning to resolve themselves when the crisis struck. Indeed, some operators had got back into profit for the first time in two or three years only a month or two before the disease struck.

At the start of the epidemic, the market for cast sows was inevitably lost, because 90 per cent. of them went to the plant where the outbreak was first discovered. The problem is that there is no effective market for cast sows. Will the Government consider a welfare scheme for culled sows? It will be urgently needed.

The House will realise that I represent a quality livestock area, so there is no livestock sector that is not important to the north-east of Scotland—as is the case in many parts of the UK. I was pleased by the Secretary of State's announcement of the reintroduction of the over-30-months scheme on 23 July in Scotland and on 30 July in England and Wales. That will remove one uncertainty that has been worrying many producers. It may be a forlorn question, but will the Minister for Rural Affairs tell us whether there will be any consideration of the extra costs incurred by those farmers who have to retain cattle for several months? They have to feed cattle which have no productive use, so it would be proper to expect additional compensation to be allowed for animals which have—to use a colloquialism—been eating their heads off.

We have been living with the effects of BSE for a long time. My strong concern is that the beef export regime is unworkable and that it is unfair to British producers. I have raised this matter in the House previously: technically, we have lifted the ban, but, practically, we have not. As the number of BSE cases in the UK continues to decline, while it is still rising on the continent, it is time for the Government to press for a standard EU-wide regime that will at last enable prime British and Scottish beef once again to reach tables throughout the world. Let us not deceive ourselves: that is not happening at present.

I pray in aid a lady who deals in meat in northern Italy; she rejoices in the name of Francesca Piccolini. She said that throughout the period of the beef export ban she had scoured the world looking for beef of the quality that she had imported from Scotland, but that she had conspicuously failed to find anything of such quality. We can still produce that quality beef and get it on to the table—even in the House of Commons, where the beef supplied is produced in my constituency. However, we cannot put beef of that quality on the table of foreign purchasers because the regime does not allow us to do so. That is absurd and must be addressed. I hope that Ministers agree.

Of course we require a full public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. I agree with the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) that we must press the Government hard on that point. I remain dissatisfied when I am told that we have to leave it to the Prime Minister, who will ensure that there is a proper inquiry—whatever that is—when the outbreak is over, even though we do not know when that will be.

I understand the argument that an inquiry cannot be started perhaps until the outbreak has finished, but it would help if we knew what kind of inquiry it will be, that it will be public—we have had no such assurance—and who may submit evidence to it. I find it odd that the Government do not recognise that that is probably in their own interest, given the rumours circulating that suggest that there is even Government complicity in the spread of food and mouth disease—nothing that I accept, but Ministers must know that it is being said. Surely it is in the Government's interest to make it clear now what form the inquiry will take.

The catalogue of disaster clearly shows that a fundamental review of our approach to disease control is required. Our defences have been lowered under successive Governments, and we need to address the extent to which the reduction in the number of vets, the compromised research institutions and the cuts in customs

[Malcolm Bruce]

control have contributed to the increasing problems of disease, and to find out what needs to be done to put it right.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The hon. Gentleman refers to disease control, but what is the official Liberal Democrat policy on vaccination? He will be aware that Lord Greaves, who speaks for the Liberal Democrats in the other place, has called for immediate vaccination, but I am not entirely sure if that is the hon. Gentleman's policy.

Malcolm Bruce: It might be Lord Greaves's policy. The policy on vaccination has been recognised; it is an agreed international policy, to which we have signed up. Indeed, I have said on several occasions that the policy cannot be changed half way through a crisis. I certainly think that vaccination should be considered, but it would have been quite wrong to change the policy mid-term. I have also said that the role that quarantine could play should be considered. A public inquiry should look into those issues—that is what it is for.

Common sense tells me, and it should tell the House, that the rundown in the quality, availability and volume of advice for the Government has been a factor in our problems, and we should consider what we need to do to raise our defences once again, to ensure that we can monitor and control disease penetration into this country. Frankly, our ability to establish public confidence internally and any significant export operations in the long term depend on our being able to reassure people that we have the matter under control, and we patently have not had it under control for the past 10 years or more.

I want to press home a point made by the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), who asked the Minister—he did not get much of a reply—about the rural commission. It was a Labour manifesto pledge. It was set out as though it was a radical cultural change and, indeed, a justification for the creation of a new Department. Six weeks have passed since the election and we are getting no information—

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Six weeks and it has not been done!

Malcolm Bruce: Not only has nothing been done, but we have not been told how and when it will be done and who will be involved. There is plenty of speculation outside the House about the rural commission. One such speculation is that it will be entirely an internal Government commission, that it will not involve outside consultation, that it will be by Lord Haskins and that it will report by the autumn. If that is not true, will the Government tell us what is true, and then we shall all know what we are working with. In the interests of the Government who say that they wish to engage, how on earth can Opposition politicians or those in the wider community contribute to such an operation if they do not know its format and timetable? Why are the Government so coy? It would be helpful if Ministers would give us a little more information than they have so far.

Some useful experience is emerging from Scotland, which has had a Rural Affairs Department—at the Liberal Democrats' insistence—for two years. In the past two weeks, my Liberal Democrat colleague, Scotland's Minister for Rural Development, Mr. Ross Finnie, has produced a useful forward strategy for Scottish agriculture that contains some valuable pointers. Particularly welcome is the rebalancing of £70 million in recognition of the fact that farmers need to diversify their income base. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary jeers, but his own party endorses and supports those proposals, which could usefully be adopted by a new Department.

The suggestion is that farmers should be able to apply for funding to support not just farming operations, but environmental management, tourism and other business projects that can generate income and employment opportunities. That approach has also been reinforced by Liberal Democrat Members of the European Parliament in their review of the common agricultural policy. Co-ordination and clarification of the relationship between the Department headed by the Secretary of State and the Departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be helpful.

I shall give a constituency example. A rendering plant in my constituency operates to a rather poor standard and that generates many complaints and much trouble. However, when we complain to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, we are told that it is powerless to enforce controls because it has been told by DEFRA that the overriding responsibility is to process and render the consequences of foot and mouth. That may be the case, but environmental standards should not be compromised at the same time. Who is calling the shots? Why cannot we have both effective rendering management and good environmental standards?

The Scottish strategy also recognises the need for UK-wide and EU-wide initiatives on livestock movements, which I have mentioned; on a scheme for establishing traceability in sheep, which is clearly difficult but desirable; on eradicating scrapie; on reducing the number of transactions involving live animals; and on buy-out schemes for farmers approaching retirement. They are all useful initiatives and I hope that they will be the subject of genuine debate. A commission could usefully consider them, and practices being developed in Scotland could inform that process.

If we are considering a holistic approach to rural services and to the rural economy—something that the hon. Member for South Suffolk was anxious to stress—more vision will be needed. We tabled an amendment to the motion, because simply cataloguing the problems does not take us very far. It is important that we find ways of moving forward.

It is true that post offices continue to close and are doing so at an accelerating rate. Transport services are also under threat. The Secretary of State said that 2,000 new bus services had been introduced, but I presume that she meant in England or in England and Wales. In Aberdeenshire, 1,600 services were withdrawn last month because Stagecoach, which is suffering from the losses on the railways, felt unable to sustain them and the local authority was quite incapable of finding the money to keep more than a fraction of them going. We are not moving forwards, but back.

Community hospitals in rural areas are under review and, in many cases, rural authorities do not have the resources to pick up the pieces. The Secretary of State also said that there had been only two school closures—

presumably in England—but there was one in my constituency in the last 12 months. It took place under a Labour chair of education and was approved by a Labour Education Minister despite the highly dubious case made.

When services are cut and closures take place in rural areas, no one takes responsibility for the transfer costs to the citizens living in those areas. Agencies say that they cannot sustain the cost of a service, so they close it down and they pass the cost to people in rural areas to pick up. The Government should consider requiring any agency to capitalise that cost and for it to be taken into account before any closure goes ahead. That might very well alter many of the decisions made.

The irony is that more and more people are moving into the countryside when services are diminishing. That is madness. We need a moratorium on the reduction in services and we need—I hope that we will get it—a radical approach in the new Department to rural policy and services. However, it would help if Ministers could provide us with some answers before the House rises for the summer

5.13 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome the opportunity to say a few words in the debate and I very much welcome the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The new Department can successfully bring together countryside interests in a forward-looking way and an environmentally sustainable way. Both aspects are important. The new Department should certainly see agriculture as part of the wider rural economy and in the wider context at regional, national and European levels. That is vital if agriculture is to recover from the foot and mouth disaster.

I do not intend to concentrate on the foot and mouth crisis, however. That is not because I do not consider it serious, because it obviously is; nor is it because I am not prepared to defend what my colleagues and I did in the previous Ministry. Indeed, I welcome the inquiry and believe that some of its findings will place the Department in a good light. However, given the scale of the disaster and the stark differences between the recent outbreak and that of 1967, about which I have spoken several times, it will certainly be true that not everything was handled perfectly,

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Farmers in my constituency are usually very critical of Ministers, but they have paid tribute to the work of the right hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown) while they were office. I thank her for meeting my constituents during the outbreak to discuss their problems and remind her that at such a meeting she expressed sympathy for those who had to experience the burial of carcases in vast quantities at Widdrington. She said that the Government needed to recognise their contribution when forming future policy. Is she still of that view?

Joyce Quin: Indeed I am. The right hon. Gentleman's constituents made a strong case. That site is located in a part of the country that has experienced many environmental problems over a long period. I thank him for his kind words. It is my experience that one is paid more compliments on leaving government than as a Minister in government. None the less, I am grateful for his comments.

I want to consider the future of farming and agriculture. By contrast with the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), Labour Members are of the view that farming has an important future. Food production is agriculture's role first and foremost. I believe that the British farming industry can supply a good proportion of our food requirements, and that applies both to meat products and to the fruit and vegetables that are produced by our horticulture sector. No doubt we will continue to import products that we cannot produce ourselves, but I hope that we can rebuild our export markets.

Labelling is important and I do not accept the Conservatives' criticisms of the Government on that. Country of origin labelling, which exists for fruit and vegetables and some meat, is an important aspect of giving consumers information and allowing them to make an informed choice. I hope that Ministers will continue the work of the previous Department in stressing concerns about labelling at a European level and by increasing the amount of clear and accurate information that consumers across the single market can expect.

Marketing schemes are important to help farmers add value to their products. As a Minister, I was struck by some of the successful marketing schemes, such as the fell-bred marketing brand in the Lake district. Successful work on branding has also been carried out in Scotland, Wales and parts of England. Those schemes help to build consumer loyalty to brands and often help them to buy regional and local produce, which is often a good trend.

I was also much taken by the growth in the regional and speciality food market. I pay tribute to some of the regional food organisations, in particular Taste of the West, which has a good record in promoting regional foods in the south-west and winning markets much further afield. Co-operation along the food chain is important, and for that reason I hope that the code of practice, which will mean that supermarkets treat their suppliers reasonably and fairly, will work. I am sure that those of us who are interested in these issues will be keen to monitor its operation in the weeks and months ahead.

The role that agriculture plays in countryside and environment issues must be taken fully into account. When we are looking at the relationship between farming and the environment, we must consider things like support for organic farming. I believe that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), has been taking part in a debate on organic farming in Westminster Hall. I know that he personally has a long-standing commitment to that sector, and that the Government have considerably increased the funding for organic farming.

Happily, the Government have expanded the countryside stewardship schemes, which go back several years, and it is important that they continue to do so. We must recognise that there are parts of conventional farming that are much more environmentally sensitive than they used to be. I think of the programme linking the environment and farming—known as LEAF—and of the fact that much modern farming equipment is able, even when it is applying pesticides, to target crops much more sensitively than in the past. Developments in conventional farming are making it more environmentally benign. All those issues will continue to be important.

[Joyce Quin]

I strongly believe that the regional dimension is important to the future of agriculture in our country. That is why I welcome the fact that MAFF, now DEFRA, has appointed staff to the Government regional offices to ensure that agriculture is fully factored into regional economic strategies. We need to consider the role that agriculture can play in exploiting and developing the economic potential of the different regions. I hope that the regional development agencies will give full weight to agriculture in their strategies and exploit as effectively as possible the links between rural and urban areas and between farming and food industry jobs. Regional economic growth and jobs will depend on such initiatives, which will be enormously helpful to the future of agriculture.

No speech about the future of agriculture would be complete without a reference to the common agricultural policy, and indeed the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) referred to it in his contribution. The policy is still in need of profound change, but the prospects for that change are better than they have ever been. The CAP is not appropriate in the present circumstances, because it supports certain agriculture sectors and not others.

The policy has been slow to reform, so it has tended to be backward looking and only with great difficulty can it withstand pressures from the World Trade Organisation and enlargement of the European Union, as well as pressures for greater compatibility between environmental protection and agriculture policies. As I said, however, the prospects for change are greater than ever before; certainly, a helpful start was made with the development of the second pillar of the policy, the rural development regulation. That has allowed the introduction of schemes that are more flexible in their support of agriculture sectors and more forward looking on the subject of how farmers can add value to their products.

The changes agreed, especially at the time of the Berlin summit, are helpful, and we have seen in the European Council of Ministers that an increasing number of Europe's Agriculture Ministers take a more forward-looking and reformist approach to the common agricultural policy; the change in Germany is particularly positive. During my last months as a Minister at MAFF, I was aware of the growing number of allies that the UK Government were gathering in relation to agricultural reform.

It will be important that the UK Government protect British interests and make sure that any new rules that emerge from the proposed changes do not give unfair advantage to one party or another. However, I believe that the UK Government are excellently placed to build alliances with like-minded countries, so I conclude by wishing my colleagues every success in that important task of reform.

5.25 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), and to speak in a debate briefly attended by my old comrade the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who has now left the Chamber. He defeated me soundly in 1997, so living up to his nickname of "Jones the Vote", and it is a great honour to share the Chamber with him now.

As is conventional in maiden speeches, I pay tribute to my predecessor. As many in south Oxfordshire and elsewhere have not hesitated to point out, Michael Heseltine is a hard act to follow, so I approach this moment with much the same sense of self-doubt as Simba in "The Lion King". For the benefit of those who have not seen Walt Disney's film, there is a poignant moment when Simba, following Mufasa across the veld, compares his own paws with the vast pawprints left by that great beast; such are my feelings today. I have no arboretum in south Oxfordshire, merely a sort of lop-sided laurel. I struggle to run one magazine, whereas Michael told me that at the last count he had 267. He served the people of south Oxfordshire well for 26 years and in that time he was one of the biggest figures on our political landscape.

As Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael liberated millions from the captivity of state-owned and state-controlled housing. When some Members of Parliament were unilateralist, he stood out against a Soviet menace that is now almost forgotten and played his part in the end of the cold war. He worked tirelessly in the 1980s for the people of Liverpool and other deprived areas, and in so far as there is a Canary wharf—Hezzagrad, as people call the great city that has arisen in the docklands—it is thanks to his energy and drive. It is fair to say that we did not agree on every detail of European policy, but far more united us than divided us. Even when Michael was Deputy Prime Minister, he was, it is acknowledged everywhere in south Oxfordshire, an excellent constituency Member of Parliament—and what a constituency it is.

There might be some present who are under the impression that Henley is merely the town of Henley, so it might be helpful if I give them a little guided tour. Suppose one is travelling on the M40; just before junction 6, one suddenly comes to that dramatic cutting—the Khyber pass of the Chilterns—where ahead, spread out like a land of dreams, is the plain of south Oxfordshire. That, roughly speaking, is my constituency. That is the view that Jude the Obscure saw when, on that spot, he dreamed of education: far in the distance on a clear day one can just make out the spires of the ancient university town, now in need of some protection from senior figures in the Labour Government. Away to the south, one sees the Whittenham clumps, which were famously painted by Constable, and the towers of Didcot power station, which were not.

If, unlike Jude, one turns south at junction 6, one comes to the small town of Watlington, with its first-rate fish and chip shop and venerable town hall. One would not want to have a car crash in Watlington because, apart from anything else, the Government have closed the local cottage hospital—a fate that has befallen many cottage hospitals throughout the country. Labour Members will of course be delighted to know that the hospital is now likely to be rebuilt, thanks to an enormous concerted private initiative taken by the people of the area. I do not know whether that is in accordance with Government policy these days—it is hard to tell—but let us hope so.

Even if one were not injured in that car crash, one would certainly not want one's car to be out of action for very long in Watlington. One might have an urgent appointment in Thame to the north but not want to stump up for the petrol. Let us not be under any illusions—many of my constituents find it very difficult to afford petrol these days, as my hon. Friend the Member for South

Suffolk was saying. Someone might want to use the bus. I have news for the House: one can get a bus from Watlington to Thame only on Tuesdays and come back only on Saturdays—but let us suppose that, one way or another, one succeeds in doing so.

People will find in Thame a vibrant town that holds regular busy farmers' markets of the kind that the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West was describing—and wonderful events they are. The farmers will say how badly affected they have been by foot and mouth, how fast their incomes have been falling and how much they depend on such occasions to market their produce. They will also say, I am afraid to report to the House, how disappointed they are that there was not more in the Queen's Speech about rural affairs than the promise to ban hunting.

Armed with some produce from the farmers' market, one might meander south. Let us suppose that one gets a bit lost. If one is lucky, one will end up at a place called Ewelme—it has a claim to be the centre of English literature and language, as Chaucer's niece is buried there—where a wonderful pub called the Shepherd's Hut, selling very good ale and food, is to be found. It is doing very well, unlike many other pubs in the area that are not so lucky and, as hon. Members will know, have been closing in great numbers.

One reason for such closures is that people are of course worried about drink driving and the punitive measures taken by the police. I of course support all measures to deter reckless driving, but want in my maiden speech to make one legislative proposal. The Chancellor, who I am disappointed to say is not present, should offer a tax break to Brakspear's 2.5, which is a newly developed beer that I have sampled and which I assure the House is utterly delicious. One can drink three pints of it without coming near exceeding the limit. It would be very good if it were taxed at an appropriate rate, thereby encouraging sobriety when driving and helping local pubs that are otherwise closing at such a rate. Those who have the Chancellor's ear may be inclined to pass that on to him.

Thus fortified, one passes through many scenic villages in south Oxfordshire. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk has pointed out, such places have already suffered the closure of post offices and many varieties of unsuspected rural hardship. Eventually, one arrives in Henley, the town that gives its name to my constituency. It is of course famous for its regatta and bringing back a great haul of gold from the recent Sydney olympics, thereby doing something to redress the Chancellor's recent wanton disposal of bullion on the markets. Henley is of course also this week the scene of a most wonderful festival, which I commend to all Members.

Not everywhere in my constituency is as lucky as Henley. There are pockets of genuine deprivation, problems of poverty and problems of prosperity. For every affluent estate agent in south Oxfordshire—and there are quite a few—there are dozens, if not hundreds, of young people who cannot afford housing in the area and whose needs must be attended to.

I want to explain why I am in politics and sought election. We always say in our pious way that we want to make a difference, to do out bit for our country. Of course that is true; I hope that the House will not mind if I offer it that piety. It is perhaps especially true for someone who spent a lot of time sitting in the Press Gallery—I am not supposed to mention that place; I hope that hon. Members will forgive the solecism—as a journalist. I do not condemn those who have taken the socialist view—I do not know whether they are still socialists—and do not condemn those who have believed in socialism. I can see why they do, and why they are motivated to root out injustice and build a better a society. However, I think that Conservatism offers a better and broader understanding of human nature, which is why it has been so successful over the past 200 years and why it is now sedulously imitated.

There is a hidden wisdom in old ways of doing things. If you get the state off people's backs and allow them to get on with their lives, not only will they be more contented, broadly speaking, but they will generate more of the wealth that society will always need to help the poorest and those who genuinely cannot help themselves. That is one-nation Toryism; it is a wholly reasonable creed. If I have one criticism of the framing of the motion—of course, I do not—it is that we have talked too much as if there is a great insulation between the crisis in the countryside and metropolitan England and London. The simple fact is that yesterday's newspapers show that musicals are closing in London because of the foot and mouth crisis.

The crisis in the countryside affects everyone. I make that point for the first time in the House as Member for Henley; I am proud to be given the chance to make it again, as I shall on behalf of all my constituents in the months and years ahead.

5.36 pm

David Hamilton (Midlothian): I do not intend to attempt to try to follow the entertainment that we have just had, but, as a socialist, I congratulate the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on his contribution and his tribute to his predecessor. If I remember rightly, his predecessor closed 32 pits throughout Britain and had a hairstyle not unlike that of the hon. Gentleman. I shall see with interest how we can work together on a number of issues over the next four or five years.

I shall make one or two observations about comments that have been made about the countryside in crisis, before going on to the main part of my maiden speech. As a councillor in Midlothian—there are 17 Labour members on the council and one Liberal Democrat—I had meetings with farmers and others, as I represented a semi-rural area. It is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that we all need to work together. We rise and fall together; it is not about one community as opposed to another community. Foot and mouth has highlighted that in many ways.

I have recently been meeting farmers, who have raised the same issues as those raised by the Opposition. The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) talked about how high council tax is; a tenant farmer who lived in a big mansion complained to me that he had to pay council tax, but never had the opportunity to own the house because he was a tenant farmer. Such complaints are made, but we should remember that the Government helped badly paid farm workers by establishing the minimum wage, giving them some of the biggest increases that they have ever had. We should remember that it is not just about the farmers, but the farm workers who reside in the countryside and have to look after farms.

[David Hamilton]

In addition, I am pleased that we work well with people from the borders. We shall work with hon. Members from the borders to promote the Waverley line, which is extremely important in opening up the countryside. It is important that we start to look at developing the countryside's economic base.

It is a great honour to speak in the House as a representative of my home county of Midlothian, the place of my birth and, of course, the constituency of a man whom some may remember, W. E. Gladstone, Midlothian's most prominent politician to date, who made his mark in Parliament. Since its early years Midlothian has undergone many changes in size and population. Since the war there have been four Labour Members of Parliament: David Pryde, James Hill, Alex Eadie and, of course, my predecessor, Eric Clarke. They all had one thing in common: they were all from a mining background. Alex Eadie will be remembered by some in this place as Under-Secretary of State for Energy between 1974 and 1979. He spent 21 years in the House and did not forget his roots. He was followed by my predecessor, Eric Clarke.

As it is the custom of the House, I shall say a few words about Eric, who came to this place in 1992. I believe that his contribution was a good one, and not only because he successfully introduced a private Member's Bill or because he was a junior Whip for a period. I believe that being a Whip would have suited him. He was commonly thought of as rather a grumpy person, but having known him for more than 30 years I can assure the House that Mr. Grumpy had a soft centre. Indeed, in the last Prime Minister's Question Time of the previous Parliament, I saw the then hon. Member for Midlothian thanking all Members for their friendship, and that was sincere. I hope that the House will join me in wishing Eric a long and happy retirement.

The House will remember that Eric raised the question of a group of workers, and I to pledge to carry the banner forward. I refer to victimised miners—an issue that is still a running sore after 17 years. I believe that the Government have made some progress with the repeal of parts of trade union legislation. They have made major changes to enable thousands of workers to claim industrial compensation, having recognised the contribution that they made over the years. They are the first Government to do so.

Workers, including miners, and their families have been able to claim. They have received benefit for vibration white finger. Thousands of miners and widows and their families are receiving millions of pounds through chronic obstructive pulmonary restriction funding, although it has taken too long for some of the payments to be made. That is a major change and a major improvement to the lives of many people throughout Scotland and, indeed, Britain.

Good people such as Alex Bennet, James Hogg, Robert Hogg, Michael Hogg, Arthur Blackhurst, Billy Anderson, George Laing, Jimmy Lennie and George Purcell are only a few of the 206 Scottish miners who were sacked during the 1984–85 strike. Many have returned to work. Unfortunately, all too many did not get the opportunity to do so. It is already too late for some, such as my good friend Dyett Murdoch, who has since passed away, but their families are still looking for justice.

There were many casualties during the dispute. There have been 17 long years for Britain's sacked miners and their families. They lost not only redundancy payments but, more importantly, some of them lost their pension rights. If Members are wondering why I feel so strongly, it is because I am one of the sacked Midlothian miners—there were 46 at Monktonhall colliery, 36 at Bilston Glen colliery and five at Newbattle workshops. I am proud to be a victimised miner, and to be the first to enter Parliament. The phrase "down but not out" comes to mind when I say that. I am proud also to carry the banner on behalf of miners and their families.

I hope that the House will agree that 17 years is long enough. We should have a cross-party agreement to right the wrong. I remind Conservative Members that even after the dispute up to 10 Tories signed petitions to the effect that the miners should have been reinstated after the dispute.

On a more upbeat note, over the last decade mining has declined and Midlothian has changed dramatically. Thousands were employed in only a dozen industries, and now dozens are employed in 1,000 industries. That shows that small micro industries have developed throughout the area.

The old industries may have gone, but they still play a significant role. An example is Monktonhall, the colliery where I used to work. The council has commissioned studies into the use of warm water from old mine workings to provide energy for 4,000 houses and industrial units in the largest greenfield development site in Scotland. Essentially, a mine water heat pump would pump water that had been geothermally heated from the bottom of the mine. The water would then be circulated to consumers and returned to the mine, where it would be reheated. If the heat pumps were operated using a green source of electricity, the heat delivered would be truly renewable energy without any greenhouse gas emissions. This renewable energy requires a capital investment, perhaps from one of the funds that have been announced by the Government, and a commitment from the developers to provide the appropriate infrastructure.

Finally, one of the most exciting challenges in Midlothian comes from biotechnology. Hon. Members will have heard of Dolly. We are in the process of combining research and manufacturing in Midlothian with the development of the Gowkley Moss land acquisition, to which I look forward. As a councillor, I have asked the director of education to work closely with our six secondary schools and the local college and universities to support employment opportunities in biotechnology, which now employs more than 1,000 people in the locality.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House for the kindness shown to me as a new Member. I have no doubt that that will be shortlived, thanks to the Opposition and some of those on the Government Front Bench, when I start to express my views. I have been given a great privilege by the people of Midlothian, and I shall do everything in my power to repay that privilege.

We are at the beginning of a new millennium. As we meet the new challenges, I hope that we will not forget the values for which many of us came into politics—free education, a free health service and support for the weak in our society, for those who are disabled and for our

elderly. I feel sure that when we say that we are the fourth largest economy in the world, those people will benefit, along with all of us, and not just a few.

5.45 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): It may seem presumptuous for me, as I am about to make my own maiden speech, to start by congratulating the hon. Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) and my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on theirs—two excellent speeches, giving in their own way a vignette of their parts of the world, which the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend will clearly represent so ably in Parliament.

Anyone with political aspirations has rehearsed the moment of their maiden speech many times over. I am sure that I can rely on the indulgence of the House in making mine. The full terror of the occasion crosses the political divide.

It is the custom in a maiden speech to refer to those who have gone before. Even if that were not the case, I should anyway want to start my speech by paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir Peter Emery, who is well known to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to others in the House.

Sir Peter's political career, which was lengthy, began with the ritual blooding of fighting so-called unwinnable seats—in his case, Poplar, which he contested in 1951, and Lincoln in 1955. Unsuccessful but undeterred, like so many of us, he went on to win Reading by 3,942 votes from Ian Mikardo. He represented Reading from 1959—incidentally, the year in which I was born—until 1966, when he lost to John Lee by just over 4,000 votes. In 1967 Sir Peter succeeded Robert Mathew in a by-election as the Member for what was then the Honiton division, with a majority of 16,000. In 1997, following boundary changes, the major part of that seat became East Devon, which Sir Peter represented until the election.

Sir Peter's record is one of unstinting service to his constituents and to the House. He was, I believe, an important influence on the Modernisation Committee, and I know that the House found his advice, based on many years of parliamentary experience, to be of enormous help. His retirement is truly a loss to the House.

The House's loss is my gain, and I stand here humble and honoured to have been chosen as Sir Peter's successor to represent East Devon, which can lay claim to be one of the most beautiful parts of our countryside. From the River Exe in the west to the borders of Dorset in the east, it includes the coastal resorts of Exmouth, whose foundations lie in Roman times and which was originally a busy fishing village but is now more of a tourist resort; Budleigh Salterton, which takes its name from the salt pans that were used to collect local salt for preserving by the monks at nearby Otterton priory; and Hayes Barton, birthplace of that great Elizabethan explorer, Sir Walter Raleigh who, I suppose, in his own way did so much for the tobacco industry and who, if alive today, would almost certainly have just returned from an overseas trip promoting his product. Incidentally, I hope that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will support me in my ambition to relocate his statue from Raleigh green in Whitehall to his birthplace in East Budleigh.

The charming seaside town of Sidmouth, near which I live, with its Regency terraces and villas, was immortalised by Sir John Betjeman. The small village of Beer was once famed for fishing and smuggling. The waiting women made lace there and so contributed to the foundation of the Honiton lace industry. Seaton, where the Romans landed and the Fosse way started, and nearby Axmouth, which is thought to be the site of the major Roman station of Uxelis, and from which until the late 19th century trading vessels sailed regularly to and from London, are also situated in the area. Those towns, together with a largely rural hinterland, including the towns of Axminster, which is famous for the synonymous carpet factory, and Colyton, represent my constituency.

East Devon, which is so rich in history, is not only about landscape and coastline, although I shall return to those aspects shortly. In Lympstone, we are proud to have the training camp of the Royal Marines. Exmouth, our largest conurbation, is home to one of the country's biggest secondary schools, which is also the country's largest community college. That contrasts with Colyton grammar school, which always scores highly in Ofsted reports and has just achieved long overdue beacon school status.

If I am guilty of anything this afternoon, it is that I may have depicted East Devon as a place from an England of yesteryear rather than of today. To an extent, that is truthful. Mercifully, we do not suffer from some of the problems and tensions that have been seen in other parts of the country. Although crime is a recognisable problem, it is not out of control.

Beneath that bucolic veneer, however, lie some all-too-real problems, one of which is rural poverty. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) articulated the problems of farmers yet again today. Throughout the foot and mouth crisis, he has articulated the suffering of my farmers better than anyone whom I can think of. Our farmers and suppliers are desperate in the wake of foot and mouth, although to date we have been relatively lucky in having had only one reported outbreak. Our local magistrates courts in Axminster and Exmouth have been closed. Our infrastructure, roads, local shops and post offices, all of which people in the countryside depend upon, are under constant threat, just as our countryside itself is threatened by over-development.

A great number of my constituents are on fixed incomes. Some 27 per cent. of the population of East Devon consists of people aged over 65, which puts a strain on the health service. In some parts of the constituency, more than 6 per cent. of the population is over 85. Although our cottage hospitals are as good as any in the land, the pressures on our privately run care and residential homes are now truly worrying.

In my constituency, the income of our four main coastal towns is based mainly on tourism-related employment. We have an extraordinary opportunity ahead of us if the bid to give world heritage status to the east Devon and Dorset coast is successful. We will learn the result in December. The United Kingdom currently has 20 world heritage sites, 11 of which are situated in England and one of which is the Palace of Westminster, together with the abbey and St. Margaret's church.

The proposed world heritage site is the 88 miles of coastline between Orcombe point near Exmouth and Old Harry rocks in Dorset, with some exceptions of coastline that do not exhibit important geological or geomorphic features. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has been campaigning vigorously along with

[Mr. Hugo Swire]

my predecessor for world heritage recognition. The geomorphology of the coast is of global importance. There is a complex spectrum of every combination of landslide-forming rocks of the Triassic, Jurassic and cretaceous periods, which together provide an extraordinary teaching laboratory comparable to similarly important landslide areas to be found in New Zealand and the Black sea.

World heritage site status will lead to new opportunities for tourism, but we must address them in advance. It is vital that the gateway towns to this proposed new site do justice to it. I hope that the Government will be sympathetic to providing funding for the restoration of Seaton Hole and the Alma bridge at Pennington Point, which have suffered as a result of coastal erosion and landslides. Their current condition is a source of great local concern.

We must ensure that the tourism industry offers suitable training, first-class accommodation and, indeed, sufficient accommodation. We must reverse the trend that we have seen recently in Sidmouth, for example, of losing hotel beds to residential development. We must improve access by road, which will mean improving the A303, the A30 and the A35. We must improve access by plane, which will involve a controlled expansion of Exeter international airport. We must also improve our train services on both the Paddington and Waterloo lines as a matter of urgency. None of this can be achieved without commitment and funding.

In today's world, agriculture and tourism are interlinked. People come to our part of the world and marvel at our landscape. Unlike our coastline, it has been man-made over the centuries by landowners and farmers. It looks as it does because it has been farmed, and it must continue to be farmed. The Government must recognise that, above all.

I urge the Government also to recognise that tourism in my part of the world will not recover of its own accord. It desperately needs help. The total revenue generated by tourism in the United Kingdom during 2000 was around £64 billion. Of that, £6 billion was spent by tourists and visitors to the south-west, which amounts to 10 per cent. of the gross domestic product of the region. However, investment by the Government in the English Tourism Council, which includes the allocation to the council and to the regional tourist boards, was £11.7 million, or 20p per head of the population, compared to £3.77 per head in Scotland and £4.03 per head in Wales. Moreover, none of that money can be used for marketing. The report published by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport in May 2001 states:

"These figures leave no doubt that there has been a sustained problem of under-funding by the public sector in tourism that has affected English tourism in particular."

I urge the Government to provide at least £3 million so that we can develop a professional and effective campaign aimed at our home and near-overseas markets. I urge them to reconsider the inequalities in funding to which I have just alluded. I also urge them to take up South West Tourism's plea to set up an independent competitiveness review of the costs and profits position of the United Kingdom's tourism business, compared with our overseas competitors, so that we can best judge how to increase what is, after all, the fourth largest industry in the country.

I make no apologies for promoting my part of the world. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who have not finally settled on their summer holiday destination will now think favourably of the south-west, but with one caveat: that none of my colleagues bring a leadership campaign down there. I can guarantee right hon. and hon. Members who come to the south-west a memorable holiday; I can equally guarantee them welcoming and appreciative hosts.

5.59 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): It is amazing that, of the last four speakers, I should be the most senior in terms of service, as I have been here for only four years. It is a delight to listen to maiden speeches, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) on a heartfelt and principled speech. Those qualities always add to the geographical and historical descriptions that we also enjoy. Unless the constituency of Midlothian has been redistributed, I believe that I have been there once. I visited the town of Balerno, but it may no longer be in his constituency.

I also enjoyed the two maiden speeches from Opposition Members. That of the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) was almost a model maiden speech. He expressed his view of the countryside and its importance well. I congratulate the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson). I do not know Henley, but I was intrigued by his geographical description. I now realise that it is just east of the Khyber pass, and I shall bear that in mind when travelling.

The speeches so far have been reasoned and well balanced. The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) tends to go overboard in his condemnation of the Government. He is not

"slow to chide and swift to bless",

to quote the hymn. We need to take a more balanced approach to the position in agriculture and our rural communities.

Agriculture has always been in crisis. We could almost go back to biblical times and the seven fat years and seven lean years. Agriculture is subject not only to economic fluctuations but to those of nature, which are often beyond the control of man. In the past decade, agriculture in this country has suffered from BSE, classical swine fever—at least in East Anglia—and, lastly and most devastatingly, foot and mouth. On top of all that, economic factors, such as the decline of the markets in the far east and Russia, have proved pernicious to our export trade.

Agriculture has also been affected by the climate: in the past year, there have been floods and droughts. All those factors affect farms on the margins, especially farming communities in what used to be called marginal areas.

Further problems spread from agriculture to the rest of the rural community. Not enough people are engaged in agriculture. At the end of the second world war, approximately 1 million people were employed in agriculture. It was the equivalent of the mining industry. Agriculture and mining have suffered colossal decline in different ways. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) made a fascinating maiden speech in which he told us about the unity between farmers in one part of his constituency and miners in the other. We must remember that town and country, industry and agriculture do not stand apart. They form a unity.

The problem nowadays in rural areas is that so many people can no longer work locally. Many others move to rural areas because, as the descriptions of new Members often imply, they are idyllic havens—places where one wants to live. People live, or simply sleep or weekend, in those havens and return to London, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham or Cardiff to work. Consequently, the village store does not have customers to buy from it every day. The local garage cannot sell petrol because the commuter or weekender has bought petrol more cheaply at Tesco, Asda or elsewhere. The local pub is also affected for several reasons but mostly because the closely bound community, of which the pub, the chapel and the school were all part, no longer exists.

That has been happening for decades. Twenty-five years ago, I lived in a small village beneath the highest point of the Pennines. Before I lived there, it had a school, a chapel and a post office. The school had gone in the distant past, the post office had hung on until the proprietor retired, although no replacement could be found, and the chapel went after I left, so that village no longer has the essential ingredients of community life.

Rather than blame the Government or the previous Administration, we should consider the long-term trends that are causing great problems to our rural communities and we must devise a means whereby people who live in the countryside can work in the countryside. Part of it might take the form of Government schemes to encourage young people to enter farming. The average age of those in the farming community is even greater than that of members of the Conservative party and new people are not coming in. Also, it is difficult to take up farming at a young age because of the price of land.

The situation is absurd: commodity prices are low and profitability has been squeezed to the margin, but the price of the acres on which farming takes place is still ludicrously high, certainly in the south and the east. That involves elements of speculation, does it not?

Large organisations, banks and insurance companies buy agricultural land as a speculative investment. They have no real interest in the product that comes from the land and no real desire for the communities based on that land to thrive. They are interested in the price of the land and they will do everything by way of purchase or sale to keep the price high. That represents the investment, but it is one of the factors that make it so difficult for agriculture to survive.

At one time, many farms were rented, so the young farmer, or the son, nephew or niece of a farmer, could rent land to raise animals or grow crops. That is now unbelievably difficult and the only way to do it is to form a contractor company whereby people contract out their labour and work for others who own the land. The problem with that, which other Members may have experienced in their divisions, is that that system separates the occupation of the land from those who work on it.

I look to the Government to devise schemes whereby they encourage young people back to the land through either financial incentives or renting out state-owned land. Unless we get more people back in the countryside and working in agriculture, the crisis, if I may use that word, will go on for many more years. Eventually, the foot and mouth outbreak will end and I entirely agree with those who have said that we need an inquiry. What form it should take I do not know, but it should not be akin to that chaired by Senator Joe McCarthy. It should seek proper solutions to problems that have been discovered, and we must find out what happened. That issue can be addressed, but the long-term problems in agriculture require us all to think about how we can resolve them.

I should mention two more contemporary matters. The first is arable agrimonetary compensation. I do not trot along with the notion that we should go to Brussels and ask for the money and that Brussels should hand it over. We all know that most of it is our own money and that we are spending it among ourselves, but there is a case for making an application because the price of arable crops is some 70 per cent. of what it was a few years ago.

Secondly, I want to raise the renewal of the over-30-months scheme. Although there are alternatives such as the welfare schemes, difficulties were created by its suspension when the foot and mouth epidemic was at its height and farmers are experiencing great problems. That issue has links to the need to stimulate and support small slaughterhouses. Finally, it is universally agreed that we must be ever-vigilant to ensure that we do not allow contaminated food to enter this country by way of sandwiches, non-Cornish pasties or whatever and thereby put our livestock at risk.

I shall support the Government tonight because they are making genuine attempts to help to solve the problems in our rural communities. It behoves us all to work together to achieve those solutions.

6.10 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech, and I am delighted to follow the maiden speeches of the hon. Members for Henley (Mr. Johnson) and for East Devon (Mr. Swire). If they think that they have the most beautiful constituencies in the United Kingdom, let me tell them that they have stiff competition from North Tayside. I am also pleased to follow the hon. Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton). We both have Scottish constituencies and we both have mining backgrounds, although unfortunately mine has been lapsed for two generations.

I am grateful to have been called to make my maiden speech in a debate about the countryside. My constituency consists almost entirely of countryside, being one of the five largest in the United Kingdom, and it experiences many of the issues and difficulties described so well today. Before I discuss those difficulties, however, let me say—like many maiden speakers before me—that in my humble opinion, mine is perhaps the most beautiful constituency in the United Kingdom.

North Tayside is a constituency of rivers and mountains, of market towns and open spaces. In the heart of Scotland is highland Perthshire, and around that beating heart flow the rivers of the Tay. They are the heart's blood of my constituency—rivers such as the Tummel, the Ericht, the Isla, the Strath and the Braan, which make up the largest river system in the UK, flowing ever onwards and outwards into the Tay estuary.

The western part of Angus is also in my constituency. There the River Esk flows down from the mountains that adorn the Angus glens. What can I say of the mountains? At the geographical heart of Scotland is Schehalion, hill of the fairies, the most striking mountain in the whole of

[Pete Wishart]

Scotland. We also have Ben Lawers, Ben Aglow and Ben Vrachie, and Dreish and Mayer sit deep in the Angus glens.

Mine is also a constituency of estates and castles. I think that it must contain more noble Lords than any other constituency in Scotland. Deep in Strathmore is Glamis castle, perhaps the finest example of a baronial castle anywhere in Scotland. At the foot of the Tay is Scone palace, ancient home of Scottish kings and true home of the Stone of Destiny.

The thing that I do not like about my constituency—there always has to be one thing—is its name. "North Tayside" sounds like a council ward in some old Labour municipal council. Whoever came up with that name must have been up in the Library all night. I suggest that we find a name more in keeping with the constituency's natural beauty. How about Strathmore, Highland Perthshire and the Glens? There is a name worthy of its splendour.

I am grateful to the people of North Tayside for electing me to represent that beautiful constituency. I am, of course, aware of the responsibility involved. Let me also do what is traditional and pay tribute to my predecessor, John Swinney. John was elected to the House of Commons in 1997, and it is hard to believe that he served only one term, given the impact that he has made on Scottish politics since.

John transformed the constituency, turning it into one in which all constituents' concerns were addressed immediately. It is also hard to believe that he served two of his four years here with a dual mandate: that never stopped him from being a most effective Member of Parliament. Wherever I went during my election campaign, there was a good word about John Swinney, and a growing realisation—accompanied by pride—that this was a future First Minister of Scotland. I had to reassure my constituents that John was going nowhere, and would continue to represent their interests in the Scottish Parliament. I now look forward to working as part of an effective team with John to ensure in both Parliaments that all our constituents' concerns are addressed.

John has, of course, gone on to bigger and better things since becoming a Member of Parliament here in 1997. I am not referring to the fact that he is now convener of the Scottish National party, or even the fact that he is Leader of the Opposition in the Scottish Parliament but to the fact that he is now Scotland's most eligible male, as decided by *Scotland on Sunday*. That is an honour to which this Member for North Tayside does not aspire and from which, in any case, he is disqualified by reason of marriage.

Before John's incumbency, North Tayside was represented for 18 years by the Conservatives in the guise of Bill Walker. Bill is what is commonly described as a colourful character; I think that everyone involved in Scottish politics has a favourite Bill Walker story. He and his colleague the then Member for Perth and Kinross provided the House with an unforgettable double act that I am sure is sorely missed by some of our older Members.

It is surprising that tourism has been so little debated this afternoon. Tourism is a big issue for my constituency, given its natural beauty and scenery. Tourism is one of the major employers in North Tayside. It has struggled under the impact of foot and mouth disease, but it was in crisis in Scotland long before the latest outbreak. The high cost of fuel and the high value of the pound make a double whammy that continues to beat the countryside. We cannot underestimate the effect of the strong pound on deterring European visitors. That was clearly demonstrated to me when German friends told me that this year they would not make their usual annual trip to Scotland because it was too expensive. They could get two weeks of luxury accommodation in the Mediterranean for their two nights of bed and breakfast in Scotland. Moreover, they could be guaranteed all-day sunshine in that destination. The best that I could guarantee was that the weather was likely to be changeable.

Poor access to European airports from Scotland is another factor. For a nation of 5 million people, we have appalling access to European destinations. The services that exist are highly priced and infrequent. The extra cost of coming north from an English airport is an added disincentive to European visitors.

What of coming to Scotland by car? With our crazy fuel costs, we have started to enter the realms of the luxury holiday sector ourselves. We seriously cannot discount the high cost of fuel as a major disincentive to European and United Kingdom visitors to Scotland. Members on this Bench always ask, why has oil-rich Scotland got the highest fuel prices in Europe?

Agriculture, agricultural supplies and textiles are also major employers in my constituency. Food production is perhaps the main employer in Strathmore, where the world-renowned berry industry faces many severe difficulties. It is but a shadow of its former self. The berry-picking season is nothing more than a distant memory.

Even with all those activities, the main issue in my election campaign was local hospitals. I simply cannot equate the warm words of Labour Members with the reality of health service provision in my constituency. The service on Tayside is in chaos. There is no confidence in its delivery and staff morale is at rock bottom. We in Tayside are to be subject to a centralisation programme that takes no account of the geography of the area or the public's desire to retain popular local services.

The east of my constituency is served by the Stracathro hospital. Its acute hospital status will be lost with services centralised in distant Dundee. The western part is served by the Perth royal infirmary. The preferred option is to remove maternity and paediatric services once again to Dundee. That means that my constituents will face upwards of a 100-mile journey to receive the services. A service already seen as remote will now seem as though it were at the other end of the country.

I come before you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as the first Member of Parliament from the world of popular music. I am reliably informed that I am the first Member who has ever appeared on "Top of the Pops" in his own right, so you can imagine the onerous responsibility that that places on my shoulders. I find it staggering that no one before me has made the journey from the stage of the concert hall to the Floor of the House of Commons, given the historic association between popular music, popular culture and politics. We can see from history that popular culture has sometimes been expressed by musicians and artists and that that led and dominated political debate.

In the counter-culture of the 1960s, there were those who rallied against unwarranted international aggression and those who championed and pioneered the rights of minorities and women. Music has so often been the soundtrack of political change. At times, music and song have even articulated it. Can any hon. Member imagine political change without the songs?

People and commentators ask me what are the differences between my previous profession and my new job in the House. I answer that it might be a different stage and even a different song, but that I will certainly not get an encore in this place.

Tonight's debate is entitled "The Countryside in Crisis". It is clear that the countryside ranks low in this Government's priorities and thinking. They come on the back of a Conservative Government who gave us the BSE disaster. It must have been the first incident that gave the feeling of crisis, from which the countryside has never recovered. We must also remember that it was the Conservatives who introduced the fuel tax escalator, which started the crazy spiralling of fuel costs in the first place.

My constituency consists almost entirely of countryside, and particularly beautiful countryside at that. Let us do what we can to promote it and ensure that we get the best from our most prized asset—our countryside.

6.19 pm

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): I begin by congratulating hon. Members on some excellent maiden speeches. I assure the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) that after he has won his second election victory he will come to love the name of his constituency. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on a tremendous maiden speech. I especially valued his comments about his predecessor, whom we all esteemed. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) is himself a victimised miner; I know that his comments will have resonance on both sides of the House, and I hope that we will achieve justice for such miners during his time in this place.

I cannot begin my speech without mentioning the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), who gave us such an entertaining bird's-eye view of his constituency. I am convinced that he will uphold the tradition of dashing blonds in the House.

As my contribution to the debate, I lend support to those who urge the Government to work in Brussels for EU-wide fund switching under the common agricultural policy, so that this country is not at a disadvantage, and to ensure that sufficient resources are made available to allow much wider application, to most UK farms, of agri-environmental schemes, organic conversion, farm woodland development and so on. That will mean that agricultural practices can become more sustainable and can protect, rather than detract from, the natural environment and wildlife. I am confident that there will be public support for that sensible emphasis.

Consumers want quality, and they want safety. Most people have come to understand that the condition of the countryside concerns us all whether we live in the country or, like myself, represent an urban constituency. Many of my colleagues support the aims of the organic targets Bill, which would make 30 per cent. of land and 20 per cent. of food marketed in England and Wales organic by 2010. Perhaps one of my colleagues will make it their business to help the Bill to make progress, through one of the channels open to Back Benchers.

No one who has attended this important debate underestimates the scale of the current problems, and everyone knows that full recovery will take a long time. A document produced by the Countryside Alliance states that the lowest average weekly wages are in rural counties such as Cornwall, Northumberland and Shropshire; that seven of the 10 counties with a gross domestic product below the national average are rural; that total farm income is down from £6 billion in 1995 to £1.8 billion in 2000; and that the average farm income after expenses is £5,200 per farm. That is clearly unsustainable. The Countryside Agency estimates potential losses of £2 billion in the rural economy as a whole as a result of the terrible foot and mouth epidemic.

Before the election, I hosted an event in the House that brought together several rural interest groups and at which representatives of the Farm Stay UK Exmoor group took the opportunity to brief the then Minister for Tourism on the scale of their losses. I know that she had hoped to visit Exmoor to see for herself. No doubt her successor will want to strengthen such contacts.

The income from letting accommodation keeps many farms going. A small family farm with six bedrooms is currently losing between £500 and £600 a week. The Exmoor group will lose £25,000 a week as the holiday season progresses, and is looking at a loss of £500,000 if foot and mouth disease continues throughout the summer.

Even counties such as Dorset, with no FMD, have been badly affected. The English Tourism Council has pointed out that if there is a silver lining to the terrible FMD crisis it is that it has demonstrated to the Government, the business community and the public what the industry already knew: the importance of tourism to local economies. In some rural economies it is the main employer, and we could get far more from it in terms of growth and jobs. The council says that £4 out of every £5 spent on English tourism comes from domestic tourists, so it is they who need to be encouraged back. We need a wide-ranging review of the industry, and encouragement for certain ventures.

Before the election, I supported a proposal by Farm Stay UK to acquire Government backing for an integrated nationwide information and support service, as exists in France. Again, the then Minister was sympathetic, and I hope that the Government will revisit the issue in the light of the continuing crisis. There should be much more support for organisations such as LEAF—Linking the Environment and Farming—whose activities I have promoted on several occasions in the House, and there are others, such as the Farmers Conservation Group and the Farmers and Wildlife Advice Group. Perhaps there is a case for those groups to co-ordinate and work more closely together. We must also support new industries in rural areas.

Last week I was fortunate enough to secure a debate on environmentally friendly fuels, and I talked about liquid biofuels from farmland, which are important in my own region, as well as in others. Fears about climate change have increased this very week, and we know that the need to reduce greenhouse gases is urgent. The slaughter of more than 3 million animals during the terrible FMD

[Mrs. Helen Brinton]

epidemic has left much land under-utilised, and the set-aside scheme contributes nothing to our gross domestic product.

I understand that the European Commission is working towards a directive that would make it mandatory for member states to ensure that 2 per cent. of road transport fuel came from biofuels by 2005. In the United Kingdom that would involve some 300,000 tonnes of biodiesel and perhaps 400,000 tonnes of bioethanol. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has suggested a 20 per cent. rebate for biodiesel in the 2002 Budget. That is welcome, but it does not go nearly far enough.

A few thousand tonnes of recycled oil may be involved, but it is by no means certain that that fuel can meet the essential quality standards required under engine warranties without the addition of perhaps 10 times as much pure oilseed. I understand that the rebate will not be paid on fuel that does not meet the standard. No firm guidelines have been given for bioethanol. Research has been mooted, but it will be years before it can make any serious contribution to the rural economy and cleaner air.

Many issues have brought crisis to our countryside, and hon. Members on both sides of the House must work together in the spirit that has characterised this excellent debate. I am delighted to have heard such sensitive speeches from new Members on both sides of the House. I am also delighted that they have all contributed to the theme of this debate. We can work together, and I am confident that we will.

6.28 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also thank all hon. Members who have kept their speeches short enough to allow me a brief innings tonight.

I thought that as the summer recess is fast approaching, I would take hon. Members on both sides of the House on a brief tour of a very green and pleasant land—or at least it was green and pleasant until the channel tunnel arrived. I was elected this year to represent the Faversham and Mid-Kent constituency—a creation of the 1997 boundary commission. I know that the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) knows it well.

My constituency comprises all the countryside between Sittingbourne and Maidstone on the western side and Canterbury and Ashford in the east. It rises in the north on the north Kent coast and sweeps over to Faversham—originally a cinque port and a well known mediaeval market town, which is now famous as the home of the oldest family-owned brewery in the country, Shepherd Neame.

My constituency continues beyond Faversham, across the north downs—an area of outstanding natural beauty, criss-crossed by many ancient pilgrim routes to Canterbury. Beyond that to the south is the rolling countryside of the weald, to the west of which are the prosperous suburbs of Maidstone. However, it would be wrong to try to argue that all that part of the world is prosperous. At the eastern end of Maidstone are two of the most deprived housing estates in Europe. As Members will imagine, it is from there that much of my postbag comes.

The town, however, has the accolade of being home to three former Members of the House: Sir Roger Moate, Andrew Rowe and Sir John Wells. Indeed, it is the current home of the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe).

Over the past few weeks, a number of people have grappled with the question of how to talk about their predecessors. I have no such problems. Andrew Rowe was universally regarded as one of the most diligent and popular constituency Members. After I was selected, I was very struck by how many people said to me what a difficult job it would be to follow him as the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent. I have been amazed since my arrival at the House by just how many people have said to me how sad they were to see him go. There may be some irony in that. Mr. Speaker told me that Andrew Rowe would be an extremely hard act to follow, and at the end of my first month here, I am just beginning to understand exactly what that means.

I am sure that all Members of the House, knowing that Andrew Rowe was not well in his last few years here, will join me in wishing him a long, happy and well deserved retirement, and will hope very much that the disease that blighted his final few years in the House will finally be laid to rest. He was indeed a credit to the House.

I asked to make my maiden speech today because in many ways, the countryside defines my constituency. Not for nothing is it known as the garden of England. However, as with the many other parts of the countryside that Members have mentioned, my constituency is in crisis. Incomes and the number of people employed in rural industries are falling and many of the orchards that so characterise that part of England are being grubbed up.

The reasons for that are many and varied. They include low prices, because farmers receive a falling share of the retail price; cheap imports from abroad with which we cannot compete; poor weather; regulation; and most critically, surprisingly enough, the labour situation. Many of my constituents tell me that they simply cannot get their fruit picked. The answers to the problem are also many and varied, but it is interesting that none of the farmers directly wants any form of state handout. All they want is the security to run their farms as businesses, free from interference and over-regulation.

Fruit farmers ask for three things in particular. The first is fairness in competition; they want to compete on a level playing field. The second is honesty in labelling. They would like consumers to know accurately the country of origin and the means of production—a point that the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) touched on earlier. Above all, they want more flexible labour arrangements. They want to employ casual labourers at the national minimum wage. During the election, I spoke to a fruit farmer who, sadly, had had to lay off all the local workers because he simply could not tackle the regulations involved in taking them on for short periods.

Fruit farmers also want an increase in the seasonal agricultural wages scheme so that they can access more nationals from countries joining the European Union. I met some Polish 17 and 18-year-olds who, having left school, are over here to pick our fruit and to learn something of our culture. They were also learning English and they were having a marvellous time. It is an extremely good scheme and I commend it to the House.

I have been asked to be brief, so I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion. I am particularly fortunate to represent a constituency in an area where I was born, educated and brought up. Farming in general, and horticulture in particular, is the one industry that affects the whole of my constituency. In Kent, the fate and the future of the countryside is the single biggest issue for most of my constituents, and I believe that it will be best safeguarded by promoting a living and working countryside.

The horticulturists whom I represent are keen to produce high quality food in a healthy environment and to preserve Kent's beautiful countryside. I, as their MP, am very keen to help them do that. I ask for the help of Members on both sides of the House to help them achieve their aim.

6.34 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I remind the House of my interest which is properly listed in the Register of Members' Interests.

Although the debate was rather short, it was marked by a succession of excellent maiden speeches by hon. Members on both sides of the House. They commenced with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) who, as well as rightly paying tribute to Michael Heseltine, demonstrated that his wit in literature is repeated in his speeches. His light-hearted tour of his constituency enshrined some serious concerns. He is lucky to hold such a grand constituency and the House is fortunate to have him. He came here with a reputation—that can often be a millstone around new Members' necks, but he demonstrated that that will not be so for him.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) rightly paid tribute to Sir Peter Emery whose wise words we miss. He, too, took us on a tour of his constituency from Roman days, through Raleigh and Betjeman, to its problems today. He presented a shopping list for his constituency, and I hope that when he stands for re-election he will have ticked off some of the items that he has come here to obtain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) continued the trend of using breweries as part of the route map around a constituency, which in his case is in the garden of England. He succeeded Andrew Rowe, a true gentleman whose mild manner concealed strongly held views. My constituency also grows much fresh produce and we, too, have the problem of obtaining enough labour, to which my hon. Friend referred.

We also heard maiden speeches by the hon. Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton), who used strong words to describe his mission here, and the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), who even I have to admit represents a truly beautiful and historic constituency. However, if he is worried about hospitals in his area, it is no use coming here because the House no longer deals with such matters in Scotland.

All the maiden speeches were fluent and clearly argued. The new Members bring a great deal of varied knowledge and experience to the House. They are all welcome and we look forward to their contributions.

When the Secretary of State replied to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), she criticised him for repeating some of the points that he made in the debate on the Queen's Speech. That was churlish because she could not reply to him at the time because of her voice, and it was right that he should repeat them.

We strongly welcome the right hon. Lady's announcement that the over-30-months scheme will restart. Farmers in many parts of the country have pressed for that. However, a large number of cattle are over 30 months only because they could not be moved off their farms as prime beef. We await a Government decision on whether those farmers will receive compensation.

The right hon. Lady also referred to the green belt and produced a lot of statistics, but it is not size that matters with the green belt. It is no use expanding the green belt on the outside if we allow it to be eaten away on the inside, because it then ceases to protect villages and city centres, for which the green belt is important.

Mr. Challen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I shall not. We have tried hard to fit in a number of maiden speeches.

The development of the green belt and greenfield sites is a problem in my constituency. I do not understand why it is necessary for the Government to impose housing figures on local authorities. We have been told that we must have 2,800 new homes a year in the Cambridge sub-region, which is a higher figure than either the county council or district councils believe is necessary. The consequences of possibly creating a new town in the area are causing many people much heartache.

I deal now with agriculture, and agrimonetary compensation which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst). Much of the debate has been about the livestock sector and my later remarks will deal with that, but we must not ignore the arable sector, which is also suffering. Last week, the figures for this year's area payments were fixed, as a result of the exchange rates during June. For cereals, the payment rate went up by 26 euros per hectare, but translated to sterling, the rate, including the penalties for over-production and the modulation, is at a standstill. That is another example of the increasing difficulties that British farmers are experiencing in trying to be on the same playing field as their continental competitors. I hope that the Minister can give an undertaking on agrimonetary compensation.

As for livestock, an order on the fishmeal ban was laid before the House last week. It will have considerable cost implications for farmers and feed manufacturers. Of course we support the ban on meat and bonemeal, but it has been banned in this country for many years, whereas in the rest of Europe the ban is very recent, so we already have systems to control and authenticate fishmeal to ensure that there is no risk of contamination by meat and bonemeal. I understand that the Food Standards Agency's advisory committee on animal feedstuffs has said that the new proposal is unnecessary, so why is DEFRA continuing with that further cost increase for farmers?

I want largely to deal with the situation in our hills and uplands, to which the Secretary of State briefly referred. I look forward to what she will say when she considers the matter later this month, as she has promised to do. Two weeks ago, the Scottish Agriculture Minister said that the sheep industry was two months from meltdown. Does the Secretary of State share that refreshingly honest opinion? The reason for the crisis is that large numbers of

[Mr. Paice]

lambs will be finished in the next two or three months and many of them, as hon. Members have said, would normally go to the Mediterranean trade and are not appropriate for the UK market so there will be a huge surplus of those animals.

In addition, between 5 million and 7 million lambs and draught ewes would have been sold at auctions throughout the country from August to October. That includes store lambs for further finishing in the lowlands, and ewe lambs and draught ewes bought for further breeding. On top of that, some 800,000 cattle would normally change hands in the autumn.

I have several questions for the Government. First, will they confirm that there will be no changes in the provisionally free area system? Will they allow any live sales to take place in provisionally free or at-risk areas? Will they clarify whether slaughtered-out farms can be restocked from within the infected areas with some of the lambs that I have mentioned? Will they amend the licensing rules, which at the moment allow movement only for breeding purposes, to allow movement for further growing and fattening? What is the Government's attitude to the Meat and Livestock Commission's protocols for various alternative trading options to try to assist with the problem? Will store lambs and cattle that do not find a market be eligible for a welfare scheme?

Will it be possible to designate corridors through infected and at-risk areas to provisionally free areas so that sheep from the highlands of Scotland, to which the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) referred, can come down into English at-risk and provisionally free areas? The Government are already allowing transport to slaughter outside infected areas, so they appear to have accepted that the process of transportation carries minimal risk. I ask them to look carefully at the idea of designating corridors, perhaps just motorways or dual carriageways, along which sheep can be transported.

Finally, I turn to the issue of farmers putting the sheep that they would normally have sold out to other farms. As many hon. Members have said, the problem is that farmers have very little money with which to do that. Can we have an advance of the sheep annual premium, or something similar, so that farmers will have some cash to pay for over-wintering in the hope that those animals can be sold in the spring?

None of those ideas or questions are new. The industry has been pressing the Government for answers for weeks, but no decisions or guidance have been forthcoming. The concern voiced in Westminster Hall last week is that in the absence of information all sorts of rumours abound—and that, coupled with the Government's suggestions about buying back quota, leads farmers to believe that the Government want many of them to go out of business. I hope that that is not true, but farmers' fears are understandable in the absence of information to the contrary.

That view was intensified by reports of comments that the Prime Minister made to the chairman of the National Farmers Union of Scotland—apparently, the right hon. Gentleman said that farming was not one of his top 15 priorities—and exacerbated by the delay in producing a recovery plan. I have been looking back on the issue of a recovery plan. On 27 March, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said:

"any recovery plan—we are working on such a plan with the industry—must take into account"—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2001; Vol. 366, c. 845.]

and so on and so forth. A month later, he said:

"We . . . intend to work in partnership with farmers and others to identify ways of assisting the recovery of the farming sector."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 459.]

On 3 May, he said:

"We are in discussion with the devolved Administrations and the farming unions".—[*Official Report*, 3 May 2001; Vol. 367, c. 1004.]

The current Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said on 26 June:

"Work is in hand on a farm recovery plan".—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 524.]

Three and a half months later, we are still waiting. All we have had is this week's announcement of £10.5 million of business advice.

We need information now. The farmers of this country want to know how to get through the crucial sales periods in the coming months. Three and a half months to produce a recovery plan is too long. It is time to stop considering, reviewing and listening; it is time to act and to make decisions.

6.46 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): We have covered a lot of ground this afternoon, from the Angus glens to the rolling countryside of East Devon. We have also covered a great deal of ground in terms of substance: serious issues have been raised by Back Benchers, including my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton). Some require a more detailed response than there is time for at this stage of the debate, when there is little time left; in such cases, I shall respond in writing.

I must start by commenting on the maiden speeches made today. I have particular sympathy with the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) who experienced that awful moment towards the end of a debate when one waits to see whether one will be squeezed out. I pay tribute to colleagues on both sides of the House for making sure that he had time to speak. The hon. Gentleman succeeds Andrew Rowe, a delightful man who was a great champion of charities and the voluntary sector; he will be difficult to replace. There is a vacancy for someone who engages with the sort of issues in which Andrew Rowe took a strong interest.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) on his maiden speech, which was a passionate promotion of the pubs of Henley. He was confident, assured and entertaining—the very qualities that inspire jealousy among listeners in the Chamber. It was the sort of speech that demanded the heckling and interventions that are forbidden during a maiden speech but that will, I am sure, occur on every future occasion that he rises to speak. Incidentally, I have to point out that it is the Government's policies on the countryside—and almost everything else—that are clear, whereas it is impossible to know what the Conservative party stands for. None the less, I look forward to many meanderings and excellent speeches in future.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (David Hamilton) whose style was wholly different. Serious and thoughtful, his comments were rooted in his own experience and knowledge of the needs of people living in a rural area with a mining background, such as the area where he was born and which he is now proud to represent. He gave a mature and worthy speech in which he showed a sense of humour combined with decency.

In another first-rate speech, the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) rightly emphasised the link between farming and tourism. I agree with the link that he made and with the need to boost tourism. I have been involved in that for some 28 years. The issue is not just one of cash but of people having a sense of vision and direction. It is also about partnership between the different bodies and levels of government that can do something to promote the issue. I am certainly happy to accept his invitation to visit his region.

I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that the Government have made available £3.8 million for national and regional public relations and marketing in tourism—a subject he emphasised. That timely action did much to restart the domestic tourism season. We also pledged additional funding of £14.2 million. That was supplemented by another £2.1 million which was redeployed by the British Tourist Authority from previous plans. The BTA sought that amount for 2001 after full consultation with the industry. The point about needing to kick-start and promote tourism is well made but one with which the Government are already very strongly involved.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) demonstrated a nice style and a sense of humour. Standards are improving in the humour stakes in this House. He seemed, however, to have some problems with travel. I can only commend to him consultation with the Minister of State, Scotland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who is one of Labour's many rural MPs, a source of good advice and quite an entertaining companion.

Listening to the debate, it is difficult to know why the Conservatives chose the subject of the countryside as they had nothing new to say. We had hoped to hear something constructive, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was hardly churlish to criticise the opening speech of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), given that it was a rather pathetic attempt to promote the old myth that the Conservative party is interested in the countryside.

I must point out that it is Labour that has a practical and positive engagement with the needs of rural communities and the rural economy. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may mock, but they should look at the results of the general election, at which Labour Members were again returned in force to represent rural areas. Conservative Members should consider the work undertaken by Labour Back Benchers in making constructive proposals to the Government. I look forward to engaging with many of my colleagues in promoting the Government's positive programme. The hon. Member for South Suffolk posed a string of questions on which he had clearly not done too much homework. The arrival of foot and mouth merited maturity and responsibility on both sides of the House. It has been disappointing to see how the Opposition have responded.

Our priority has been to eradicate foot and mouth disease—not easy, given the devastating nature of the outbreak in comparison to the previous experience in the country—then to alleviate the immediate impact on farmers and rural businesses and communities, and then to assist longer-term recovery. I am finding chairing the rural task force a most positive experience; we are dealing with difficult issues. All stakeholders have shown maturity and a willingness to engage, as they do in the stakeholders group in which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs takes part, and that is extremely positive.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alun Michael: I shall follow the example of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) in trying to respond to the debate. The hon. Lady has not been with us this afternoon.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at the outset, we must learn the lessons of the outbreak. There is an attempt to make mischief by suggesting that the Government should respond by setting up an inquiry. We have made it clear that we want to learn the lessons and to be as open and inquiring as possible, but that we must do so in a way that enables us to move forward rather than delay learning those lessons.

It is important to look at longer-term trends and policies, to which some Members have referred. For some 20 years, rural communities have suffered a long-term decline in services. I must tell one or two Opposition Members who referred to the decline in some services in rural areas that they declined faster in the Conservative years than in any other period. The position is now the reverse: improvements in the past four years seek to make sure that small schools survive; we are putting more money into rural transport; and we are trying to make sure that shops survive in rural areas and that the Post Office engages with the need to provide services in rural areas.

Some of those things are not just about an individual service, but involve looking laterally at how to combine the needs of the community with commercial reality. I visited Waters Upton at the beginning of the week and saw just such an example: people had recognised the need for a small shop, information technology and broadband access in a rural community. They also recognised the need for mothers seeking to return to work to obtain training, and combined all those things in a project that certainly benefits from planning gain but will be advantageous for the rural community. The number of village halls has increased. The Government have therefore stopped the decline in services as far as possible, but we have much to do to create a secure and sustainable future for rural communities. The rural White Paper was published last November and we shall certainly take account of foot and mouth in its implementation; it provides a framework in which we can progress.

[Alun Michael]

I point out to Opposition Members that, in looking at recovery, we have already provided £10.4 million to extend the facilities provided by the farm business advice service, which enables farmers directly affected by foot and mouth to apply for five days of free business advice rather than the three days provided under the previous scheme. That is vital, as statistics show. A survey of businesses in the west midlands showed that 80 per cent. of those which identified themselves as being directly affected by foot and mouth had not sought help or advice, and 60 per cent. did not decide to make any change in their business or its marketing, whether it was farm-related or another rural business. That is worrying, because there is a need to adapt and change. We must help, but industries must work with us if we are to achieve those changes.

I was surprised that Opposition Members raised the issue of crime. As a Home Office Minister, I set in train research into rurality, which led to additional money going to rural police forces to tackle the problem. We are providing extra resources—an additional £15 million last year and £30 million this year—and more officers can be recruited from the ring-fenced crimefighting fund. This year, we have seen the build-up to the second round of crime and disorder reduction strategies, which provide rural communities with a voice and engagement with the police and local authority in every area of the country. If adopted positively, that will create a partnership between people living in those communities, the police and local authorities to tackle and reduce crime. That is an appropriate response to rural areas and their experience.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), who made a well informed contribution and was involved in the work leading to the White Paper, which seeks to provide a framework for delivering our aim of thriving rural communities in a protected and accessible countryside. We need to help people in rural areas to access key services, and have set in train moves that will give them that benefit. We must provide greater access to affordable new housing and support for farmers and rural business; we must make local government in the countryside more responsive; and, across government, we must engage with the needs of the countryside. The Government care about the countryside and will work with all who do to ensure that it has a sustainable and thriving future.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 277.

Division No. 24] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Greg
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Annette
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter

Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Peter Atkinson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Brennan, Kevin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David

Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House supports the Government's key priority to eradicate foot and mouth disease as quickly as possible; regrets that the Opposition has failed to notice the Government's recent announcement of an enhanced Farm Business Advisory Service which encourages farmers to develop new income opportunities and an extension of the rate relief scheme to ensure further financial support to businesses in rural areas suffering most from the impact of FMD which will help councils to grant 100 per cent. rate relief to eligible small businesses up to the end of the year, as well as continuing other measures to help the rural economy to recover from the crisis; endorses the Government's commitment to rural communities as set out in the Rural White Paper and the England Rural Development Programme; applauds the Government's wider record on public service delivery in rural areas; and calls upon the Government to continue pursuing a strategy based on long term policies to regenerate British agriculture, improve rural services and revitalise the rural economy as a whole.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Immigration (Leave to Enter) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 June],

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 26th October, 2nd, 23rd and 30th November 2001, 11th, 18th and 25th January, 15th March, 12th and 19th April, 10th May, 21st June and 19th July 2002.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

DEREGULATION AND REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE

Motion made,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. David Chaytor, Brian Cotter, John Cryer, Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Mr. Paul Goodman, Andy King, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Mr. Andrew Love, John McDonnell, Mr. Denis Murphy, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Andrew Rosindell, Mr. Anthony Steen, Ian Stewart and Brian White be members of the Select Committee on Deregulation and Regulatory Reform.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

2001 Census

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

7.14 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am very grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue in the House. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury for my part in her having drawn the Thursday night short straw.

I have requested this debate because of the considerable significance of census data to all local authority areas. The collection of accurate information about the population and their characteristics is of incalculable importance, not least because the data that are collected now will form the basis for most of the standard spending assessment block calculations for the revenue support grant settlement in two years' time. The census statistics are the only source of much of the small areas data that local authorities draw on, especially data relating to ethnicity. This is, therefore, an issue of considerable importance to every Member of Parliament, every councillor and many others.

As the representative of an inner-London constituency, I am acutely concerned about this issue. Areas such as mine, in north Paddington and north Kensington, combine all the risk factors associated with poor data collection with all the factors contributing to high and complex levels of demand for services. This is particularly important in respect of ethnicity, because the service requirements of communities in which dozens of languages are spoken within a small area are quite different from and more complex than the needs of communities of similar social and economic characteristics in which there is perhaps only one language group.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the strong population growth in London in recent years, as measured by the mid-year estimates, demonstrates that the population growth is overwhelmingly young. That young population is, by definition, likely to consist of people who are having children now or will do so in the near future, for whom they will naturally expect nursery provision and education. The planning of those services is incredibly sensitive and important. This subject is dear to my heart at the moment because, as of a couple of weeks ago, 250 primary school children in one small area of north Westminster were still awaiting the allocation of a school place for this September.

Under-enumeration in the census, leading to a lack of reliable planning data and, possibly, to financial consequences in terms of grant allocation, has very serious consequences. Yet there can be little doubt that, in some small areas, serious under-enumeration has occurred.

I shall give some examples of where things have gone wrong in my area, and I would like to set them in context. I understand how hard the process is. Dealing with populations of inner-city constituencies such as mine involves assessing accommodation in multiple-occupation houses and in an increasing number of short-let tenancies, both of whose populations are extremely hard to keep track of. This places a huge responsibility on census enumeration, and it is no coincidence that the areas in which I suspect there is a serious problem of

under-enumeration following this year's census are exactly the same areas as those where we also have the most critical problem of electoral registration, for example.

The royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea is aware of this problem, and has taken on board the fact that its current electoral registration process is problematic, and that a great many people may have lost their ability to register to vote as a consequence. I am certainly not saying, therefore, that all the problems arising from census enumeration can be laid at the door of the census and the Office for National Statistics. This is a very difficult job indeed.

I am also aware that the problems that we experienced in 2001 are not unique. The census also had huge problems in 1991, rooted in the effect of the poll tax. At that stage, there was clear evidence that a great number of people, particularly young people and those in inner-city populations, were deliberately avoiding the census because of the possible implications for registration for the poll tax. This time round, however, deliberate avoidance of being recorded in the census was negligible. In fact, members of the ethnic minority communities in my constituency, about whom I shall say more later, have stressed to me how keen they were to participate. There is a real awareness in those communities of the importance of their existence, extent and characteristics being recorded by the census, and they went out of their way to do everything possible to ensure that enumeration levels were high. Despite all that, we had some serious problems in some areas.

I received dozens of complaints, not least when on the doorstep in the election campaign. I have already referred many of them to the Office for National Statistics. However, clusters suggest the possibility of a deeper problem. For example, the Westway travellers site was missed out despite repeated requests for forms. The Catholic Children's Aid Society, which works closely with the travellers, took up the matter. That was resolved—I am pleased about that—but only after the Catholic Children's Aid Society had approached me and I had gone to the chief executive of the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, who ensured that enumerators got into the travellers site.

In Westminster, the residents association of the Fisherton street estate in NW8 wrote:

"While allowing for the distress caused to residents on the Lisson Green Estate"—

the subject of a front-page story in my local newspaper on census problems—

"please note the equally considerable distress caused to 99 per cent. of the residents in Dickens House (20 flats), Huxley House (20 flats), Landsmeer House (16 flats), Lilestone House (16 flats), Capland House (16 flats), Selena House (16 flats) and Gibbon House (16 flats) . . . despite requests, phonecalls, follow ups and assurance, not one word has been forthcoming to explain why an entire estate seems to have been excluded.

Of note, I also wish to point out that enquiries and reports coming to me suggest that the way in which the Census, or lack of it, was handled in the multi-cultural and economically sensitive area of London deserves some sort of apology and explanation for the Bureau".

The director of Westminster Race Equality Council told me that scores of families from Chinese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Afro-Caribbean and other minority communities did not get forms. Abdul Toki, the chair of Marylebone Bangladeshi Association, said:

"Families came to me saying no forms had been issued . . . I volunteered my time to accompany officials to flats at the beginning of May. I heard nothing."

Since details have been passed to the ONS, action has been taken in those specific cases. I am grateful for that, and to people who have been active in local community organisations and gone out of their way to work with enumerators.

I also pay tribute to the overwhelming majority of enumerators who did an excellent job. It is not an easy task, and they did as well as they could. However, the fact that I received such complaints from well organised groups such as the Marylebone Bangladeshi Association and residents associations makes me wonder about the extent of non-contacts in more diffuse areas. My greatest anxiety is about those who live in streets of properties in multiple occupation. Those people are not part of well defined and cohesive residents or ethnic minorities organisations.

I received several complaints about the difficulties of accessing the hotline and the lengthy delays in waiting for translation facilities on it. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux drew attention to the hotline problems, such as short holding times and restrictions on access for disabled people.

There were many problems, some of which have been redressed. I am not wholly confident, however, that we will not end up with pockets of significant under-enumeration. That is my key point. The census coverage survey, which will ascribe imputation figures to the populations, may constitute a robust and excellent statistical process. I have no doubt that it is, and that clever people will ensure that door-to-door under-enumeration is assessed accurately. But I am concerned that the characteristics that those numbers represent may not be properly reflected in the census coverage survey, simply because it is highly unlikely that such a survey can correctly ascribe the characteristics of the dozens and dozens and dozens of minority communities and language groups in such a hugely diverse community.

That is the nub of my case and I want the Minister—later, if not now—to assure me that the census coverage survey and the use of imputation figures will ensure that the numbers are both accurate and an adequate reflection of the diversity and characteristics of an under-enumerated population.

I hope that the Minister will do her best and work her hardest with the ONS to plug the gaps where she can through whatever possibilities remain in the direct process and through the census coverage survey. When the census data are published and used for rebasing the mid-year estimates, we will therefore be able to be confident that the hard pressed inner-city authorities that usually do an excellent job of providing services receive the resources that they require for the populations whom they serve. Those authorities are always looking for the complex pattern of demands made of them to be recognised, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

7.27 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate and I assure her that I am delighted to respond.

The 2001 census is important for my hon. Friend's constituents, the Government and the country. It is a vital source of information on the number and characteristics of the population. The information it gathers is used by the Government, local authorities and health authorities to form policy, to plan services for specific groups of people and, in particular, to distribute resources effectively at a local level. As she said, the results will be the evidence base that informs policy in many key areas for the next decade, so it is important that the information paints an accurate, authoritative and comparable picture of the UK's population and its needs.

Although we shall not have exact figures for the number of people counted until autumn next year, I believe that the census was successful. The return of census forms has been extremely high; the Office for National Statistics estimates that 95 per cent. have been returned and that the overall response will be as high, or higher, than that in 1991.

The 1991 census faced genuine difficulties in accurately counting some groups, and about 2 per cent. of people were not counted. By international standards, that is not a bad performance. Indeed, such under-coverage would not be a significant problem if it were evenly spread between groups in the population, as those missed could be assumed to share the characteristics of the others, but I believe that particular groups were not fully represented in the results.

In the example of young men in inner London and other cities, as many as 20 per cent. or more were missed, so our first challenge in planning the 2001 census was to ensure that those groups were properly counted. Since 1991, changes to population patterns have added to the difficulties that the ONS faces in compiling accurate census data on them. The size of some groups that are more difficult to count has increased, the number of people living alone and in properties with entryphone or other security controls has increased, which makes establishing contact more difficult, and life styles have become more varied, which makes it difficult to catch people at home.

My hon. Friend helped the census by pointing out many of those difficulties to my predecessor and I thank her for the work that she did to ensure that those groups were properly represented. As she said, the groups that are difficult to count accurately during the census are often those that need particular support from the Government, so under-counting has a disproportionate effect on the resource decisions made on the basis of census data. That is why planning for the 2001 census began with the establishment of a coherent strategy to ensure that those groups were accurately counted, and why the final results presented a representative picture of local and national populations.

The main aims published in the census White Paper in March 1999 were to ensure that the questions asked would provide useful information, to ensure that the results would be of good quality and would be produced according to a sensible timetable, to ensure that the whole operation was acceptable to the public and to ensure that the census represented value for money. A key priority was to reduce under-counting of particular groups, and to ensure that the results of the census would command the confidence of those who rely on them. That is most critical when the results are used for resource allocation to local authorities and health authorities.

The plans for the 2001 census took on board a range of lessons learned from difficulties encountered in the 1991 census. They also recognised the impact of changes in society and changing needs for information, among Government and others.

The plans for the census were subject to full and open scrutiny before being approved, and were properly developed and funded well in advance. The strategy for the conduct of the census had two main parts. We wanted to ensure that the highest possible enumeration was achieved, paying particular attention to the groups most likely to be under-counted. We also wanted to compensate for any bias by producing a final set of figures giving an accurate picture of the real population in the groups and areas that were under-counted.

Let me explain how we attempted to achieve high returns. For the census in England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics established a range of procedures to ensure good coverage of all members of the population. It was expected that major urban areas, especially in London, would present a major challenge. Areas with high levels of ethnic-minority populations, multi-occupancy accommodation, estates with poor-quality housing or apartments protected by entryphone and other security systems would require particular attention. Arrangements were made to enumerate special population groups including the forces, students, rough sleepers, refugees and asylum seekers. Planning for the census was aimed at ensuring all those groups and areas were properly enumerated, including areas in which there had been significant under-counting in the 1991 census.

The ONS adopted a variety of approaches to overcome specific difficulties. A major initiative was the local community liaison programme, in which the ONS worked with minority groups, charitable organisations and local and health authorities to encourage participation in the census and to help to identify sources of potential field staff. The questions and guidance on the census forms were translated into 24 languages, with a further two, Korean and Tamil, added during the fieldwork period. Interpreters were available to be used where necessary. Census materials were prepared in Braille, in large print and on audio tape. A publicity campaign sought to encourage universal self-inclusion. Publicity was also targeted at sectors of the community in which there had been significant under-enumeration in the 1991 census.

Recruitment for the census aimed to ensure that local people who understood the local area carried out the work. Finding the right number of staff with the right qualities proved particularly tough in some inner-city areas. A number of local authorities, including Westminster city council, gave the ONS a great deal of support to ensure that recruitment was effective.

Once they were recruited, training given to field staff emphasised the importance of making contact with householders. Census enumerators were required to make a number of calls during the census operation in order to make initial contact and to follow up households that had

not responded. At the end of the main enumeration period, there was a further follow-up by team leaders and district managers of households that had still not responded. Enumerators in inner-city areas were given smaller work loads, so that they could spend more time on making contact and returning to households that had not responded. Collection of forms used a team approach that had been shown in tests to improve morale and overall response in hard-to-count areas.

That was the first leg of the strategy. It was designed to target resources on the more difficult areas, in order to increase response and reduce differential under-coverage.

The second part of the strategy was to put in place a robust and accurate method for taking proper account of the people who inevitably were missed and to produce a single set of numbers that everyone could trust. It was critical to produce final figures that were authoritative at local authority level. To ensure that the procedure adopted would command confidence, a steering committee for this part of the project was established, involving academics with international reputations in the field, other experts and representatives of central and local government as well as the census offices.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, the census coverage survey was central to this strategy. The survey was conducted immediately after the census. It sought to measure how effectively the census counted households and people by interviewing a cross-section of the population and carefully matching the results from this survey with the census. In England and Wales the survey covered approximately 300,000 households in 20,000 postcodes selected to form a representative sample capable of producing reliable figures for each local authority area. I emphasise that the census coverage survey was broad enough and independent enough to be reliable at individual local authority area level. That was an important feature.

By using the findings of the coverage survey in combination with the findings from the census, the characteristics of those groups that were missed can be imputed and added to the original census database. While small pockets and particular groups of people may have been missed from the original census, the characteristics of the groups from which they are drawn should be covered by the combination of the census and the census coverage survey. It will then be up to the individual local authority to allocate its resources according to its local knowledge and to make up for any small gaps that it thinks may have occurred.

The whole approach was thoroughly tested in a dress rehearsal for the census in 1999, involving some 150,000 households. The areas chosen for the tests included a cross-section of the population and types of housing found in the country as a whole. They included areas with high levels of multi-occupancy, student accommodation, hotels and holiday accommodation, and various ethnic minority groups.

The final element of the strategy involves a series of plausibility checks against other information. For example, by rolling forward the number of births and deaths and adjusting for migration effects it is possible to get a high-level estimate of the numbers in each age group. By looking at the numbers receiving child benefit or retirement pensions it is possible to assess the aggregate numbers and locations of people in each of these groups. These plausibility checks form part of a comprehensive quality assurance process that has been designed to reflect the inevitable difficulties that would be encountered, especially among hard-to-count groups. Of course, the real test of this two-stage strategy will be how well it works in practice.

The enumeration itself began in April. London was always expected to present particular difficulties in getting a good level of response, and special attention was focused on it during the planning stages. The procedures that were put in place to ensure the best possible response had a significant effect and there have been good reports from across the capital. Some of the issues that my hon. Friend raised with my predecessor, for example, show the type of situation that arose. Census staff were ready and prepared to follow up concerns so that the job was done as well as possible.

It was inevitable that planning for an operation on the scale and complexity of the census would not cover all the circumstances that could arise, but throughout the census period ONS sought to respond to issues of concern as they emerged.

I note my hon. Friend's point on the census helpline. It was planned to cope with a threefold increase in calls compared with 1991, but the interest was such that 250,000 calls were received on just one day in the week before the census—as many as were received during the entire period last time. ONS installed large numbers of extra lines within 48 hours and the service was improved.

An additional factor was that in this census the public were asked to post their forms back as soon as possible after the census day on 29 April. There was an extremely high return of forms, which the ONS estimates as being close to 90 per cent. of the forms delivered.

Ms Buck: Although I accept the point that the helpline was improved, on a number of occasions people left messages or made contact saying that they had not received a return call, or said that it had taken many, many calls to secure information. I do not expect an immediate answer, but I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could let me know what monitoring was carried out of the information received through the helpline, so that we can establish why some cases were not followed up promptly and accurately and forms were not despatched.

Ruth Kelly: Of course, I shall take note of the points made by my hon. Friend. I can assure her that I shall look into that issue and reply to her.

As I was saying, there was an extremely high return of forms—about 90 per cent. of the forms delivered. Field staff returned to households, as planned, to retrieve forms that were not returned by post. The ONS estimates that 95 per cent. of all forms are now back and that most of the remaining 5 per cent. relate to vacant addresses.

Following the census, the census coverage survey took place between 24 May and 17 June. The outcome was better than the rehearsal, with a national response rate of more than 90 per cent. The exact figure for the number of people counted in the 2001 census will be available in August 2002, when information from the census forms, the enumerators' books and the results of the census

[Ruth Kelly]

coverage survey will have been analysed. The ONS is confident that the overall response will be as high, if not higher, than in 1991.

When the results of the census and the census coverage survey have been analysed there will be a set of figures for each local authority area that will be comparable and consistent. Any under-counting of particular groups will have been kept as low as possible and, where it exists, will have been taken into account in the final results. Despite the best endeavours of all, some people will have been missed, but the strategy is designed to ensure that they will not lose out in resource allocation.

I believe that the census will meet its objectives and that local authorities, including Westminster, will not lose out when the final count is in and the strategy as a whole bears fruit.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 13 July 2001

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Small Firms

[Relevant documents: The Report and Accounts of the Small Business Service for 2000–01 [HC 104 of Session 2001–02] and the Framework Document for Government Departments "Think Small First".]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

9.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): It is a pleasure to open this important Adjournment debate on the need to ensure that our small businesses get to the future first. The Government have an ambition to make the United Kingdom the best place in the world to start and grow a business. Successful businesses are set up and run by enterprising individuals, but the Government shape the environment within which they can do business. The Government therefore have a responsibility to provide the most appropriate support required by our small businesses so that they can compete effectively to meet the challenges of a global economy.

We also have a responsibility to minimise the burdens that are imposed through better regulation and other measures. We have a duty to provide a stable macro-economic environment that allows small business and enterprise to flourish. I want to stress the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises to the economy. It is clear that the SME sector, in terms of job creation alone, is vital to the economy. Nearly three quarters of the increase in employment has come from small and medium-sized firms. In the past five years for which figures are available, more than 750,000 more people were in work. Some 5.9 million jobs were created, and SMEs created 540,000 of the gain. That is 71 per cent. of all the extra jobs created.

UK SMEs have a combined annual turnover of around £1 trillion. SMEs also bring benefits such as stimulating competition, providing a supply chain and developing and exploiting new technologies and niche markets, so there are many reasons for the Government to focus on this sector.

In the industrial economy of the 20th century, large corporations drove economic progress. In the knowledge economy, the drivers of change will be small businesses. In March this year, a Department of Trade and Industry foresight report entitled "Financing the Enterprise Society" was published. The foresight programme is a partnership of Government and business, small and large, which helps all of us to think about the future and helps business get to the future first.

The report predicts that over the next 10 years small businesses will be the main drivers of economic growth, product innovation and job creation in our economy. There are several reasons for the shift in importance from large to small organisations. First, there is the war for talent. People with knowledge, imagination, creativity and entrepreneurial drive are increasingly impatient with large organisations. They want more freedom, and more control over what they do; they want to own their work, and they want to own the results. Large businesses are trying, sometimes desperately, to strip out their bureaucracies, change their culture and marry the benefits of scale with the benefits of small, but it is a tough thing to do, as we in Government know only too well. Thus smaller and entrepreneurial businesses are finding it easier to attract the people they need.

Secondly, there is the impact of information and communications technology. Increasingly, the use of the internet and e-business is bringing about the death of distance. Ease of access to information will drive down prices and allow the rapid rise of new competitors, leading to increasing globalisation, even by small businesses. The technology revolution in particular is changing the way we live and work—as consumers, as citizens and, very definitely, as business people.

The third reason for the shift from large to small organisations is the speed of change and the need to innovate. That is where small can definitely have its advantages. Around 88 per cent. of all novel innovators—the firms introducing a technologically new or improved product to the market—are SMEs. It is usually much easier for small businesses to change their products. They can change direction quickly, move swiftly into new markets, seize opportunities in new technologies and work in new and innovative ways to achieve their goals. In today's business world, it is not just getting ahead but staying ahead that counts.

We support the growth of the self-employed sector and of small business. We want to make it easier for people to start up on their own account. We are working to achieve that by producing more user-friendly guidelines such as those set out in the Inland Revenue's booklet "Thinking of Working for Yourself?" Already the number of small businesses, including self-employed people, is growing fast—up 170,000 in the past four years. On the basis of the foresight study, we can predict that by 2010 there will be almost 1 million more SMEs—a growth from 3.7 million today to more than 4.5 million. Between them, those businesses will have created 2 million new jobs.

I want to say a few words about the life cycle of small businesses. The numbers understate the scale of the change. I do not have to tell informed hon. Members here that many small businesses do not last. However, that does not mean that they fail. There are many reasons why an owner will decide to close a business, often to start up something else, sometimes to move into employment. New businesses emerge to fill the gaps left by the weakest link, but on present trends, on the basis of the foresight projections, most of the businesses that exist today may not exist in 10 years. But of course their parents are already in business; it is just that most of the 4.5 million businesses that will exist in 2010 have not yet been born.

Start-up and survival rates are critical. Life expectancy for small businesses has improved in recent years, benefiting from a more benign economic environment.

[Nigel Griffiths]

Almost 130,000 more businesses have started up than have closed in the past three years. More than 1.6 million new businesses have started since April 1997, of which an estimated 900,000 are still trading. The latest survival rates show that more than 88 per cent. of businesses now survive one year after registration, with 61 per cent. surviving three years.

The number of business closures during 1999—382,000—was the lowest in a decade. There were 3,700 company insolvencies in the fourth quarter of 2000. That is much lower than in the early 1990s, when they peaked at almost 16,000 a quarter. Of course, all that is against a background of the longest period of low inflation for more than 30 years and the longest run of low interest rates throughout that period, with rates less than half the level of a decade ago. Long-term rates are now lower than in the United States and in other EU states.

One million more people are now in work, and unemployment is down in every region and nation of the United Kingdom. We are encouraging enterprise and entrepreneurship for all. We need to ensure that we maximise the potential of all our aspiring entrepreneurs. If the United Kingdom is genuinely to become an enterprise society, there is no doubt that more needs to be done to encourage everyone in society to believe that they can really make it in business. That is one reason why the Government established the Small Business Service in April last year.

The role of the Small Business Service is to develop world-class business support services. We are all concerned that small businesses and those who want to start up in business should have easy access to high-quality business advice and support in whatever way best suits them and at every stage of their development. I am confident that all business link partners will have the needs of small businesses uppermost in their minds, and this can be summed up as their commitment to a ruthless customer focus.

Our commitment to social inclusion means reaching the parts that other schemes fail to reach, and the SBS is also investing in deprived areas and among groups who are under-represented in business, via the Phoenix fund and community finance initiatives. The Phoenix fund has already generated a great deal of interest—250 bids were received, of which 50 were successful.

Let me tell the House about one such bid—the Phoenix development fund project for women in Birmingham. It aims to establish, develop and maintain a programme to help women across Birmingham, irrespective of their status, ethnicity or religion, to set up and run businesses. The programme will contain a blend of workshops and group business counselling activity, together with structured training. The menu of options available includes one-to-one business counselling, idea-generation workshops, workshops on relevant pieces of legislation and skills training. The project also plans to establish a self-financing working forum for women-led businesses.

About a third of start-ups today are by women. More than 840,000 women in the UK are self-employed. Despite a significant increase in women's participation in other parts of the labour market, the proportion of businesses started by women has remained roughly constant since 1998. True, nine out of 10 women think it is easier to start up in business today than in the past. However, discrimination is still a reality. Research by the NatWest shows that women are most likely to establish businesses in service areas. Almost 50 per cent. of businesses in that sector are started by women, and such businesses are least likely to have employees as they tend to be run from home. Women face problems starting up, including sexual discrimination, not being taken seriously, and, very important, having to juggle family responsibilities.

The SBS small firms loan guarantee scheme has been of particular help to women, who may lack a proven track record, in raising finance. Business link operators have been addressing their business plans to how best to support and encourage female entrepreneurs.

The Government recognise the increasingly important contribution of ethnic minority businesses to the economy. For many decades, such businesses have been a driving force. Starting small, ending up big—some of them massive—all of them make a tremendous contribution to British society. It is estimated that ethnic minority businesses represent about 7 per cent. of the total UK small business stock. Britain's ethnic minority businesses contribute almost £13.5 billion annually to the economy. More than half of that is here in London, where almost 50 per cent. of the UK's ethnic minority population lives.

People from ethnic minority groups are more likely to be in business on their own account and to employ others. We recognise that many ethnic minority business people are among the most entrepreneurial in our society, and we have a lot to learn from their experiences. In 1997, people from ethnic minority backgrounds represented 5 per cent. of the UK population, yet entrepreneurs from ethnic minority backgrounds were responsible for 9 per cent. of new business start-ups.

The needs of ethnic minority businesses are diverse, but they all share the common concerns of small business, including raising finance, competition and marketing. The Government want to make sure that we are tailoring our policies and business support to improve their competitiveness. That is why the new network of business links is gearing up to meet the needs for start-up support from the black and ethnic minorities. Business links can make the difference between somebody being able to start a business and just aspiring to it.

Denton Thomas was a Business Link client. When he decided to set up his own travel agency, he did not need any advice on how to do his books or pay his tax because he had been working for the Inland Revenue for 22 years, but he did need advice on accessing finance to keep him afloat through the first few months of trading. Business Link provided advice on applying for finance and helped him through the process. That was six years ago; today his turnover is approaching £1 million and he has plans for expansion. He knows that Business Link made all the difference and that without it he would not be where he is today.

We are keen to ensure that the Government think small first. A major role for the SBS, especially in relation to regulation, is to ensure that Government Departments are really thinking about the effects of their actions on small businesses. To promote this objective, the Government published "Think Small First" back in January. As a result of that publication, we have agreed to introduce a

minimum period of 12 weeks for consultation on possible new regulations and a 12-week period of grace after regulations are finally agreed, when guidance should also be made available. This consultation period prior to the regulations coming into force will give small businesses and the regulators another opportunity to consider the implications and make the changes required.

I know that the House will join me in hoping that wherever possible we can avoid making regulations and bringing in legislation. Under all Governments, there have been criticisms that red tape stifles small business, but it is important to remember that, according to the OECD's "Economic Outlook" published in December 1999, the UK has less regulation than other OECD countries. We know, however, that there is no room for complacency and that we need to work hard to maintain and improve that position.

Of course, the sensible way is to strike a balance on regulation to protect employers, workers, and consumers and to guarantee decent minimum standards. Most businesses see the advantages of treating staff and customers well, but a tiny few do not. Last year, 180,000 people were injured and 160 killed in workplace accidents, and 30,000 consumers were harmed by faulty products. Consequently there will always be a need for regulation in some form. The Government's role is to ensure that we promote intelligent or smart regulation. In that way, we can provide businesses with effective incentives fully to meet their potential, and not wrap them up in red tape.

For employers, we have introduced exemptions for small businesses in relation to trade union recognition, EU requirements on unit pricing in shops, merger fees and rules on stakeholder pensions. While minimising administrative costs to employers, millions of employees have gained from a direct improvement in their terms and conditions, for example, through the introduction of the national minimum wage and annual leave entitlement—all with no apparent negative effect on employment levels.

Recent research shows that fewer than one in six businesses cite red tape as their most important problem. The concerns of businesses were expressed in the following proportions in a recent MORI poll: 44 per cent. on securing sales and cash flow; about 14 per cent. on costs and overheads; and about 6 per cent. on changes to regulations. That reinforces the need for accessible business support and advice for small businesses. That is why we have made that help more readily available than ever before.

In partnership with the Business Link network, the SBS recently launched a national website and contact centre—www.businesslink.org—providing information and advice. I remind the House that 1.7 million small and medium-sized enterprises are already IT-literate, and more than 450,000 of them have access to the web. The service that we now provide will continue to expand and evolve.

A major objective of the web service is to provide personalised support enabling registered users to have their interests noted so that they can be automatically provided with up-to-date information and regulatory changes and, in due course, with business opportunities—for example, from EU tendering lists.

Business Link can help with all aspects of setting up, running and growing a business. Although the new Business Link network went live in April, I should like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved—Business Link, local authorities, chambers of commerce and others—for their effort and commitment in making this possible.

I believe that we are building on the good foundations laid over the past decade and that we are well on the way to having in place a truly world-class business support service. That is precisely what our small businesses deserve.

9.54 am

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): May I start by declaring an interest? I have an interest in small businesses in that I have owned, operated and worked in several of them. The number of employees ranged from six to 106. The turnovers were from a few thousand to tens of millions. It is exciting. It is rewarding—sometimes—but it is also hard work. Running a small business is tough. I make that point not only to demonstrate that I have some of hands-on experience, but also so that those who are interested in such matters will appreciate that I am declaring an interest. Those interests are in the register for all who want to examine them.

My work in small businesses has taught me that we cannot fire a magic silver bullet to make all the problems of small business disappear so that all will be well. The problems of this vital sector can be likened to a cake. That cake is cut into slices of varying thickness and digestibility, but all have to be tackled and consumed. When that has been done, the Government of the day will look down at the plate to find another cake there—also with slices of various sizes. The aim of the game is to ensure that it is a smaller cake and that when that one is gone, there should be an even smaller one, although I doubt that we shall ever arrive at the point when there will be no cake at all: no problems facing the small business sector. As the Minister said, the sector is diverse; it is made up of many, many parts, so what might help one part of the sector may often damage another.

From that perspective, I can fully understand why, over the past few years, Labour Members have highlighted the Government's efforts to maintain stability in the economy. Obviously I welcome that stability: no one wants high inflation or high unemployment. I was about to say "high taxation", but some Labour Members are rediscovering an innate restlessness on that subject. It was there years ago, but has been coming back since 7 June.

I want to deal with some of the larger slices and—surprise, surprise—the largest slice is the one on which the Minister spent some time: the question of regulation. As I listened to his remarks, I could have signed up to almost everything. As a former Minister for small business, I said, "Yes, that's right, that's what we want to achieve, that's good": but then I gave myself a little pat on the cheek, woke up and found that what the Minister was saying and what the Government were actually doing, although not diametrically opposed, were certainly not exactly the same thing.

The truth is that the Government put considerable spin on their claim to be the friend of business in general and of small business in particular, but that is belied by the facts. In April 1997, Labour's business manifesto stated:

"We will not impose burdensome regulations on business, because . . . successful business must keep costs down."

[Mr. Richard Page]

But what do we find? Since 1997, the Labour Government have added £10 billion, through regulation, to the burdens on business. Those are not our figures; they come from small business organisations.

I do not want to embarrass the immediate predecessor of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but it was that right hon. Gentleman, the present Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who—

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Page: Of course.

Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that about 90 per cent. of that £10 billion consists of the costs of the minimum wage and the working time directive? The Conservatives are now in favour of the minimum wage and they cannot change the working time directive, so to present that as red tape is misleading.

Mr. Page: I was merely pointing out that since 1997 there is an extra cost burden on businesses of about £10 billion. It is made up of several things, some but not all of which we have signed up to. I do not disagree with part of the hon. Gentleman's comments, but I do not think that the burden is quite so heavily loaded on one side. It is much broader. I shall come to that point—he will be delighted to hear—as I progress through my few words.

I do not want to embarrass the Secretary of State's immediate predecessor, but he said on 2 February that he would

"guarantee that we would not allow regulation to stifle enterprise".

A few months later, he went on to concede that

"too often regulations have been introduced with too little consultation and too little warning".

He should know; he is in a perfect position to judge.

More regulations than ever before—well over 3,500—were imposed on British businesses in 1999, but that record did not last long. Last year, 3,865 regulations that affect businesses were passed by the Government. I am told that the overall cost of complying with European Union and domestic regulations is equivalent to about 3.7 per cent. of our gross domestic product. That approach can only be described as control freakery—a phrase that is now entering the parliamentary lexicon—and it is unsustainable. Big firms can handle the extra cost involved, but smaller firms simply cannot; it is too much for them.

The owners and managers of firms with 10 to 14 employees spent about 31 hours a month complying with such regulations, according to a NatWest survey conducted in the autumn of 1999. I suspect that they would probably spend longer doing so now. A more recent survey by Kingston Smith showed that 56 per cent. of small firms found employment regulations extremely or very time consuming; 42 per cent. reacted in the same way to pay-as-you-earn regulations and a similar proportion to health and safety regulations; and 35 per cent. found personal taxation forms confusing. I put myself in that 35 per cent., and I should be interested to know whether any hon. Member does not do the same. Obviously, as all Labour Members are loyal to the core, they will leap up and say how simple all that is and how easy they find filling in their personal tax forms.

In each of the regulatory sectors, significant numbers of businesses have doubted whether they are actually complying with the regulations. The Government, not small firms, are responsible for the complexity of the regulatory machinery. We all know that the Government have a number of inspectors who are expert in various disciplines—so they should be—but they expect small business men to be expert in all those sectors as well. That is a burden too far, but I am glad to say that the Government have been listening to what we have been saying. The inspectors are now trying to play—it will be a hard task for them—a more advisory role, providing guidance, rather than an enforcement role. I welcome that change and hope that it can be extended. The inspectors have to do their job, but only if a small business does not comply, having been warned. They should give advice when it is clear that small business men or women probably have not got a clue whether they are complying with the latest regulations.

I do not want to encourage kleptomania, but the time has come for the Government to adopt—dare I say steal?—Conservative party policies on deregulation. That should not worry them too much; they have stolen so many of our clothes already that a few more will not do any harm. However, an independent assessment of the overall costs of regulation to the economy is urgently needed, as is a willingness on behalf of the Departments responsible for those regulations to accept targets to reduce the burden that they impose, year on year.

New regulations should not be introduced unless, simultaneously, old ones are removed under the regulatory reform process. Sunset clauses should be used more often and more openly. Small businesses certainly have a good claim to be exempted from certain classes of regulation. I welcome the examples that the Minister mentioned, but such exemptions should be extended. There is evidence that businesses on the continent are allowed exemptions from European regulations, whereas we try to ensure that as many people as possible comply with them. If firms with 10 or fewer employees had been exempted from the parental leave regulations, more than 80 per cent. of firms would have been freed from an obligation that is especially onerous for micro-organisations, but only 20 per cent. of employees would have been affected. We should encourage that.

The Minister tells us that deregulation is part of the Government's agenda. Ministers often say that they want regulations to be lifted, but I wonder whether any of them has ever run a business. If they had, they would immediately tell their Departments, "We are not winning." Out in the real world, the Federation of Small Businesses has produced a red-tape dossier, which lists regulations that hurt small businesses, and a booklet entitled "Constraints on Business Growth", both of which should be compulsory reading for Ministers. We recommend that our party should go away and read the book, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus"; well, I recommend that Ministers read the booklet "Constraints on Business Growth" and the red-tape dossier. If they did so, they would start to grasp the feelings of those in small business towards what the Government have done in the past few years.

We can bat surveys back and forth, but part of the survey that underpins that booklet was carried out by Strathclyde university, which produced the statistic that some 50 per cent. of small businesses wanted to expand, but the fact that more and more burdens are being lumped on to employers has led to some 56 per cent. of them voicing concerns about the effect of regulation in relation to employing staff. I do not know how many people were involved in the MORI survey, nor whether MORI comes that high up the poll for accuracy in various parliamentary predictions, but the Strathclyde university survey polled about 21,000 people.

Geraint Davies: I, too, have run a small business. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some red tape, such as the working families tax credit in the payroll, are part of enabling more people to access the job market, which reduces small business wage costs because more people are in the market? Although small businesses moan and groan about red tape, it is part of the reason why they are growing and creating more profit, and they cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman seems to be trying to fight both ways. Certain regulations are necessary; they exist to provide protection. We certainly would not want a complete free-for-all, without rules and guidance, but there is excessive enthusiasm for regulation and gold plating. Either he is right, or a substantial percentage of the small business sector and the Minister are wrong, and I am wrong. The Minister has just spent half an hour at the Dispatch Box arguing that regulations and red tape need to be reduced for companies, and I endorse that position.

Nigel Griffiths: I spoke for 20 minutes.

Mr. Page: I hope to speak for only 20 minutes—so long as I do not keep getting interrupted.

The Government inherited a golden legacy, and I admit that when the economy is going from strength to strength, help and protection for small businesses is not so urgently needed, but when there is a downturn, it becomes vital to try to reduce the burdens on them. The Chancellor claims that he has done away with boom and bust. I seem to remember that there was a king called Canute who thought that he could stop the tide, but he was unsuccessful, and I strongly suspect that no Chancellor can insulate a country from world conditions.

The Minister and I are as one in believing that future employment will come from small businesses. Large companies are downsizing whenever possible and subcontracting out more and more work. The old concept of large businesses doing everything in-house is dead. Small businesses must be part of the supply chain. I know that over the years the Government have endeavoured to build up a supply chain involving small firms so that they can develop flexibility, which is essential, and larger firms can keep their products up to date and their designs fresh and exciting, rather than ossifying in traditional patterns.

The Government use many fine words, but over-regulation and gold plating carry on apace, and each year sees a new record figure for regulations established. The Government have, using psychology, carefully named the taskforce headed by Lord Haskins. The fact that it is called the better regulation task force, rather than the "less regulation taskforce", means that it will not necessarily reduce the burden of regulation, but rather try to make it better. However, the Government simply pile regulation on regulation.

Lord Haskins has expressed his frustration about the fact that the taskforce is failing even to slow the remorseless flood of regulation that spews out of Whitehall every day. Much has been made of the Regulatory Reform Bill. I served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill, and I wish it well, as we all do. However, the power to examine regulations comes into effect only when they are two years old. There is no mechanism to check the existing Whitehall regulation machine, as Lord Haskins is so obviously aware.

The Small Business Service is supposed to explain regulations to puzzled, concerned business men, but the head of the service, David Irwin, has complained that the task grows more complex each day. Last September, he said that he wanted to introduce a red tape index, which would monitor the amount of regulation introduced each year by each Department, and then he would try to make the Departments cut that amount. That sounds fine, but the service has failed to meet its target, and a series of parliamentary answers shows that little, if any, progress has been made. Again, we have spin, but no delivery.

I agree with almost all of the "Think Small First" report. Its executive summary says:

> "Businesses have a range of needs, including access to advice and training, finance, workspace, labour with the appropriate skills and information. They desire a tax and regulatory environment that is fair, simple and straightforward. Ideally, they would like a culture that is supportive of business rather than antagonistic."

There is nothing wrong in all, but are businesses getting a regulatory environment that is fair, simple and straightforward? I do not think so. In an interview on the internet, David Irwin says that his task is to

> "manage all of the government's small business support programmes and cut back regulation".

What power does he have to cut regulation? What power has any organisation to do that?

Today, the Small Business Council has announced 21 measures. In true Labour style, the announcement was made on the "Today" programme. I look forward to hearing about those measures, but I look forward even more to hearing whether the Government will set up an independent organisation that could say "Stop!" when a regulation was proposed. The House could be told that the organisation had objected, and that would inform our decision whether to agree to the proposed regulation.

There is talk of the Department of Trade and Industry wanting to establish a Brussels bureau to be closer to the source of regulation. The aim would be to make it self-sufficient in two years. That is a bit rich because the Government are saying to business, "Please pay us to tell you what regulations we will impose on you in the coming years."

Returning to the Whitehall regulation sausage machine, I anticipate that anyone who objects to a regulation will be told by the Government, "Don't worry, if it does not work, we can use our new mechanism to examine it after two years." I wonder whether that attitude will permeate through the legislative process, and result in even less enthusiasm for halting regulation.

[Mr. Page]

I advise the Government to consider our manifesto commitment to establish an independent body that can prevent a Department from introducing a regulation unless it is referred to the House of Commons. The House should be paramount in these matters. I hope that it will be paramount on Monday in the decisions on Select Committee membership because those decisions should not be imposed by the various Whips Offices. If the Government are twitchy on that subject, I have grave doubts that they would be prepared to set up an independent body to control regulation.

We need independent assessment of the cost of regulation, and I hope that, at the very least, a red tape index will be established. If the Government do not have the courage to set up an independent body, they should use their toothless tabby, the better regulation task force, to produce information on the cost of regulation. The information should be gathered by the taskforce, rather than by the Small Business Service, because it has got to be seen to be at arm's length from the Government. Many Bills have a little note in the back, saying that the Government believe that they will incur no appreciable cost to industry, or whoever is affected by the legislation. However, when one talks to the people who are affected, they say that their costs will increase. That is why an independent assessment is necessary.

The Government must put themselves in the shoes of small business men, rather than trying to adopt the attitude that nanny knows best. There was a classic example of that immediately after the Government came to power, when they established a statutory right to interest on late payments. I accept that it was a manifesto commitment, but they continued with it despite the fact that they were mistaken in thinking that it would enable businesses to solve their late payment problems.

The measure has now vanished without trace, and if there is evidence that it has been a glorious success, I would like to see it. I have asked for such evidence, but nothing has been forthcoming. All I have is an article that was in a national newspaper a few months ago which says:

"The Labour party is today revealed as a 'maximum risk' late payer of its debts—despite introducing laws aimed at forcing businesses to settle up on time."

Again, Labour is saying one thing and doing another.

I do not oppose everything that the Minister said. Much of it was supportive and helpful, and Conservative Members want to encourage that. We all want business start-ups to succeed, but that applies only to those that have a reasonable chance of success, rather than those set up by graduates of the "it seemed a good idea at the time" school. I am not saying that the UK should be like Germany, where anyone who wants to start a business has to be endorsed by the local chamber of commerce. There should be greater encouragement to ensure that, before a business starts trading, there is some check or independent evaluation of its business plan. This is not the time and place to develop that argument to the full, but we should do what we can to prevent the phenomenon by which companies start but then go bust in a very short space of time. That causes heartache not only for the individuals involved, but for all the people connected to the company—the people who have provided it with credit and supplied it with goods. Everyone gets hurt when a business fails.

Small businesses in certain parts of the country have also been badly hit by the foot and mouth disaster. The problems do not affect just farmers; they go broader than that. Thankfully, my constituency has not had this terrible disease visited upon it, but NSR Communications, a company based in Rickmansworth that supplies public address and communications equipment, has found itself in trouble because the orders for its equipment have not materialised. As we all know, a number of agricultural shows and fairs in the north of the country have been cancelled and that has caused huge problems in many constituencies.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. NSR Communications was directed to the loans guarantee scheme and it was told that only companies that could demonstrate that they had a viable future would benefit from a loan guarantee. Obviously a company faces tremendous difficulties when it is affected by the problems caused by foot and mouth but, following my representations, the right hon. Lady went on to explain that she had asked her officials to discuss with the principal lending institutions the idea that viability should be considered on a long-term and short-term basis. She hoped that businesses that were successful before the onset of the disease would be supported by lenders until matters improved. I am grateful for her support.

I shall not describe all the difficulties facing the small businesses affected by foot and mouth, but the support that the Government have announced is inadequate. As the Minister will know, at Question Time yesterday, I raised that concern at the Dispatch Box and he made great play of the fact that £3 million had been allocated to the north-west to help the companies affected by foot and mouth. Given the effects on small businesses, £3 million is a mere drop in the ocean and we all understand the difficulties involved in channelling the money to those companies to ensure that they succeed.

We are as one in what we want to achieve, but we face a difficulty in how we are going to get there. The Government instinctively find it difficult to let things go and stop the control freakery that I mentioned earlier. Small firms are the main losers in that process. They lack the resources of the larger firms and they do not possess the same skills in dealing with the demands of the state. Just registering for VAT brings a 300-page book through the post from Customs and Excise. Many small businesses trying to stay afloat in competition with others cannot turn themselves into amateur tax men, health and safety officials or experts on employment law. The big firms can afford to employ specialists, but small firms cannot. Business Link can play an important role in that regard.

Government policies and regulations are not always put directly or exactly into effect. That brings the policies and the mechanisms of policy into disrepute. There is an excessive regulation of small firms and an indifference to their problems except in times of obvious crisis. That is discriminatory and unfair.

The gap between the two political parties is most obvious on this issue. We believe in less regulation and we think that small firms are likely to succeed in an environment in which the hand of the state lightly touches their affairs. The bureaucracy should exist to serve the interests of the people and of the small and large businesses that provide this country with prosperity. The Government's temporary political strength should not lead them to believe that the current conditions will last for

ever. Like the Minister, I believe that the future of employment and the future of companies in driving the economy forward rely on our small businesses. Conservative Members will do everything that we can to help them.

10.25 am

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I am delighted to make my maiden speech in the House of Commons on an issue that is of vital importance to my constituents in West Bromwich, East. Being elected as the Member of Parliament for West Bromwich, East is a great honour, and I am thankful for the faith and the trust that the people have put in me. However, I have to admit to more than a little trepidation, because I am following in the footsteps of two excellent parliamentarians.

Peter Snape represented West Bromwich, East for 27 years. He left with a distinguished record of service to his constituents and party as well as with a reputation for toughness in the Chamber. The best compliment that I can pay Peter is to say that he never lost sight of where he came from. His working life began as a signalman in the Edgeley No. 2 junction signal box on the west coast main line and, despite his success as a Whip and as a member of the Labour party's transport team, he never forgot his roots. His no-nonsense manner and understanding of the world outside Westminster kept his feet firmly on the ground, but that would often get him into trouble with his colleagues. He was the only member of the Tribune group of MPs to vote for Denis Healey in the party's leadership election. However, Peter was always prepared to take a contrary view if it was the right thing to do.

Parts of my constituency were also represented by another highly successful parliamentarian. Baroness Boothroyd was a renowned defender of democracy and champion of this House. Parliamentarians around the globe referred to her as Madam Speaker, but in West Bromwich she was affectionately and simply known as "Our Betty".

Hon. Members will therefore know how tough it is to take up the role of MP for West Bromwich, East. However, the job has been made much easier by the welcome that the people of the constituency have given me.

West Bromwich, East is a misleading name for the constituency because the seat takes in parts of Walsall, Wednesbury and Birmingham. Each area is fiercely independent, with its own identity and proud history. A quick glance at Wednesbury's "What's on" for July shows a community overflowing with activity—from whist drives to wheelchair basketball.

One of the most frightening experiences of the election campaign was drawing the bingo numbers at the Friar Park millennium centre in Wednesbury. People talk about the fear that hon. Members face when making their maiden speeches, but let me say that this is nothing compared to the terror felt when pulling out the bingo numbers in front of Gladys Cooper and the 50 ladies from Friar Park who regularly attend her bingo club.

The Great Barr parts of my constituency are in the authority of Sandwell but the postal district of Birmingham. They share a common interest with the Walsall part of my constituency in protecting our precious green belt. Great Barr hall and the green fields that surround it lie in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), but a proposed new housing development on the site will affect many of my constituents, who fear congested roads and a reduction of our green spaces. Over the coming months, I will work to ensure that their fears are not realised.

Given my background as an officer for Britain's most progressive trade union, the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, I hope that the House will forgive me if I concentrate my remarks on the engineering and manufacturing challenges facing small companies in this sector.

After the industrial revolution, West Bromwich was known as "Spring Town". There was no shape or size of spring, for whatever use, that could not be made there. Springs of every shape and size were made and exported to all corners of the world. The springs made by Salter's Weighing Machines graced every kitchen table across the land, as well as shops, offices and factories all over the world. Anywhere where there was a need for accurate measurement of weight, a West Bromwich spring would be present. But that was the tip of the iceberg. West Bromwich also made springs for suspensions and shock absorbers. Ask for a spring for any purpose, and one of the small firms in what today we would call a cluster was able to make it. The byword was innovation.

West Bromwich Spring in my constituency has been at the forefront of the industry for more than 100 years. It makes anything from a spring as small as a few millimetres in length that weighs less than a gram to one two metres high that weighs half a tonne. Although it is important to celebrate such long-standing success and technical expertise in an intensely competitive industry, it is important for us not to rest on our laurels. Put simply, we cannot live for ever on the innovations of our parents and, in some parts of the black country, our grandparents.

It is worth mentioning how, in that early cluster of spring companies, innovation and technology transfer took place. After a long day of thirsty work at the hearth or forge, the springmakers would often drop by at the local pub for a fine pint of black country beer—a practice that many of my constituents still enjoy today. Over a pint, springmakers would fall into conversation about the trouble that they had in getting a particular steel to harden or their difficulty in making an accurate spring. As they chatted away, one would tell the other that he, too, had had the same problem and some time ago achieved the solution, which he then passed on. The next day, back at work, that solution would be put into practice, and technology transfer had occurred.

Today, the technology challenges that small engineering and manufacturing firms face are much broader in scope, from the advances in new materials—composites, polymers and plastics—to the technological explosion in computers and telecommunications brought about by the e-revolution. Sadly, the range of technical support that they need can no longer be found in the local pub. Hon. Members should not think that I am trying to persuade them that there are no excellent hostelries in West Bromwich, East—the Vine and the Crown offer the best curry and beer in the country, and they sustained my campaign team through the long month of the general election.

I warmly welcome the Government's commitment to supporting all small firms through the Small Business Service. I also welcome the commitment to creating a

[Mr. Tom Watson]

regional manufacturing advisory service. It is important to regard the Small Business Service as we would a GP—as looking after the health of small firms in an area. However, when it encounters a technology-based firm with a particular technology problem, it must be able swiftly to refer it to the best possible body of expertise in the relevant technology, wherever that happens to reside.

In an ever more complex world in which multiple technologies are required to make even more complex products, technology transfer from industry to industry and firm to firm will be achieved in many different ways, from seminars and conferences to the use of the internet and the world wide web. We must embrace all those methods to equip our firms to compete in an intensely competitive global market.

On a personal note, I began by mentioning my predecessors. As a new Member, I cannot help but be struck by the history that swirls around us in this place—the statues of kings, queens and great leaders of the past and the ornate paintings and architecture—but if there is one thing that my predecessors taught me it is that we should always keep our feet on the ground. We are here to serve the people who elected us. The problems that they share, the challenges that they face and their hopes for the children whom they cherish are the reason why we are here.

10.35 am

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I applaud the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) for his interesting and lively maiden speech. He mentioned a couple of pubs and said a little about his constituency, but what struck me most was his interest in business and industry. We welcome an hon. Member with such a background, especially as there are fears that the manufacturing industry is in the doldrums. I look forward to hearing more from him.

I declare an interest as managing director of a small manufacturing company. I should be running my business this morning, but I am attending the debate because I keenly anticipate the Under-Secretary making some interesting comments. I hope that my presence will be worth while. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Under-Secretary said, "One person, one job," but it is important that hon. Members have other experiences. I could not abandon my business when I was elected because my employees depend on me for their work. Like that of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East and other hon. Members, my business experience contributes to this place. Perhaps the Under-Secretary has such experience, but many civil servants and others do not, and we need people who have day-to-day experience of business.

Small business is usually the responsibility of a Minister of State. It is regrettable that the role has been downgraded—as some Labour Members have—and is now the responsibility of an Under-Secretary. I had hoped that the Government would mark the way in which they think about small business by appointing a Minister of State. It is a shame that they have chosen not to do that, although I hope that the Under-Secretary will be effective.

It is also a shame that we are having the debate today. I am not sure whether this is the annual debate on small business. Perhaps the Under-Secretary will make that clear. We need an annual debate, although that is not to say that we should not debate the subject at other times. The annual small business debate should be declared as such and held when many more hon. Members are present to participate.

Having made those slightly jarring comments, I welcome the Under-Secretary to his job and look forward to hearing from him as he gains experience. We want the Government to produce new initiatives. Mere words to the effect that they support small business are not enough. I want something more tangible. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will surprise us at the end of the debate.

We welcome the Small Business Service. As a concept, it follows the United States model and is a good thing. However, after a year, it is worrying that many people wonder whether it has established a clear profile. The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) referred to effectiveness in regulation and legislation. I have been looking for such effectiveness in the Small Business Service, as there is in the United States service. The chief executive should have a powerful role and be able to intervene at the heart of government to ensure that regulation is effective and not over-burdensome.

I am not the only one making such comments. The better regulation task force has recommended that the Small Business Service

"should lead a project to deliver, in partnership with other representative bodies, a single internet portal",

and that it should be more effective in delivering what it has been set up to do. It is essential that the SBS functions effectively to ensure that the small business community is at last represented—not just by an Under-Secretary but by an organisation at the heart of government.

The Government had an opportunity during the foot and mouth crisis to demonstrate their commitment to small businesses, but they did not come up trumps—nor, indeed, did the Small Business Service. When the crisis broke, many small firms were unsure where to go for the help promised to them. At the time, Government help was very modest, and it was regrettable that, on telephoning the helpline, people found out that they had to pay 8.75 per cent. interest on any deferred payments. That was subsequently put right. The SBS should have come into play quickly and effectively, but it did not. We support the concept of the Small Business Service, but it must be effective.

The Under-Secretary spoke about the Business Link network. The SBS has indeed improved it by issuing franchises, but I still hear reports about their variable effectiveness. The Under-Secretary highlighted the Phoenix scheme and others, and there are some good ones, but we look to him to spread them throughout the country to reach small and micro-businesses in particular.

The Government have today been politely castigated by the Small Business Council, whose report has drawn attention in particular to rules on consultation of small business. The Government and the SBS have not been effective in consulting small businesses so that such firms have a better chance to affect legislation.

The Liberal Democrats have consistently raised concern about regulatory impact assessments. On the one hand, I am glad that the council has said that Departments have failed to produce what is required, but on the other,

I am disappointed that it has had to do so. We have hammered on about the issue in this Chamber and elsewhere. I hope that the Under-Secretary will take the council's report very seriously.

We broadly welcome the proposed enterprise Bill. We hope that it will be effective in many areas. We welcome proposals to abolish the Crown's preferential right to recover unpaid taxes, to remove automatic VAT fines and to crack down on monopolies and cartels, and the possibility of a new flat rate of VAT. That will be music to the ears of many small business owners.

I hope that the Government will seriously consider including in the Bill a dedicated payments regulator, as recommended in the Cruickshank report. Many in the small business community, the Liberal Democrats, the Forum of Private Business and the Federation of Small Businesses have been concerned about the outcome of the Cruickshank report. At the request of the banks, there has been a delay to give them more time to consider evidence. As the days go by, it is incumbent on the Government to take the report and the issue of the banks very seriously, because we need action and support for small businesses. The banks should not be given time to be less helpful to business than they should be; the situation cannot be allowed to continue.

I am disappointed with the Government on business rates, on which a White Paper was published in the last Parliament. Time and again, the small business community has put concern about business rates at the top of its agenda. Red tape and bureaucracy, about which small businesses have strong concerns, can be difficult to tackle—although my party has clear proposals, having identified 25 unnecessary burdens which in government we would repeal right away, and we are examining many others—but the issue of business rates is very clear.

Small businesses have to pay a very large proportion of their turnover in business rates, for which they get very little return. They have to pay as much as 35 per cent. of turnover, which is clearly a burden, as against larger concerns, such as supermarkets, which pay as little as 2 to 5 per cent. of turnover. I pledged at the general election that we would continue to fight in this Parliament for a scheme to help small firms with rates.

Nigel Griffiths: I shall address as many points as possible in my winding-up speech, but I must ask the hon. Gentleman what is his policy? Who does he think should meet the cost, and how much would small businesses have to pay?

Brian Cotter: We are very clear on that. Our policy is one of business rate allowances. Small firms under a rateable value of £25,000 would qualify for rate relief on the first £1,500 of that rateable value. There would be no red tape or unnecessary burdens, and 87 per cent. of firms in the country would qualify for such relief, saving between £600 and £700 each. The Under-Secretary asked for the Liberal Democrat scheme, and I have made it absolutely clear—it is in our manifesto. I ask him for the same clarity and commitment today.

The Under-Secretary might say in response that, under his Government, 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief, and so on, has been introduced. All such schemes are very good and to be applauded. Before the election, a Bill was introduced proposing a 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief for village shops and post offices. The original scheme was extended to pubs and small garages. However, let me point out in anticipation of the Minister mentioning that scheme that the £9,000 threshold was impossibly low, with the result that only the very smallest of, for example, pubs would benefit. I challenge the Government to come up with a more helpful policy. My hon. Friends and I strongly support the schemes that have been aimed at rural areas, but businesses in large urban areas also need help.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): My hon. Friend is right. The other problem with the schemes introduced to support rural small businesses is that they apply only in those local government areas that are classified as rural for government purposes, so a business in an extremely rural part of a district council area that is otherwise suburban or urban will not qualify, which seems ridiculous.

Brian Cotter: That is correct. During the foot and mouth crisis we came across the problem of areas not being regarded as in need of assistance. Rather than continuing to talk, the Government must do an awful lot of work to help people. Furthermore, from day one of the foot and mouth crisis, we Liberal Democrats urged that the help proposed should apply to businesses with a rateable value of up to £50,000, but only in the last few days have the Government announced that they intend to extend their assistance in that way.

Before the election, the Government proposed a supplementary business rate scheme, which we felt would impose one more burden on small businesses, so we are glad to see that the Government have abandoned the idea. Instead, they talk about creating business improvement districts. Small businesses welcome the concept but we urge the Government to ensure that the small business community has real input into where the districts should be and how they will operate. Small businesses must have a voice and their concerns must be addressed if the districts are to be effective in ensuring that small businesses are not overwhelmed as they have been in the past by initiatives in which larger companies have a greater say.

We could go on for ever about red tape, but there are clear issues. Excessive regulation comes from many quarters: the European Community is often blamed and I, as a Liberal Democrat, would never say that everything that comes from Europe is to be accepted willy-nilly. However, we in this country have for some reason developed a culture whereby a few pages are turned by civil servants into a sheaf an inch thick. That has happened often. I urge the Minister to make a commitment to resolving that issue. In Holland, the part-time working regulations comprised two or three pages, whereas we ended up with 40 or 50. That has to stop.

Another issue arises when small businesses are turned into tax collectors for the Government, through the working families tax credit, for example. The Liberal Democrats believe that the credit is a good measure, but small firms should not have to implement it. Some other means should be found. Similarly, stakeholder pensions have imposed a burden on small businesses in terms of both paperwork and cost. It is likely that pension firms will help small businesses to run the schemes—but at

[Brian Cotter]

a cost. We are concerned that in a few years' time, there will be only two big pension companies left to run stakeholder pensions and they will be able to present small firms with a bill that they have to pay.

There are other Government proposals on tax credits that I ask the Minister to address when he winds up the debate. Other issues arise in the context of red tape, including consultation, which was addressed by the Small Business Council today, and a longer lead time for new legislation.

As the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire said, small businesses suffer from inspections, some of which may be unnecessary. Many companies endure inspection after inspection. In 1997, 24,000 inspectors carried out 465,000 inspections. Many will have overlapped with each other and been conducted in a draconian fashion. The Government should take the lead in that area.

We Liberal Democrats believe that there should be an inspectorate specifically for small businesses—one that exercises a light-touch regime whereby inspectors go into businesses to advise them, rather as we hope Ofsted will in education. If firms are clearly non-compliant, heavier teams could be brought in. In response to our initiative, the Government asked how one inspector could possibly know about all the different matters that require inspection, but it is equally valid to ask how small businesses can be expected to cover all those matters. If the Government do not expect a single inspector to be able to understand all the issues, how can they expect a small business man to do so?

I should be interested to learn whether this is to be an annual debate. I believe that an annual report on small businesses should be presented to the House for an annual debate. I urge the Government to consider compiling such a report on the impact that legislation has had on small businesses in the last year. That could provide an effective means of demonstrating the Government's commitment to examining the burdens on small businesses. Furthermore, by concentrating minds, it might ensure that many regulations were disposed of.

The Liberal Democrats are looking for a lot from the new Minister. I hope that we can ensure that the Small Business Service is a more effective and stronger representative of small businesses. I look to the Government to produce an effective annual report on small businesses, and I hope that we will have further debates—if not annually, on some day other than a Friday so that more Members have an opportunity to examine that report on the Government's handling of small businesses.

10.58 am

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham): It does not seem long since I was the designated Labour party researcher in an historic by-election in mid-Staffordshire. We all knew at the time that we had a candidate who would go far in Parliament, but I could hardly have imagined that 11 years later, that candidate would call me to make my maiden speech. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity.

I congratulate my good and hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson), who I know will be a powerful advocate on behalf of working people. It is a great honour for me to represent the people of Dagenham. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Judith Church, who served them loyally and energetically. I know that she will be missed by many hon. Members and that everyone joins me in wishing her well for the future.

I am the fourth Labour Member of Parliament to represent the people of Dagenham. Before my immediate predecessor, Bryan Gould represented the constituency for 11 years; before him, John Parker was its Member of Parliament for 48 years, eventually becoming Father of the House. I acknowledge the work of all my esteemed predecessors and shall seek to continue their work.

To outsiders, Dagenham is synonymous with the Ford plant, and the fortunes of my constituents are seen as almost solely dependent on the nature of Ford's involvement in Dagenham. Indeed, one wag said to me this morning that contributing to a debate on small firms was appropriate, given that Ford is pulling out of Dagenham.

That attitude is precisely the problem that we face in Dagenham. The end of car production in the first quarter of 2002 is seen by many as devastating for both the town and local people. Indeed, press reports at the time of the announcement talked of a dying town. It is my job to dispel those distorted and simplistic views. Dagenham is well situated to gain from its geographical location and historic association with manufacturing industry. Alongside that, the strategies of the Labour Government in east London and the priorities of the London Development Agency and the Mayor all point to the positive opportunities that are opening up in Dagenham.

My constituency partly covers the Becontree estate, the largest council estate ever built in Britain and one of the largest public housing projects in the world. It is often argued that Dagenham was built for the sole purpose of supplying labour for the Ford plant, yet the estate predates the building of the Ford complex.

However, it cannot be disputed that Dagenham has its share of economic and social problems. A cursory look at some of the statistics in the borough can make for difficult reading. Adults there have the second lowest level of numeracy and the fourth lowest level of literacy in the country, and 4 per cent. of residents have higher education qualifications, which is among the lowest in the country. We have the lowest wage economy in greater London. Barking and Dagenham remains one of the most deprived boroughs in the capital—indeed, in the whole country.

Today, however, I want to flag up a positive agenda for economic and social change in Dagenham and, in so doing, to overcome misconceptions about the area. Geographically, Dagenham sits at the centre of the so-called Thames gateway sub-region, an increasingly integrated area that includes 13 boroughs and 2 million people, and covers many of the most deprived communities in the country. Because of the location of the Ford motor company, Dagenham will remain the manufacturing centre of the Thames gateway.

East London is an exciting place to be at the moment. In the political economy of London, the centre of gravity is moving eastward. The Mayor talks of shifting priorities from west to east London and building a new city to the east. The nature of the London housing market and the dynamics of transport congestion are pushing London eastward, and the people of Dagenham are set to benefit from the major changes that that will bring. I shall now consider some projects that are taking place.

First, despite the press reports that I mentioned earlier, there are considerable developments on the Ford Dagenham estate, some of which will be discussed by the company later today at a press conference. A new high-technology engine manufacturing plant is soon to be built and will be one of the most modern manufacturing facilities in Europe. Annual engine production will rise to 900,000 units a year by 2004. After the end of car assembly, more than 5,000 people will still be employed on the Dagenham estate, which will continue to be London's largest industrial centre and will become Europe's premium manufacturing facility for diesel technology.

In addition, a new supplier park is to be created in Dagenham on London Development Agency land to support the new diesel facility and will attract small and medium-sized, high-tech businesses. On top of that, a proposed new centre for manufacturing excellence on the Ford estate will provide education and training, from basic skills right through to advanced postgraduate degrees for local people.

We must also consider some of the major infrastructure projects. The scarcity of river crossings over the east Thames remains a major impediment to successful economic regeneration. East of Tower bridge, there are only three road and three rail crossings, compared with 26 between Blackwall and Battersea. The proposed package of three new river crossings will have a major impact on creating employment and development opportunities.

The channel tunnel rail link, which will go underground in Dagenham, is vital if international and domestic connections to London and the south-east are to be created and major hubs for new investment established. Hopefully, the Docklands light railway will be extended into the borough, linking it to major job generation sites across east London. Crossrail remains a catalyst for regeneration and strategic regional integration. Options linking Dagenham dock and the key employment sites in the Royal docks and Canary wharf will be high on my agenda. Within Dagenham itself, change is evident, and will be of direct benefit to the community. The heart of the Thames gateway project is providing a new economic future for Dagenham and south Hornchurch to the tune of nearly £500 million.

Just outside the constituency border, the new Oldchurch hospital will be built, and I shall work to ensure that it is completed on time. The local education authority and all the people who work in our schools deserve special mention, as their work has ensured that the borough has some of the fastest improving schools in the country. The Government's strategy to confront pensioner poverty and provide dignity in older age is beginning to bear fruit, as is the tax credit regime for young families.

I could go on; overall, a lot is happening. My job is to ensure that local people benefit from change, and to put the case for Dagenham at Westminster. The radical industrial strategy for east London puts paid to some of the simplicities common in debates about the so-called new economy. Regeneration is based on large-scale manufacturing, construction and civil engineering projects, yet it includes large, medium and small firms at the cutting edge of research, design, skills and technology. That is not the old economy; it is the economy of the future for large parts of east London.

Dagenham has a strong tradition of industrial working class organisation. Before the general election, I worked in Downing street, seeking to develop a positive trade union agenda and better employment rights for people at work. In the House, I shall continue to push that agenda to ensure dignity in the workplace.

The future is bright for the people of Dagenham. Geographically we sit at the centre of the Thames gateway sub-region. Economically, the centre of manufacturing in London will remain within Dagenham even after the regrettable end of car assembly at Ford. It is my job to help to drive the agendá of change in east London. I hope that we can begin a transformation materially to change the lives of the working people of Dagenham. That is why I joined the Labour Party.

11.7 am

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I am grateful to have been called early in our debate to make my maiden speech in Parliament. I am not entirely sure of the convention for successive maiden speeches, but I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) on his eloquent and interesting speech; I am sure that he will serve the interests of his constituents well.

It is with trepidation that I make my maiden speech today, because I note that it is Friday the 13th. For some people, 13 is their lucky number. My lucky number, however, would have to be 48, which, as some hon. Members will be aware—certainly Conservative Members—is the size of my majority. In my constituency of Perth, such a small majority is not without precedent. Indeed, one of my illustrious predecessors, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, who was well known to the House as a colourful character and eloquent member of the Scots Bar, had a majority of 53 when he first came to the House in 1974. He went on to hold the seat for 21 years; I take that as a good marker for my own tenure.

I believe that my constituency of Perth likes determined and strong-minded individuals who are prepared to speak up for the interests of their constituents, and there is no better example of a real fighter for her constituents and for Scotland than Roseanna Cunningham, my immediate predecessor and fellow member of the legal profession. Roseanna entered the House in June 1995 as the Scottish National party Member for Perth and Kinross—as the constituency then was—following a spectacular by-election victory. She went on to hold the seat in the 1997 United Kingdom general election. That was the first time in the SNP's history that a by-election victor had held a seat in a general election. In doing so, Roseanna moved the cause of Scottish independence significantly further forward.

As many hon. Members will be aware, Roseanna was a forceful debater and never failed to get her point across. She was a champion of the land reform debate, and succeeded in wresting further powers for the Scots Parliament from the Government during the passage of the Scotland Act 1998. There were very few concessions during the passage of that Act, a point that will not be lost on the people of Scotland in the years to come. Roseanna Cunningham is now a Member of the Scots Parliament, and I feel sure that all Members in this place would wish her well in her continuing work in that Parliament.

For me, it is a great privilege to have been elected to serve as the Member for Perth. I have heard claims in the House during the past few weeks on the part of various

[Annabelle Ewing]

Members while making their maiden speeches to the effect that their constituencies are the most beautiful. I would respectfully have to differ, for who, having been to Perthshire, could fail to be enchanted?

My constituency consists of the fair city of Perth itself, where some hon. Members will be interested to know that the fair maids reside, and the peaceful village of St. Fillans, nestling on the shore of Loch Earn to the west. It extends through the southern highland town of Crieff and beautiful Comrie down Strathearn to the thriving town of Auchterarder and the neighbouring village of Aberuthven. It includes the gentle plains of the Carse of Gowrie and the historic village of Abernethy. No visitor to my constituency could fail to be impressed, and no visitor could fail to be struck by the diverse nature of the countryside, with the lower Grampians to the north, the Ochils to the south, the silvery Tay stretching to the east and beautiful rich farming lands throughout the constituency.

A visitor to my constituency would be able at the end of the day to unwind, perhaps in the beautiful Gleneagles hotel with a wee whisky, the headquarters of Highland Distillers being based in Perth. With the whisky we, of course, have the water. We have Highland Spring, the world famous mineral water producer, which is based at Blackford in my constituency.

A visitor will also quickly become aware of the importance of small firms to the local economy of Perthshire, particularly in the tourism sector, which has been hard hit by the foot and mouth crisis. It must be said that the tourism sector has been struggling for some years now against the backdrop of the high pound policy and the highest fuel taxes in Europe. Those are both Government policies, and regrettably both are currently outwith the jurisdiction of the Scots Parliament. It must also be said that the shambolic state of the Scottish tourist board, which is known as visitscotland, but perhaps not for much longer, has not helped the situation for those who are trying to make a living in the tourism sector.

It is not only tourism that is suffering. Small firms in general in my constituency, as elsewhere in Scotland, are burdened with over-regulation, excessive red tape and high business rates. In Scotland, we once again have higher business rates than in England. The poundage has been decoupled by the Scottish Finance Minister and the Labour-Liberal coalition in the Scottish Parliament. Small businesses are overtaxed and they are acting as unpaid tax collectors. Those problems are exacerbated in my constituency by the lack of a 21st-century telecoms infrastructure, with very little broadband communication and high-speed ISDN—integrated services data network—available outside Perth city.

Notwithstanding what the Minister said, in my constituency there is now a downward trend in business start-ups. There is also an increasing trend of business failures. Those failures do not take place because those concerned go on to start another business. They are the result of people being unable to afford to keep their businesses going. That is the depressing reality.

In Scotland, small firms are the motor for growth. Without a supportive framework for small businesses, we cannot move forward. Indeed, growth in Scotland in the past 30 years has averaged a paltry 2.1 per cent., lagging behind the rest of the United Kingdom and our other European competitors.

The simple fact is that the Union is not working for Scotland. We need to ensure that full financial powers are returned to Scotland so that we can create the right economic conditions for our small firms to flourish and for our country to prosper, a country where we will not be ripping out key services from our local hospitals, as is the threat in my constituency to Perth royal infirmary. In short, Scotland needs to return to the normal status of independence, for it is only with independence that Scotland can move forward.

I am honoured to have been elected as Member of Parliament for Perth and I fully intend while in the House to champion the interests of small firms and to stand up for my constituents and my country. In so doing, I am following in the illustrious footsteps of my mother, Winnie Ewing, former Member for Hamilton and then for Moray and Nairn, and now a Member of the Scots Parliament for the Highlands and Islands. I am also following in the footsteps of my sister-in-law, Margaret Ewing, former Member for Dunbartonshire, East and thereafter for Moray, and now the Member of the Scots Parliament for Moray. One of the Doorkeepers, who remembered both my mother and my sister-in-law, said to me the other week that it seemed to him that as soon as one Ewing left another one arrived fairly quickly thereafter.

My mother is sitting in the Speaker's Gallery, and I feel that it would therefore be appropriate for me to conclude by echoing a statement that she made at the time of her famous by-election victory in Hamilton in November 1967. That is that I and my hon. Friends are not here to settle down; we are in the House to settle up for Scotland.

11.15 am

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I was enriched by and pleased to hear the three maiden speeches, in particular the one delivered by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) whose predecessor, Peter Snape, I knew well. Another West Bromwich Member was Baroness Boothroyd, whom we all knew in the House as a great character. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) is still in the Chamber. I am almost one of his neighbours. I am aware of the difficulties in Dagenham and the concerns over Ford but pleased by the recent news about new production and new clusters. I am sure that he will be a strong advocate for the area and its people, who have such opportunities alongside such problems.

I was pleased to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), whose speech I much enjoyed. I look forward to going on holiday to her constituency one day but hope that I am able to do so before I am required to have a passport to go there. I am pleased to see her mother here as well.

Like others who have spoken, I have a background in small business. In the first instance, however, it was in multinational companies. I managed a marketing department; I then started a couple of my own businesses in travel and in graphic design, a business which has an international clientele. My interests are declared in the Library. I come to this place with an idea of some of the difficulties of running a small business. That runs alongside my admiration for the public sector, having been the leader of Croydon council.

I shall talk in general about the need for a strong and stable economy, which is the start point for small business success. I am sure that we can trade all sorts of statistics across the Chamber. The Government, however, are bound to be in a stronger position because more small businesses are being created than ever before and there are fewer business failures. That is partly due to the support that has been given to small businesses. Largely, however, it is due to the overall economic success that we are now enjoying. That is the result of the prudent economic management of the economy, and not least the independence of the Bank of England, which has guaranteed low interest rates and low inflation rates. Proper cost control by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has ensured that we have an economic climate in which small businesses are succeeding.

When small business people approach me and talk about regulation and red tape, they must put that in the context of a successful economy that is delivering more prosperity, more growth and more profits. Alongside that environment, the Government are introducing an agenda that has made work pay. We have the working families tax credit and other opportunities that have enabled people to access the market and to earn enough wages to make work worth while. These people are often employed in small businesses. I said in an intervention that regulations are part of an equation: if we did not have regulations and opportunities, wage costs for small business would be much greater, as would the scarcity of skills, and the success of small business would be much less. We must examine the entire picture rather than take an opportunistic approach, as the Opposition do, and try to pick off little bits and misrepresent the impact of red tape.

Mr. Page *rose—*

Geraint Davies: I am pleased to take an intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Page: In the real world, employers find the operation of the WFTC onerous and if an employer—especially in a small firm—has to choose between two applicants, one of whom is entitled to the WFTC, there is a strong temptation not to pick that applicant.

Geraint Davies: The reality is that the WFTC guarantees a minimum weekly income of more than £200 for a family. In the hon. Gentleman's example, the employee would be taking a job that paid less than that, and it is obvious that the small business person has a profit motive not to pay the WFTC on top of that. If the regulatory cost were more than the reduced wage saving, the employer would not take the employees on. In fact, employers who complain about the WFTC are those who are employing people at that level of pay. Those employees are now earning livable wages.

The Labour party believes in decent, basic wages as well as access to work, especially for people with young families. That is an important part of our legislation. If the burden were so heavy, more and more small firms would resist employing people entitled to the WFTC. The reality is that some of those employers want to pay slave wages and to have no regulation. In today's successful economy, wages are being bidded and, moreover, in regions outside London, the WFTC is helping to generate more jobs and eliminate the poverty experienced under the disastrous years of Tory rule.

Mr. Page: My point is that the Government are shifting responsibility that should be theirs on to companies—in the WFTC and in many other respects. We do not object to the WFTC—I have been an advocate of such support for a long time—but it should be paid as a benefit. The companies should not have to pay it; the Government should do so.

Geraint Davies: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor would say, "Yes, Ronald Reagan thought that that was a great idea." I will not resort to that. The WFTC was test-marketed in the United States and found to be effective in drawing people into work, widening the labour pool and therefore lowering average labour costs.

I realise that the hon. Gentleman's point is that the WFTC should be managed through the benefit system and not the corporate system. The difference is that we are trying to empower people through work. The current system tells people, "You are working and you deserve this money, with a subsidy provided by the Government." The other way would be to say, "You should queue at the benefit agency for a hand-out." We are trying to achieve a cultural change by creating a work ethic and an entrepreneurial culture whereby Britain can succeed in a global economy, where it failed under the Conservatives.

I suggest that the hon. Gentleman could not provide a list of prospective employers who do not take people on because of the WFTC. When I ask people how their business is doing, whether it is profitable and whether they are employing more people, they say yes to all those questions but they still moan about the payroll. Most people in that position have some accountancy support that provides assistance to their business. Red tape is not a good thing, but regulation that leads to lower wage costs, higher engagement in the market and greater success for small businesses must be our priority. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion would be counter-productive.

Creating an entrepreneurial culture is easier said than done. We have already heard various pronouncements from the Government about encouraging an entrepreneurial culture in schools. We will have to create the space in the curriculum to do that and prioritise among the many excellent initiatives that we have introduced. Thanks to the rethink of the new AS-levels, we will be able to strip down the curriculum. If we genuinely want to introduce entrepreneurial opportunities in schools, we will have to think carefully about where they fit in.

New Addington, Croydon, which historically has not delivered the best education results, is now an education action zone and we have links with businesses—some of which I initiated—that enable mentoring and allow the pupils to experience working in small businesses. That gives them self-esteem and an opportunity to experience life beyond a traditional educational environment. We may wish to pursue that approach in other schools.

The next big economic challenge for the Government, after creating stability in the economy and an extra 1 million jobs, is to make those people who are in work more productive. That is the big prize. We all now know that average productivity in Britain is some 45 per cent

[Geraint Davies]

below that in the United States and some 20 per cent. lower than in France. Productivity growth has been slow because of the influx of unskilled workers, and one of our missions must be to enable them to become more productive. Part of that will require education outside the traditional education system, as well as further investment in education itself. We should not concentrate exclusively on small business, but we should always remember that small businesses require employees with skills and productive aptitude.

The recent OECD report on the impact of investment in education on economic growth showed that some 0.4 per cent. of the annual growth of 2.5 per cent. that we enjoy can be attached to educational investment. In the case of the US, that figure falls to 0.07 per cent. Studies show a high return from investment in quality education in Britain and I hope that the Government will continue to increase investment in that area. It will increase from 4.9 per cent of gross domestic product now to 5.3 per cent. by 2003.

We also need to provide more access to higher education, with student debt relief and imaginative ways to enable people from poorer backgrounds to enter higher education. That will enable them to achieve higher productivity, not least in computing and the high-tech arena. That increased productivity is important to small businesses, because the internet and computer facilities enable them to overcome the hurdles of transport cost and distance. Computers enable speed of exchange and open up wider markets that were formerly available only to large businesses. For example, I was involved in setting up a business that has only a handful of people but services 130 countries with graphic design online. A few years ago, that would not have been possible. Higher education enables small businesses to access IT.

I mention transport in passing, and the Government have a 10-year transport plan of £180 billion. Any business that sells actual physical products is aware of the costs of delay and congestion, which are enormous burdens on productivity. The Government are now investing in tackling that issue.

Investment in health has not been mentioned, but it is very important for small businesses. If a small business person has a health problem that needs attention but has to wait six months for treatment, that will have an adverse effect on the business. Small business people feel that they cannot afford to become ill and spend time away from running their businesses. The Government intend to invest a quantum amount in health, but we should also consider the economic and productivity impact of different decisions made by the health service.

With regard to red tape, entrepreneurs do not want to spend all day filling in forms. It is important to achieve a balance. Through their competitive and profit-making objectives, big companies aim to compete with other big companies and crush smaller ones out of existence. It is in the interest of big companies to encourage red tape, because that hits small companies more than larger ones. We must recognise which companies have the ear of Government. Big companies, with their public affairs departments and consultancies, can penetrate an extremely complicated system and gain access to people with influence. That clearly has an impact on small business and thus on competitive choice.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) mentioned the sum of £10 billion as the red tape cost to business. That is a spurious figure thrown around by the British Chambers of Commerce. It is not helpful, as I pointed out earlier, because it includes the cost of the minimum wage and the working time directive, which there is no intention to change. However, there is a significant cost arising from red tape. I support any attempts by the Government to reduce the complexity of the payroll. Indeed, the Government have given a commitment to reduce payroll burdens and corporation tax, which I welcome.

With reference to the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, I do not want a large number of small businesses going bust because the Government move in for their money. When a company is having trouble paying its debts, it is often the Government rather than the banks or other firms to which it owes money who pull the rug from under it. When a company goes down and stops selling its products, its creditors do not have much chance of being paid. I know that the Government are reviewing the position and recently announced that Customs and Excise would no longer be the first creditor to be paid. More flexibility is needed.

Council tax has been mentioned. The Government are introducing a new system of subsidies, which will mean a 20 per cent. reduction in business council tax for 60 per cent. of companies. I welcome that.

We are not specifically discussing retail businesses, but my hon. Friend the Minister referred to ethnic small business. The evolution of ethnic small business is often from small retail businesses—shops—to professions such as accountants and doctors in the second generation, and bigger business. I am acutely aware of the plight of the community shopping parade, where pharmacies have recently felt the squeeze from lower drug prices. The gradual but consistent and chronic erosion of community shopping facilities has social costs for poorer and older people and those who do not have access to transport.

There is a rolling programme of the concentration of power in the retail community. In my area, Tesco moved out of a large estate of 20,000 people after 31 years, undermining shopping facilities there. The Competition Commission has done a lengthy study of the competitive impact of supermarkets, but the output is not tough enough. The required codes are simply dreamed up by the suppliers and retailers. We should examine the situation carefully and perhaps offer more support to small retailers, through council tax and planning.

The Government intend to make planning more business-friendly, but I am not sure what that means. Councils need to study the composition of their boroughs and the relationship between larger and smaller companies there, especially retail businesses, and draw up plans to support small retail centres, rather than allowing them to fall away as a result of the power of large retailers, which rests in their ability to negotiate much lower unit costs. Transparency in that area is needed.

I am glad that the Government are taking initiatives on crime prevention and are aware of the problems of parking. Small retailers face multiple problems. The removal of small retail opportunities creates food deserts, which in turn result in health problems in many neighbourhoods where people cannot buy fresh food

unless they catch two buses. There are broader social and health problems, as well as the environmental problems arising from increased car travel to and from shops.

On financing, I am glad that the regional development agencies are up and running. Part of their remit should be to examine small business innovation and competitiveness. I welcome the progress on regional venture capital funds, which traditionally have not taken much notice of small business. I hope that the reduction in capital gains tax will encourage more investment in smaller operations. There are other models that could be considered—for example, German banks take shares in small businesses.

The first step is to put small business higher up the agenda for economic success. The Government have done that, and I am proud and pleased to be able to make a contribution to the debate, having a firm background in small business. I hope to encourage more support from the current Administration.

11.37 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I apologise to the House for my absence for a short period earlier this morning. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis)—or for what some of us still fondly know as Boothferry—announced his retirement from the leadership stakes of our party. As one of his supporters, I wished to be there to support him. Those who know my right hon. Friend well will understand that the dark horse has been taken away merely to be reshod, not shot. I am sure that we shall hear a great deal from him in the future.

I add my congratulations to the three hon. Members who have so far made their maiden speeches this morning. I understand that there are others to follow. The previous Member for West Bromwich, East, Peter Snape, was a personal parliamentary friend and was known on both sides of the House for his robust debating performance. It will be interesting to see whether his successor is able to develop the same fierce parliamentary skills as Snapey had.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) referred to the welcome announcement for his constituents and for the country of the development of new diesel engines, which I heard, as did many of us, on the wireless this morning. I am sure that that will be good news for his constituents. I wish him and them well. I have a proprietary interest, though not in diesel, as the driver of a modest Ford Escort estate with only 69,000 miles on the clock. If he knows the man who can cure the rattle underneath, I should like to talk to him afterwards.

We welcome the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing). Although the conventions deny us the opportunity to see visitors in the House from these Benches, it is a pleasure to know from her that her mother is present this morning. As the hon. Lady rightly claims, she represents one of the most beautiful constituencies in the country, though not quite as beautiful as North Thanet. I had a dear friend who invited me to go to Perth for a weekend some time ago, to take part in an occupation known as hill walking, which I discovered was a euphemism for mountaineering, but I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I am glad that we are discussing small firms, because it seems to me that the SNP is turning into a small, family business. In view of the hon. Lady's more partisan remarks, if she could simply let me have on a postcard the answer to the West Lothian question, I should be most grateful.

I was hoping to hear the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood), and I expect that we will hear it shortly, provided that he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I first met his predecessor in 1974 during the general election campaign when Jim, now Lord Callaghan, was on the hustings and I was working for the BBC. I spent a day going round the country with Jim following the Labour party campaign. That in itself was an interesting experience. We ended the day in Perry Barr where a young man called Jeff Rooker was seeking his first election to Parliament. As we all know, 26 years later Lord Rooker is wearing ermine. It remains to be seen whether his successor follows that far in his footsteps. I suspect that by then we may have a wholly elected upper House, and if we do, it will not be before time. I wish the hon. Gentleman well and I look forward to hearing his speech.

Turning to this morning's debate on small firms, I wish to touch on one general area and then briefly deal with three specific matters: the concerns being expressed by proprietors of residential and nursing homes; the concerns being expressed by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and the difficulties that small rural post offices in particular are facing; and the concerns of those engaged in farming, which used to be big business, but is rapidly being turned into small business.

The British Retail Consortium, in a briefing note that has probably been sent to many hon. Members says:

"The BRC accepts that regulation is an important function of government, however excessive regulation adds cost to business and in an industry as competitive as retail that in turn adds to consumers through higher prices. Many regulations have perfectly sensible aims that retailers support, however all too often instead of ensuring high standards, regulations force hours of form-filling which prevents companies offering the best value to their customers."

That note sums up much of what has been said here this morning and what has been said to hon. Members on both sides of the House when we visit small firms, retail businesses, hotels, guest houses and the like in our constituencies.

Business wants to make a profit. That was the clear message that came across to me at the last small business breakfast that I held in my constituency just before the general election was called. Business men want to reinvest in modern processes, to grow their businesses and to distribute to shareholders. They want to hedge against rainy days, plough money into pension funds and create employment. They want to create sound and lasting enterprises that they can pass on to their children, their grandchildren or future owners in perpetuity. They do not want to be treated as unpaid tax collectors and social services, hedged around by so much red tape and bureaucracy that they cannot get on with their job.

The difficulties being experienced by the residential and nursing home sector clearly highlights this. One of the National Care Homes Association's particular concerns relates to the regulations shortly to be introduced under the Care Homes Regulations 2001. Under those regulations, care and residential homes will have to notify a new commission of every death that takes place in a home and every serious illness. Let us think about that.

So far as I am aware, every death in the country is recorded by the registrar, so a record already exists. If a person dies under remotely suspicious or contentious

[Mr. Roger Gale]

circumstances, there is a coroner's inquest. A death must be registered by a general practitioner. The medical history of people in residential and nursing homes is almost invariably very well known. I cannot for the life of me understand, and nor can the National Care Homes Association, why this new burden of bureaucracy is being placed upon care homes. What is the point? Why do they have to tell a commission that somebody is very ill? By the nature of their circumstances and their age, people who go into nursing homes tend to be ill, or to become ill. It seems to me that this is yet more bureaucracy run amok.

Prior to this debate, I was astonished to discover that care homes are subject to inspection by nine different authorities: local authority inspectors, health authority inspectors, Health and Safety Executive inspectors, environmental health inspectors, pharmacy inspectors, fire inspectors, Inland Revenue inspectors, national insurance inspectors and local authority contract compliance officers. It is very small wonder that so many nursing and residential homes in my constituency and throughout Kent are going out of business—*[Interruption.]* I have been completely thrown as my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden has entered the Chamber.

We raised the issue with the Secretary of State for Health in February. We pointed out that nursing and residential homes were closing and that this was having a serious impact on the care of the elderly and on employment—nursing and residential homes are considerable employers—and a profound impact on the national health service generally. The Secretary of State told us that he was not surprised that some residential and nursing homes were closing because property prices were rising and people were selling up, but that the number of beds lost was more than compensated for by massive new investment in the health service.

I should like the Secretary of State to visit the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital in Thanet, the Kent and Canterbury hospital in Canterbury, or the William Harvey hospital in Ashford, because there is a queue in every single accident and emergency department. The queues are caused by bed blocking because the hospitals are stuffed full of people who should not be in hospital, do not need to be in hospital and do not wish to be in hospital. There is nowhere for them to go because the residential and nursing homes have closed. Those homes have closed because of the additional burdens of costs and regulations that have been placed upon them. Indeed, 60 per cent. of the costs in residential and nursing homes are wages. For an 18-bed residential home the increase in costs this year as a result of the statutory minimum wage will be £10,000. That 18-bed home will receive a £5,000 increase from fees. Where will the other £5,000 come from?

About seven years ago, a nursing home that I was told about invested a considerable sum of inevitably borrowed money to build 10 new bedrooms. Each bedroom was about 10 sq m; they satisfied all the regulations in place at the time and complied with every brand-new, up-to-date local authority requirement. All the bedrooms had lavatories and wash basins en suite, which is what the elderly clients indicated that they would like. The users were happy, the authority was happy, the proprietors were happy. Now, under the regulations, to satisfy the demand for more square footage—although granny, frankly, is not going to leap out of bed and play football in it—the loos and wash basins, which the clients use and want, have to be taken out. That is arrant nonsense.

The net effect is that the proprietors—people who care about their business and their clients—have had enough, so they are closing. In Kent, hundreds of beds have been lost in the past 18 months and more will follow. If that is true in Kent, my guess is that it is true in every constituency that makes this sort of provision. The effect of that on the health service cannot be underestimated. The Secretary of State for Health, never mind the Minister responsible for small business, will have to come to the Dispatch Box very soon and tell us where these patients—these clients—will go. My guess is that this winter we will face a serious crisis. I look to those on the Government Front Bench for answers.

Geraint Davies: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the current occupancy rate of private nursing homes is 88 per cent. and that the view is that they can take up to 93 per cent., given that there is a certain amount of turnover? Is he aware that the increase in social services investment from the Government to pay for the added costs that he mentioned such as minimum wages is about 12 per cent.? Inevitably, the increased cost must be borne by local authorities which receive more money to match the needs. I accept that there are localised problems and that bed blocking exists. However, such problems can be overcome when people with decent skills are paid decent wages; otherwise, such homes employ slave labour and provide poor service to vulnerable clients.

Mr. Gale: I have to speak as I find. I have been visiting the residential and nursing care homes in my constituency for 18 years. When I first became a Member of Parliament in 1983, it is true that there were some appalling premises. They were run badly and were known, grotesquely but probably rightly, as granny farms. Throughout the 1980s, the Conservative Government introduced sensible regulation and changes, and imposed sensible requirements. Proprietors were able to gain a reasonable return on a reasonable investment while providing a high standard of care and attention and very good qualified care assistants to look after the patients. Those people were, possibly, underpaid in comparison with those who go out at night and stack shelves at Asda. However, in fair terms, while I am quite sure that the proprietors would have liked to pay them more, they were not doing too badly.

The hon. Gentleman must recognise what many of us have recognised when we have visited or been in constituencies in which massive job losses are threatened. I recall fighting a by-election in Birmingham, Northfield, when the then Government were accused of winding down what was known in those days as Austin—the Longbridge plant—and of reducing the number of jobs from 14,000 to 9,000. However, the choice was not between 14,000 and 9,000 but between 9,000 and none.

My constituents who are and have been employed in nursing and residential care homes value and enjoy their jobs. They do not want to be priced out of business, thank you very much. As for the Government's investment, again, I have to speak as I find. In Kent, over the past winter, we experienced bed blocking. Too late in the day, the Secretary of State for Health, out of panic, threw

£700,000 at Kent county council so that it could buy some beds. First, the space did not exist because so many nursing home beds had gone. Secondly, the going rate for some of the care provided should be £500, but is currently £340 a week. In a panic, the authority said, "We have been given a bit more money so we had better pay a bit more." However, that is short-term money, not long-term money, unless the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) is going to take the Chancellor's position and say that he will make that year-on-year change in funding. That has not happened, and the money is not there.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gale: The hon. Gentleman made a very long speech and he also made a fairly long intervention.

The money is not there. The Chancellor is not giving the money to Kent county council or to other similar authorities. It is not good enough for the Government to pile burden upon burden on local authorities without providing the resources—the means to justify the will.

I wish to move on because I know that there are hon. Members who wish to make their maiden speeches, and I want to hear them. However, this is an opportunity for us to make some important points.

The concerns of the sub-postmasters are well known. Sub-post offices are going out of business at far too fast and undesirable a rate. Those of us who represent constituencies that embrace both towns and villages are acutely aware—this is not a partisan point—that rural villages depend heavily on key services, including the village school, but particularly on the local post office. It is the place where the villagers gather on certain days of the week, if only to collect their benefits, pensions and whatever. It caused a great deal of alarm when the Government said that they would take much of that work away.

The Secretary of State has given an assurance that anyone in receipt of pensions or benefit can have a Post Office card account and anyone can have a Pat 14 Account. Will everyone who wishes to have a Post Office card be allowed to have one, or will the dead hand of the Treasury come along and say, "Hang on a minute, this is costing us far too much. Pensioners are choosing to have their benefits paid this way rather than directly into bank accounts, which is what we would really like them to do, although we cannot say so because the post offices would scream blue murder." Will there be a ceiling on the issue of cards, or will everyone who wants one be able to have one? It is a straightforward question. If the Minister does not know the answer, I invite him to write to me. If the number of cards is limited, the income stream will be useless to the network, and still more post offices will shut.

I represent a constituency that is largely urban in its population, but largely rural in its landscape. All of us who represent such constituencies have to recognise the crisis in farming. Farm incomes have fallen dramatically. I was not joking when I said that many farms used to be big businesses and are now small ones. Many small farms are seriously struggling.

We have to look—I say "we" because again, this is not a party political point, although there will be differences of opinion about how the problem should be addressed—at the difference between farmgate prices and supermarket prices. The gap is widening. A year ago, the gap between the price of a dozen eggs at the farm gate and in the supermarket was £1; now it is £1.25. It seems to so many people who used to believe that they were providing a service to the country—putting the breakfast on our table, if you like—that the balance is totally out of kilter. They work day and night, sometimes literally 365 days a year, to deliver a high-quality product for which they do not receive a fair price.

Given all the other vicissitudes, including the obvious knock-on effects of foot and mouth on rural tourism and on the incomes of farms that may have diversified into a couple of cottages for let, if we do not do something about farm incomes now, never mind in six months, those businesses will have gone for good. It is a cri de coeur, but I urge the House to take on board the plight not only of the obvious victims of foot and mouth—although, Lord knows, the farmers who have lost their flocks and herds are important enough—but of others who, at the periphery of agriculture are at this very moment, as we sit here, losing their livelihoods.

I conclude with this thought. Business is blessed with courage, innovation, intellect and willingness to work hard to achieve. Left to its own devices with light-touch regulation, British business can beat the world. It is the job of politicians to create the framework within which that can happen. We are far too good at change for the sake of change, meddling and trying to mend things that are not broken. We do the business of this country no service when we do that.

11.59 am

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) and for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) and the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), who is just leaving the Chamber, on their excellent maiden speeches.

I want to say a few words about my predecessor, Jeff Rooker. Before his retirement from this House, Jeff served as the Member for Perry Barr for 27 years. While I was campaigning, it became obvious how popular he was; he still has the great respect of many thousands of his former constituents. As the House knows, Jeff served the previous Labour Government as a senior Minister and, as a Member of another place, continues to serve the present Government. He will be a hard act to follow, and I wish him well in the other place.

My constituency is very much part of the fabric of the city of Birmingham. It is a large urban constituency which runs from a few hundred yards from the Hawthorns, the home of West Bromwich Albion, right down to Villa Park, the home of Aston Villa. It is also the home of the Perry Barr and Alexandra stadiums—the first for canine runners chasing hares, and the second for human runners chasing medals, where Birchfield Harriers produce many successes.

In many respects my constituency has prospered, thanks to Government initiatives, including the new deal. Because of the prudent running of the economy, unemployment has fallen considerably. However, there remain pockets of stubborn deprivation that need to be targeted with special initiatives. I welcome the new deal

[Mr. Khalid Mahmood]

for communities in Handsworth and the single regeneration projects in both the Handsworth and the Sandwell wards.

There is another example of a place where special help involving a multi-agency approach could succeed by piloting special initiatives: the Perry Villa estate in my constituency. About 300 families live on the estate. Unemployment is higher than average. There is a high perception of crime, a lack of skills and a poor environment. We have set up a residents association, but we now need help to improve housing, set up play areas for children, give people opportunities to learn new skills, and reduce the fear of crime. That can be achieved only by a multi-agency approach, with the health authority, local businesses, the city council, further education institutions and the police—but above all, the community—all having their say. We must break down artificial agency barriers and work in a more integrated way.

Another example is the approach made to me by the Rookery road traders association. The traders very much want to play a part, working with local agencies, in improving that urban shopping area. However, like Perry Villa, they need help. The will of the people is there, but we need help from the bottom up for these initiatives to work. Let us give more and more encouragement to local people to improve their lives and environment with the help of joined-up local and national government.

There are many pensioners living in Perry Barr. Labour's first term did much for pensioners, with the minimum income guarantee, winter fuel allowances, the reduction of VAT on home energy and free television licences for the over-75s.

My constituency and Birmingham as a whole contain a huge number of small businesses, ranging from local newsagents run by families to small and medium-sized manufacturing companies. Although the city is synonymous with large industries—in particular, car manufacturing—Birmingham has, for more than a century, been a cradle of small businesses. Obviously, there are far fewer metal-bashing based companies now, but my constituency can boast of many new 21st-century businesses. It is still true today to say, "If it is not made in Birmingham, it is not made anywhere."

Small businesses in Birmingham are benefiting from new and more relevant support arrangements. The Small Business Service, working with the city council's economic development department, is leading in the provision of support to new and existing businesses. Small businesses need clear, usable support. They need access to help in developing financial and payroll systems, clarity in tax matters and in health and safety and environmental legislation, and simple and usable advice on grants and other start-up support.

A fresh spirit of enterprise exists in my constituency, and established businesses are being supported in better ways. In Perry Barr we have a business park, which extends over nearly a square mile, where growing companies are locating and state-of-the-art buildings provide the kind of accommodation that modern companies need.

Birmingham has the largest employment zone in the United Kingdom, and better links and pathways are being provided to get people into jobs. We must support our traditional manufacturers in engineering and the sectors that actually make things. Because of the current challenging market conditions and the need to improve productivity to global levels, we must ensure that the race to modernise and diversify our economy does not leave those firms behind. We must ensure that skills are further developed among our workers, in partnership with management, to meet the challenge of competition.

I applaud the work of our local universities in reaching out to businesses in new and relevant ways. The university of Central England at Perry Barr, together with those at Aston and Birmingham, has been showing the way, in partnership with the city council and the regional development agency, in providing first-class support to adopt new technologies. However, some sectors seem slow to adapt. The lesson is clear: we must help our businesses to take on board new technologies and economic change in a faster, better and smarter way. That involves building on the approaches that work best for our local businesses.

We have many examples of clusters of businesses, such as jewellery and new media. The design space 2000 project at our local university—UCE—is an example to the country of intelligent and joined-up working, with business, education and local government all working together in new fruitful ways.

I welcome the establishment of the Phoenix fund for Birmingham, which particularly focuses on women and support for ethnic minority groups. I hope that the Government's new initiative on the neighbourhood renewal fund, announced by the Minister for Housing and Planning recently, will be targeted, in part, towards helping small businesses to improve the quality of their outlets and workplaces.

Although this debate on small businesses is taking place at the end of the parliamentary week, I trust that that does not undermine its importance. Small businesses are vital to the economy of my city and to the country at large.

Today is Friday the 13th, so some may think that I am chancing my luck by speaking in the House on this day and date, but I cannot be that unlucky, as I was born 40 years ago. Some may say that life begins at 40; certainly my parliamentary life does. To represent Perry Barr in the House is a great honour, especially because from the age of nine I—like many of my good friends, such as Lord Hattersley and the former city leader, Sir Richard Knowles—have been an adopted Brummie. I hope that I can emulate them and achieve a fraction of what they achieved in their many years of service to the city.

There is another adopted Brummie to whom I owe so much—my late father, who came to the city in the late 1940s. My elation at being elected to Parliament for a seat in the city that so readily adopted me was tempered with sadness, because he did not live to see that day. I hope that I can honour him by serving my constituents with humility and determination in the years to come.

12.8 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to make my maiden speech and to participate in this debate. As someone who ran a small business for many years, I appreciate being called to speak at this time. I also thank the new small

business Minister for his invitation to contact him to discuss the ways in which we can improve services to small businesses.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood) on interesting maiden speech, and I look forward to hearing more contributions from him in the years ahead. I also congratulate all the hon. Members who have made maiden speeches today. As the hon. Members for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) and for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) said, being Friday the 13th, it is good to have survived the experience.

I am perhaps in a unique position, as my two immediate predecessors in Edinburgh, West still serve as elected Members, as they both won seats in the Scottish Parliament.

For Donald Gorrie, who stood down from Westminster this year, the Parliament represented the fulfilment of a lifetime's campaigning. Donald was elected to this place on his fifth attempt, and in his first speech, he argued for a Scottish Parliament in the debate on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill. Although he has often been described as a maverick, and still is, Donald consistently fought for a Parliament in Scotland, with Members elected by a fair voting system. He now sits in that Parliament, and is involved in the partnership Government. At times, he causes more problems for both partners than many members of the Opposition.

Donald's predecessor in Edinburgh, West was Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, who is also a Member of the Scottish Parliament—the same Parliament that he spent much of his time in this House opposing. As a list Member, he was elected under the proportional voting system, which he also opposed.

It is a great privilege to be in this place, and I look forward to working on behalf of all the residents of Edinburgh, West. It is heartening that relatively affluent constituents were prepared to elect a candidate who was advocating an increase in their tax rates. Proposals for fair, progressive increases in taxation, linked to identifiable increases in key public services, can strike a chord with the very people being asked to meet the cost.

Although the statistics detailing Edinburgh's relative affluence do not lie, they do not tell the whole story. The constituency stretches from Queensferry at the Forth bridges to Muirhouse and West Pilton, and within it there is great diversity, with areas of poverty as well as areas of affluence. In those poorer areas, there is not only financial poverty but a poverty of expectation. At the general election, those areas had a very low turnout of under 50 per cent.

It was not satisfaction with Labour which kept the majority of those electors at home on 7 June but disillusionment with politicians of all parties and detachment from the political process. We should not try to dismiss that with glib phrases such as "voter apathy". We need to address the underlying causes of that fracture between the political classes and ordinary people. We must put an end to the present voting system, which disfranchises many, whether or not they bother to vote. The introduction of a fair, proportional system is part of the answer.

There is a need for politicians of all persuasions to do more to engage with the electorate, to understand their needs and aspirations, and, more importantly, to recognise that aspirations have been damped down or even, in some places, extinguished. We must offer people a way out of their impoverishment, a stake in society and a share of the wealth of their nation. In recent years, there has been much talk of social inclusion, but in the past four years the gap between rich and poor has grown even greater, and too little has been done to reverse the damage done to society in the Thatcher years.

As the MP for Edinburgh, West, I shall endeavour to serve all my constituents, including the rich and the poor, those who voted for me, those who voted for candidates from other parties and those who opted out of the political system. Many of the matters of concern to my constituents have now been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and I look forward to working with Margaret Smith, the Edinburgh, West Liberal Democrat MSP. We will be an effective team working on behalf of our constituents.

It is a great honour to represent such a diverse constituency, with its historic villages such as Corstorphine and Davidson's Mains. Like the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, I must pay tribute to one of my local hostelries, the Corstorphine Inn, which sustained my campaign team at the general election. From Cramond to Barnton, the constituency includes castles, large estates and housing estates. In Muirhouse and West Pilton there is a great community spirit, but some pockets are the most deprived areas in the constituency.

West Edinburgh has a booming economy and the lowest unemployment rate in the city, but there are pockets of high unemployment, and we must match those who want jobs to those who want skilled workers. Education and training are key issues. We must invest in education, rather than throwing the education system—and the health service—out to the private market.

Although a city seat, Edinburgh, West has a rural dimension in the villages of Ratho, Ratho Station and Dalmeny, where many problems were caused by the recent foot and mouth outbreak. Not only were farmers affected, but the royal highland show was cancelled and Edinburgh zoo was temporarily closed, with the loss to the local economy of many millions of pounds. As the zoo is in my constituency, I probably represent more penguins than any other Member.

I am proud to serve on the City of Edinburgh council.

Edinburgh is a beautiful city, the home of the best Hogmanay celebration in the world. It has the international festival, the fringe festival, the book festival, the jazz and blues festival, the science festival and the longest continually running film festival in the world. I would like to welcome many Members there during the recess.

Edinburgh is also home to the Scottish Parliament where my predecessor now sits. In that Parliament, Liberal Democrats form part of the Government and have played a role in delivering a fairer voting system, scrapping tuition fees and delivering an excellent teachers pay deal and free long-term care for the elderly, with the details being announced just last week. I look forward to similar policies being introduced here.

In my constituency, transport is always a key issue. It has a particular relationship with small businesses, because transport policies to improve the ability of commuters to move from outwith the city into the city centre have often meant ruin for small shops and businesses along those routes. Planning decisions have

[John Barrett]

allowed the construction of out-of-town shopping centres and had devastating effects on local shopping centres.

What can be done to help? The Minister mentioned several good ideas including the reduction of red tape and the need to have access to finance and skilled labour. However, I ask him to consider some other issues. The first is the threat of the black economy with tax evasion and, for example, the unlicensed disposal of waste causing ever-increasing problems. When sensible regulation is in place for bona fide traders, there must be prosecutions of fly-by-night traders.

We must also stimulate enterprise, and one sector that I particularly wish to mention is arts and entertainment. This country has tremendous potential. In the United States, the entertainment industry now exports more than General Motors or Ford. We must stimulate our creative talent in computer technology, design, film, fashion and music. In the creative industries, we can lead the world.

However, we must not develop small business support as a separate policy. We should integrate our small business support with education so that the skills developed—whether academic or professional—will produce thriving industry; with transport so that the work force have access to the places where employers need them; with health provision so that we increase the amount of health care and advice about safe working to avoid the time lost through bad health such as back problems, which cost the country, employees and businesses millions; and with planning and housing policy so that we do not drive the cost of affordable housing away from affordable work space.

Many small businesses supply the goods and quality of services that can be delivered only by small businesses with specialist expertise in the field. They have the tools; we should let them get on with the job.

As a new Member, my first impression of this place was that it was steeped in history and had many fine traditions. I find the pink ribbon for hanging my sword on the coat hanger in the Members' Cloakroom quite invaluable.

However, since the general election much has been made of the low turnout. It is up to hon. Members to set an example to show why the public should participate in the democratic process, as we are the product of their decision to vote on polling day. It is no wonder that members of the general public are disillusioned by what they see if elected Members do not set an example for others to follow. We must rekindle the interest of the public in the political process—it is our responsibility. If we do not, we do not deserve their votes.

While we are here and grappling with the problems of the western world, I hope that we never forget those in the third world who are desperate to fill their empty bellies while burdened with debt to the richest nations on the planet. At the weekend, I was on the telephone to my wife, who is in Botswana, where she said there were walking skeletons on the street. Yesterday, a 2,000-page United Nations report on the impact of climate change stated that industrial pollution is the main cause and that the consequences for human society are likely to be catastrophic. Global warming is real—that is official. Crop failures, water shortages and disease will affect others much more than they affect us. The poor are always hardest hit.

As well as looking after our constituents, we must never forget those elsewhere in the world with problems much greater than our own. I hope that my time in this Parliament will see a change to a time when we no longer sit back and watch what happens elsewhere as if we were immune from the consequences to a time when we realise that we all share the same planet and that we had better start looking after it.

12.19 pm

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my first speech in the Chamber. It is indeed a privilege to be making it at a time when so many excellent maiden speeches have been made. Like other new Members, I have been inundated with requests to join various groups in the House. May I suggest that we form a new one, the Friday the 13th club, and we could celebrate the date in the future?

I was advised to read some of my predecessors' maiden speeches to give me an idea of what to say. I was not aware that the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who is one of my predecessors, would be sitting on the Conservative Bench opposite me. The speeches reminded me why the by-election took place in 1976. The sitting MP, Fred Peart, formerly a Leader of the House, was called into Downing street by the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, who said, "Fred, I'm going to have to move you upstairs to another place because I require your seat in the Cabinet for a younger Member." Fred said, "But Jim, you're older than I am", to which Jim said, "Yes, but I'm the Prime Minister." I have learned that lesson.

I am only the fourth Labour MP for Workington since 1918. Looking at the speeches by Tommy Cape, which he made immediately after the great war, and Fred Peart, which he made right after the second world war, it is clear that they came from a different age. However, what shines through and links them with my immediate predecessor, Dale Campbell-Savours, is the desire for social justice, for which I shall continue to strive.

Dale Campbell-Savours has been an inspiration to me and many others. He is greatly admired and respected, not just in the House, but by thousands of his constituents, because he is a fighter and a campaigner. No cause was too large or too small. If people needed help, he was there for them. He will be missed in the House and I wish him well in his new role in the other place. I also pay tribute to his secretary, Joan Gyles, who was with him for more than 20 years.

My best story of Dale was one that he told me about being here in his early days as an MP when the House often sat into the small hours of the morning. If he wanted an issue reported on Radio Cumbria the following morning and the station was closed because it was 11 or 12 o'clock at night, he used to ring up and put questions to the answering machine, which he would answer himself. I said, "Dale, don't you think that that's cheating a little bit?", to which he replied, "No. I used to ask myself difficult questions"—and he did.

I am proud to represent the Workington constituency. It is where I was born, grew up and have spent most of my life. It is a beautiful area, with its lakes and mountains

and stunning coastal scenery. The town of Workington has a strong industrial heritage and is known for its famous visitors. The Scots among us might be interested to know that Mary Queen of Scots spent her last night of freedom in Workington hall. Maryport has a Roman history and links with Hadrian's wall. I remind hon. Members that the wall did not stop at Bowness. A turf wall was built down the west Cumbrian coast, perhaps as an early attempt to deal with the West Lothian question.

We have the beautiful seaside resort of Silloth, with its famous golf course, and Aspatria, which is an old mining and old market town. Cockermouth is the birthplace of William Wordsworth and Keswick is a famous holiday destination for generations of people. When all that is combined with friendly, hard-working people, it is easy to understand why it is such an honour to represent the constituency.

No matter how beautiful the constituency is, however, if people do not have jobs and do not share in its prosperity, the beauty is not so obvious. Small businesses are important. Although unemployment in the constituency is lower than it has been for 30 years and more jobs are being created than lost, especially by small and medium-sized enterprises, I have two pleas. West Cumbria used to be dominated by coal mining, the iron and steel industries and shipbuilding. Rails marked "Made in Workington" can be seen all over the world, in Australia, India, Brazil, Mexico and the United States. What we have left is a steelworks that rolls railway lines. Unfortunately, it has come under threat in recent times.

Following the terrible Hatfield disaster, the work force at the steelworks toiled round the clock to produce thousands of tonnes of rails to repair and upgrade the rail network. Now that that crisis is over, Railtrack is placing orders for rails in Italy, Austria, Sweden and other European countries. I say this to Railtrack: "If you are taking British taxpayers' money, then for heaven's sake spend it in Britain." Workington is the only plant in the country that makes rails. It is of national strategic importance. It is vital that the plant stays open—to the people who work there and their families, and to the nation.

Those who remember the 1966 World cup final will surely remember the remarks of the commentator, Kenneth Wolstenholme, at the end of extra time: "They think it's all over—it is now." I am sorry, but when it comes to foot and mouth in my constituency and its impact on small businesses, it is far from over. The farming communities have undoubtedly suffered and are still suffering. I call for a full inquiry in order that we may learn lessons for the future.

One group of small businesses has been devastated by the outbreak: tourism and related businesses. Anyone with a hotel or guest house, a caravan park or a holiday cottage, anyone who is a joiner or a plumber who normally works in the tourism industry, and anyone who runs a leisure or outward bound business in the Newlands or Borrowdale valleys can be 80 or 90 per cent. down on normal trade. Small businesses are struggling, and unless there is continued support, it will be a very long winter for many of my constituents.

I should like to recount just one story. A married woman in my constituency who has two small children sold her house and invested in a small guest house. Business is very difficult. She said to me, "Remember, this is not just my business; this is my home as well and that is under threat." I have a series of suggestions that I shall pass to the Minister, but I want to make it perfectly clear that many in my constituency desperately need help. Although I welcome the money that the Government have already given, we need more, and for some time to come. What is really needed, however, is the return of visitors to one of the most beautiful parts of the world. I appeal to Members and people outside the House to come to my constituency, where they will be given a tremendously warm welcome and have a fantastic holiday.

I spoke at the outset about social justice. Recently, two great stalwarts of my local Labour party, George Robinson and Mary Graham, died. I pay tribute to them and the hundreds of others in my constituency who have spent their lives campaigning for social justice. I assure the people of Workington that I will continue that fight.

12.28 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I should like to thank and praise the hon. Members for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson), for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas), for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood), for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) and for Workington (Tony Cunningham), who have made their maiden speeches this morning. The hon. Member for Workington made a witty and passionate speech, and his constituency well deserves that passion. I, too, will be speaking about foot and mouth disease and its impact on my constituency, particularly on small businesses.

As the son of a small business man and the older brother of one who has been hounded out of his business by red tape and regulation, such that he is now happy to work for a firm alongside 25,000 other employees, it would be fair to say that I know a little about small businesses. We have some big businesses in my constituency, but they are more the likes of Sainsbury, Asda and Safeway. The number of people employed by the county council and Taunton Deane borough council takes them beyond the size of small and medium enterprises.

We have some Government agencies, such as the Charity Commissioners and the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office, as well as some private sector concerns that employ fewer than thousands: those include Avimo in Taunton and Relyon and Swallowfield in Wellington. After that, the size of employer rapidly decreases, which is hardly surprising given that Taunton is a county town, albeit one that has prospered in the past decade, as has Wellington.

The local unemployment rate is only 2 per cent., but I sense that we are at the top of the economic cycle. Ridiculous house prices have been recorded in Somerset. I heard a worrying story about that the other day. A local auctioneer told me that a house with some land attached just outside my constituency had been valued at £325,000, but that to get it away at auction, it had been put on at £275,000. In open auction, that property went for £605,000. To a former stockbroker, whose job was to spot market trends, that really rings the bell that the economy has peaked.

Hon. Members will have been sent Barclays bank's quarterly small business survey, which provides a depressing overview of the sector. Business starts in England and Wales are down 9 per cent. Business starts

[Mr. Adrian Flook]

in the catering and hotels sector—crucial to my constituency and to any rural part of Britain—have declined 28 per cent., with leisure industry starts down a depressing 49 per cent. In his opening remarks, the Minister said that businesses were set up and run by enterprising individuals, but added that it is the Government who shape the environment. I do not know whether that environment is being shaped by a pasta machine or a mangle, but I do know that Barclays and my constituents all see the same thing: that today's issues are access to finance, bank charges and the well known red tape.

I know a business woman—a young lady in whom I wish to declare an interest—who runs her own business, in which I have no interest to declare. She considered doubling the number of workers in her firm—increasing that number by one, so that there would be two—but when she looked at the large book of complicated regulations issued by some Department or other, she shuddered at the thought of having to read through one and a half inches of closely typed pages and concluded that it was not worth the effort to hire people when she could subcontract instead.

Let us compare and contrast that with the Government's attitude to other contractors, namely those affected by IR35. The Government have forced people to work for bigger businesses than themselves with the aim of ensnaring more people in PAYE and other tax arrangements, but on the other side of the red tape and regulations, the Government's policy of pushing people out of subcontracting is forcing smaller companies to subcontract. That is a shame. It is good when people can employ others, but not so good when small companies are forced to use subcontractors as a first stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) described the impact of foot and mouth on his constituency and on small traders. The same is true in my constituency, where several of this year's agricultural shows have been cancelled. Barclays recognises the impact of foot and mouth, as does everyone in my constituency—especially the impact on small businesses.

Small businesses throughout my constituency have been hit by foot and mouth. The lessons were immediately apparent to those businesses at the heart of the outbreak; sadly, however, no one outside that core appears to have taken any real notice. The Government have offered extra money in the form of expensive loans, but that is not what is wanted. What people on Exmoor—of which the Taunton and Bridgwater constituencies form two thirds—want is for the disease to be eradicated swiftly. They also need immediate help to mitigate the problems that foot and mouth has caused. In short, Exmoor has not had foot and mouth; it has not been infected, but it has been affected.

Earlier this year, the Government produced a small firms package, which the Federation of Small Businesses was quick to praise in part. However, it was also disappointed that the Government had, once again, widened the fiscal gap between incorporated small businesses and unincorporated sole trade concerns. The policy unit chairman of the federation said:

"There are over 3 million self-employed people who will be unable to take advantage of the cut in the small company tax rate."

He went on to say:

"Such measures, whilst welcome for incorporated businesses, discriminate against those who are self-employed and turn them into second-class citizens in the world of commerce."

More importantly, if someone is making no money, they pay no tax anyway. That is particularly true of the problem on Exmoor and indicative perhaps of the difficulties throughout the rural parts of my Taunton constituency. Sadly, it is beginning to affect the town itself; there is a knock-on effect, although it has not manifested itself properly in the town. We are now in July, five months after the start of the biggest crisis to hit Somerset in decades, but not one penny of aid has yet been handed over to any small business.

The South West of England regional development agency and Business Link have not given away any of the money that they promised. Just two days ago, they said that the money is still two weeks away. They said that they have made checks and counter-checks and are now making checks to counter the counter-checks on the original applications for help. Sadly, small businesses are the real losers. Fortunately—I hope that this is true also in Cumbria—they have a champion in a new group called Living Exmoor, chaired by the charming and fearless Judy Carless who, throughout the recent election campaign, managed to doorstep every single national party leader. She asked each of them in turn what they would do for Exmoor.

If only such forthrightness were obvious elsewhere. From a standing start, Living Exmoor now has several hundred members: from the Tantivy and Wiggys in Dulverton to the Royal Oak at Withypool and the White Horse at Exford. That is real self-help. Government agencies, such as South West Tourism, cost the taxpayer a fortune. The Under-Secretary said that the Government and their agencies should think small first. A member of Living Exmoor asked me why, if the agencies were well funded by the taxpayer, they were missing many obvious tricks. Last week, tourists could not get a coach in Spain. Why did South West Tourism not say that there were coach operators and hotel rooms going begging on Exmoor, as I am sure they were in Cumbria, so that those tourists could have a holiday in Britain? Why were public relations operations not promoting Britain to those poor tourists stuck at Gatwick? It is important that Government agencies do more to help small businesses.

As the hon. Member for Workington said, tourism is important; my part of Britain is as beautiful as his, and farming is just as important there. It is worth pointing out again and again that farming is a small business and that many people are engaged in it; many small businesses are run by farmers. Farming may account for only 1.5 per cent. of our gross domestic product but, nationally, farmers look after 80 per cent. of our landscape and even more in Somerset. Farming and tourism go hand in hand on Exmoor and throughout most of Taunton Deane.

The real problem is not the impact that foot and mouth has already had on businesses in my constituency, but the impact that it will have. The second quarter figures for businesses failing and going bust in the south-west are worrying. The fact that bank managers have withdrawn funding for small businesses—mostly tourism businesses—in the second quarter of the year is extremely scary. That quarter is the beginning of the tourism season, when those businesses expect an enhanced and increased

cash flow. For bank managers to pull the plug means that they can see no prospect for recovery in the summer and the autumn.

As small businesses go into the autumn, they will have no fat to survive the winter. That means that banks will pull the plug more quickly than they would have done in the past. They will do that throughout the summer, autumn and winter. The problem will become worse both in rural areas and in the town.

To be added to that is the possible late start to the traditional hunting season. Hunting may not please all Members, but eight hunts add considerably to the tourism business going into and on to Exmoor. It is important to remember what the hunts provide for the area, both for small businesses and as suppliers of tourists, whom I would call sporting pursuits tourists.

Where are the Government agencies and local councils in this context? The Minister referred to Business Link as having a ruthless customer focus. Business Link may be trying hard down in Somerset, but why is it thanking Living Exmoor, the voluntary self-help group, for doing its lobbying? The self-help volunteers are helping the so-called professional guys, who are sitting around in suits navel gazing, as it might seem to the people on Exmoor. The House must remember that not one penny in aid has yet been handed over.

Living Exmoor is disappointed with the lack of help from agencies, and also from Somerset county council. I hope that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who was a former leader of that council, will be able to help me in getting across to the council that small business men on Exmoor cannot understand, when political control has not changed, sadly, following the county council elections, and when the officers have not changed, the excuse that it was the county council elections that created a hiatus. That is given as one of the reasons why aid has not yet been given to businesses on Exmoor.

Before the election and since the election, my party has been asking for help for small businesses affected by foot and mouth. We have asked for the speeding up of VAT refunds to help cash flow. Much more money could easily have been given in the form of interest-free loans for the affected areas. There could be a more flexible reassessment of income tax liabilities. As the hon. Member for Workington said, "They think it's all over, but it isn't yet." He is right. There should be a full inquiry, and I would add that it should be a full public inquiry.

12.42 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): To follow on from the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), this is very much a debate full of maiden speeches. It is perhaps relevant that yesterday I was playing cricket and making my debut for the Lords and Commons team. We had to rush back for a couple of votes. My sartorial elegance, or otherwise, consisted of cricket whites and a blazer. Knowing that you are the Chairman of the all-party cricket group, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I suspect that you may have approved rather more than the Whips, who rightly ticked me off for not wearing the normal attire.

It has been an interesting debate and we have heard some thoughtful maiden speeches. I speak as a member of the new intake, who is making only his second speech in the House. The hon. Members for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) and for Workington (Tony Cunningham) both made impassioned pleas about their constituencies and the importance of developing business in them. Likewise the two Scottish Members who made their maiden speeches, the hon. Members for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) and for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett), said some interesting things about Scottish issues. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood) is no longer in his place. He said a few words about his late father. Five weeks ago, when I was elected as a Member, my first thoughts too were with my late father, who passed away about 10 years ago. At such moments, these family links mean so much to many of us in this place.

Like many of the new boys and girls who have come to the House, it is a frightening realisation that we know so little about virtually everything that goes on in the House—or perhaps I speak only for myself. This week we have discussed such issues as Northern Ireland election fraud and statementing in schools for young children. I confess that before the debates took place—I suspect that it is a confession that will terrify many of my constituents—I reckoned that on either subject I could write on the back of one rather small envelope all that I knew about the issues. However, I can profess to be a comparative expert on small business, because I have spent the past seven or eight years running a business full-time and my business background goes back to my university days when I set up a publishing concern. My firm, which I run with a fellow director, now has 12 employees and turns over more than £2 million a year. I shall return to that subject later in my speech.

My constituency of Cities of London and Westminster is best known for its larger businesses. All the leading international investment banks are based in the City of London and a significant number of large companies that play on the global stage are based in Westminster. However, it would be wrong to imagine that the constituency has only large businesses—it has a thriving small business sector.

The congestion charge is at the forefront of people's minds in London this week, because the Mayor of London has made it clear that he will impose such a charge on people coming into central London. Understandably, the focus has been on the effect that the charge will have on motorists and other commuters and it was initially promised that we would see a distinct improvement in public transport before it was introduced. However, the real sufferers from the charge will be those small businesses—often sole traders or small family businesses—based in central London, which will find that the 15 to 20 per cent. projected reduction in the number of commuters will make a big dent in their turnover and profits. That is one reason why we should think again about what will be a controversial subject in the years ahead.

We have had an interesting debate this morning. In the past, small business matters tended to be seen as the preserve of Conservative Members, but it is clear that the sector is increasingly important to the Government. I agreed with much of what the Minister said, but red tape is of concern to small business. The political battleground lies in what we would call red tape and the Government and various unions would describe as employee rights. Our aim is to ensure that small business does not suffer from the debate on the opposite sides of the same coin.

[Mr. Mark Field]

Many of the Government's actions are to be welcomed. For example, the Chancellor has made some great changes in the capital gains tax regime. I support many of those changes, but he has made the regime more complicated than it needs to be. We must also recognise the importance of a low tax economy. We live in a global economy, whether we like it or not, and that applies to small business as much as to the largest companies. We therefore need low income tax and a low capital gains tax regime to ensure that entrepreneurs are not persuaded to leave these shores in a brain drain.

As I have mentioned, I run my own business, which I set up some eight years ago. Others who have set up their own businesses will know that there is nothing more exciting. My business partner and I started in a small room with a couple of telephones and a fax machine. We had to lick the stamps for the first letters to our prospective clients, and it was a more exciting experience even than getting into Parliament. We have tried to develop the business and we now have a dozen staff, but I am concerned that red tape and bureaucracy disproportionately affect small business. Large companies have payroll departments, human resources departments and office managers, and they can cope with the demands. Even in my own business, which is now 12 people strong, that administrative burden falls heavily on me and my fellow director, as we cannot pass it on elsewhere. I beseech the Government to consider the matter carefully before gold-plating any directives from Europe and to ensure that in their own legislation new red tape is kept to a minimum. As has been mentioned from all parts of the House, the small business sector will be the vehicle for growth of employment opportunities in this country in the years ahead.

We heard from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas). What is happening in his constituency is a tragedy, with the largest employer for the past half century making many people redundant. In future, international companies will not offer great numbers of jobs. There is a risk that all those companies will downsize, and with the push to keep costs, particularly labour costs, at a minimum, more and more skilled and semi-skilled jobs will go to third-world countries.

We must ensure that we do not strangle small business in Britain. My principal worry is that we will discourage small businesses that employ 10 or 12 people from becoming businesses employing 25 people, simply because we will not have a light regulatory regime in place. I look forward to working closely with my hon. Friends and, I hope, with Ministers to begin to build a regime that ensures that there are no such constraints on the growth of smaller firms.

The extension of maternity and paternity leave, which applies beyond the small business sector, is seen as a family friendly right. It is easy for freelance journalists and others who work on a piecemeal basis to extol the virtues of part-time working, but that creates difficulties for small businesses. In my own business, two of our dozen employees were on maternity leave in the early part of this year. That made matters extremely difficult. Jobs had to be left open and we did not know whether to take on part-time staff. The burden should not be underestimated, especially in businesses that are trying to employ young people, graduates and people in their 20s. We should consider whether smaller businesses could be exempted from some of that regulatory burden.

It has been a pleasure to contribute to the debate on a key sector of our economy, which will be the great vehicle for employment growth in the next decade or so.

12.53 pm

Nigel Griffiths: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the remarks made during the debate. First, however, I join in the welcome for the excellent maiden speeches that we heard this morning.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) showed a close knowledge of the needs of all his constituents. His remarks that were particularly appreciated were his references to the achievements of disabled constituents and to his predecessors in West Bromwich who were distinguished Members of the House—Peter Snape and Betty Boothroyd.

My hon. Friend's detailed knowledge of "Spring Town", as he called it, will no doubt allow him to spring to prominence and high office in this place. I liked the analogy that he made between Business Link and general practitioners, stressing the need to tap into the best expertise available. I am delighted to tell him that one of my first acts as Minister was to approve the Business Angels programme, which will allow such expertise to be harnessed by our new generation of entrepreneurs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) made a very forward-looking speech, which combined a close knowledge of his constituency with a commitment to social inclusion. As he knows, that cause was very close to the heart of his predecessor, Judith Church. His determination to support Ford and other companies in their reinvestment shows that he will be leading the drive to bring prosperity to all parts of his constituency.

It was a pleasure to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), especially her description of her beautiful constituency which I know well. Her predecessor excites the envy of the House in still being able to enjoy representing that constituency in the Scottish Parliament. I do not know what the Gaelic for doppelganger is, or whether the hon. Lady is a fan of "Dynasty". Her mother must be very proud of her and I am sure that she will relish her triumphs in this place.

The fourth maiden speech this morning was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood). His predecessor has a long history in this place—27 years—and I am sure that he will have a great future in the other place. My hon. Friend rightly outlined the historic role of his city in supporting small businesses, growing great businesses over a number of centuries from the beginning of the industrial revolution. He spoke also of his traders' association and business park and the key role that people play in bringing about change. I am sure that he will provide the leadership that is required to take his city forward in this century, with links with business, university, local government and other elected representatives. I am sure that his father is looking down on him with pride.

The fifth maiden speech was from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett). Again, I hope that the House will indulge me in welcoming a near parliamentary

neighbour who speaks for another great city. It was heartwarming to hear him talk of a city that we both love and mention his concerns for the third world. I helped found the fair trade non-governmental organisation Scottish Education and Action for Development in Edinburgh two decades ago and it is a cause dear to the heart of many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. He will forgive me for saying that the impact of alternative voting systems on the turnout in the Scottish Parliament and European elections was no great advert for such changes, but I look forward to hearing his views develop in future speeches.

The sixth maiden speech was from my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), who rightly paid tribute to Dale Campbell-Savours, who was an exemplary parliamentarian admired by us all. My hon. Friend gave us one of the wittiest anecdotes about his predecessor which I am sure Dale will have enjoyed listening to and reading in *Hansard*. He mentioned that his constituency is the country beloved by Wordsworth:

"Bliss was it . . . to be alive,

But to be young was very heaven"

and spoke of the industrial relevance of his constituency today.

My hon. Friend also referred to the impact of foot and mouth on his constituency. I was brought up in a rural community and my heart goes out to the farmers, farm workers and other members of that community, some of whom I went to school with and whose great hardships I know of at first hand. He took the opportunity very early in this Parliament of passing me his proposals for helping his constituents and I know from his speech and his actions that he is a powerful and passionate advocate for rural communities.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), whose own maiden speech impressed me, made a number of cogent points in his second speech. I have been looking at all the forms that businesses have to complete. If he will send me the forms that his one-person business had to study and complete to take on a second employee, I shall be interested in seeing them.

The hon. Gentleman stressed the importance of the small business community in terms of the impact of foot and mouth disease. I know, in unrelated areas, that my attempt to traverse the Cuillin ridge earlier this year had to be postponed for a month because of foot and mouth, despite the fact that there was no disease in the area. I know about its impact on the tourism industry. He also asked why only four applications had been received from the business recovery fund in his area. I will investigate that and get back to him.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made a thoughtful contribution. I believe that George Bain did an excellent job on the national minimum wage, which is now accepted by Members on both sides of the House. He is looking at the very issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, and I have equal confidence that he will come up with a solution that will not overburden other areas.

The hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare (Brian Cotter) said that some regulations are an inch thick. We all want that reduced; a number of working groups made up of people of no political party and business people are examining that issue. I gave an example in my introductory remarks, of which I am rather proud, of the work that the Small Business Service did to produce a book for people starting in business on the tax that they have to pay. The book is half the size of the original draft that came from the Inland Revenue, and that 50 per cent. reduction should set a trend that should be followed.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the impact of the banks. As he will know, these were referred by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the Competition Commission. We are awaiting its response in October, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in hoping that the news is good.

The Small Business Council report was produced yesterday, and I forgive the hon. Gentleman for his selective reading of it. He failed to mention the effect of the Small Business Service in lobbying in Whitehall to make sure that the proposals in the Green Paper for a supplementary business rate were defeated. That shows just how effective David Irwin and his people are. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that from a sedentary position.

The hon. Gentleman responded courageously to my intervention on business rates. I have one advantage over him: I live in a city that was once run by the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. The rates went through the roof, with business rates going up even more than domestic rates. That perhaps explains why they formed a one-term administration in local government and have not returned to power there.

I want to pay tribute to the bravery of the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) in spending so much time on the topic of regulation. He said that he signed up to some regulations and not to others. He should have added that the vast number of regulations signed up to by the last Government, of which he was a Member, beggared belief. We may not have been much better than them when it comes to statutory instruments, but we cannot have the pot calling the kettle black. The last Government introduced some 3,000 statutory instruments, not three or 300, even in their last full year of government and after almost a decade after their attempts at deregulation. I was concerned by the example that he gave as a case of ineffective and burdensome bureaucracy and of regulation that he claimed was not welcomed by small businesses. That example was the statutory late payment regulations. *[Interruption.]* I assure the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) that there is lots to talk about in respect of the speeches made from his Benches. I know that he was not here to hear them, so it is not so much a case of refreshing his memory as rubbing salt in his wounds.

Before today, I thought that we had consensus on statutory entitlement to compensation for late payment. I know that the Federation of Small Businesses and even the Confederation of British Industry, which tends to represent larger businesses but has many SME members for which it speaks eloquently, see the merits of the late payment regulations. The legislation has had some considerable effect. It was the only example that we got of something that a Conservative Government would do, but if it is the first piece of legislation that the Conservatives would repeal, they will have even fewer friends in small business than they have now.

[Nigel Griffiths]

There is no evidence that the Labour Administration are more inclined to regulate than previous Administrations, but I want to ensure that the number of regulations is kept to an absolute minimum. It is important that there is independent scrutiny of regulations in the audit of regulatory proposals. We want a system and guidance to underpin the regulatory impact assessment process and to ensure that the process is subject to reviews and improvements.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire criticised the establishment of the Brussels office of the Small Business Service. Its clear purpose is to give small business a voice in the Commission, especially before the Commission frames legislation. He criticised the funding arrangement for the office, which he said meant that the taxpayer would have an open-ended commitment—would sign a blank cheque—and that businesses that benefited from it would not be expected to contribute. I am afraid that we shall have to disagree on that, but we are at least two years away from business being asked to contribute to that service. The Government believe that it is vital that small businesses are represented in Europe, and that is why the Small Business Service SME liaison office is being run from Brussels.

Other issues put to me included inspections. An example was given of a premises that was inspected nine times. I agree that that is too often, and I have had discussions on how to cut the number of visits. There is a trend, especially with the creation of unified authorities, towards closer co-operation between inspectors.

There is no reason why an inspector should not play the role of both cop and coach. If the fire extinguisher is close to its deadline for renewal, there is no reason why the fire inspector should not say, "Look, get this replaced. Ring me when you have done so, but if you don't, we will be back to carry out an inspection. By the way, here are the telephone numbers of the places where you can get it replaced." Where one visit can serve a multiple purpose, that should be done. I know that we will have the support of the House if we achieve that.

There were a number of less than supportive comments about the SBS. However, I think the House acknowledged that its chief executive, David Irwin, who has direct access to the Cabinet Office and, indeed, to No. 10, has had a great effect in ensuring that the supplementary business rate was not introduced and in helping tens of thousands of small businesses with their programmes and business plans. Businesses are being helped to secure finance and with other matters. As the service is only just over a year old, that is a creditable record of achievement and I am confident that it will go on to achieve much more.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) raised issues in connection with residential care homes. He acknowledged in his speech that the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 will benefit users and providers of care by ensuring that regulations are consistent and coherent. Of course, regulations and standards are the subject of a regulatory impact assessment, which will be produced for consultation. I anticipate that he will ensure that the groups that he mentioned make representations.

Several of the contributions to the debate have been of considerable merit. The latter stages of the debate obviously drew Members to the Chamber—the quality of the speeches was doubtless circulating as Members sent their notes to *Hansard*. It is always a pleasure to respond to a debate that includes contributions by Members from both sides of the House who really care about the subject—in this case, small businesses in their constituencies.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Retailing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

1.12 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a great privilege to be able to address the House on this important issue although I confess that some of the subject matter may resemble that of the previous debate, as I shall concentrate on some of the smaller businesses in the retail sector. I hope that that does not mean that we shall have too much of a good thing. There is rather more time available for the debate than I had anticipated, but I do not expect to over-stay my welcome and hope that we shall finish at a reasonable time.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the retailing sector in the British economy. Hon. Members know the details. The sector represented 23 per cent. of the gross domestic product last year. It employs 3 million people. Indeed, it employs almost 9 per cent. of the work force in my constituency. We are dealing with an important sector.

I have a little experience in the sector, having run a high street business—albeit not a standard retailing operation—in my former profession as an optician. I am extremely aware of the importance placed on a thriving retail sector not only by business people in my constituency but also by ordinary constituents. They want shops in their towns and villages. They want the convenience of obtaining products locally without necessarily having to travel to what are nowadays rather quaintly described as sub-regional or regional shopping centres. Such places can seem a long way away from people in rural Somerset.

Because of the importance of the local retail sector, I want to concentrate not so much on the larger retailers and supermarkets, or the high street multiple stores, which are found across most of the country, as on something that we talk about rather less—the independent retailer and the smaller shops that are trying to survive in our villages, smaller towns and market towns, as well as on the periphery of urban centres.

Too often, we concentrate on the retailing centres in the middle of towns and completely ignore the fact that many people and many shops are trying to subsist on housing estates, on the edge of town and in some of the old shopping plazas, which seem redolent of the 1930s and have often not improved a great deal since then. It is time to pay more attention to those retailers.

Most people who are trying to run small independent shops would identify three main enemies, the first of which is the monopolies or oligopolies, or the would-be monopolies or oligopolies, that threaten them, either by competition or through their direct dealings with them. The second enemy is the activities of criminals. That is becoming an ever-increasing problem for many people who run retail businesses. The third enemy—I use the term advisedly—are the Government, although I wish it were otherwise. Local and central Government can place impositions on retailers' business.

Added to those three principal groups of enemies is the vulnerability of so many small businesses, whether in the manufacturing or the retail sector, to events that are entirely beyond their control. The classic example, which is very current in my constituency, is foot and mouth disease and its aftermath—a very serious issue. If a company is big enough, it probably has the reserves, capability and ability to weather the storm, but those trying to run a one or two-person business probably do not, and they will go under unless adequate support is provided.

I shall deal with each of those sectors in turn, beginning with the monopolies or large businesses. Competition is a good thing; it is a motor of retail business. We should not be afraid of competition or of saying that consumers vote with their feet. It is very easy to say that the big supermarket chains, for example, are always the enemies of the piece, without realising that most people in most towns clamour to have one of the large supermarkets in their towns. At the moment, many people want Asda to relocate to Frome, and they are looking forward to that happening. It is absolutely right that the local community considers planning and other issues.

People should consider whether large retailers should move into the town centre to reinvigorate it, or whether they should be allowed to build on a greenfield site on the edge of the town, so destroying the town centre. The argument about such things has gone on for many years now, and it is a key part of public policy. While recognising the effectiveness and efficiency of large retailers, we should also recognise that they sometimes have advantages that are not entirely fair over smaller independent retailers. Some of those advantages are to do with the management of the supply chains.

Large retailers obviously have enormous buying power, which squeezes out competition and has an effect on their relationship with primary producers. As a representative of a constituency that is still largely agricultural, I notice that effect in the dairy sector, in which there is a very unequal balance of power between the retailers, and even the processors, and the primary producers. The Government should examine the relationships in the food chain.

Before the election, the Minister of Agriculture promised me that he would study the milk chain. From an answer to a question that I asked about a week ago, I now understand that the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is not considering such a study. I do not know whether that means that the matter has been hived off to the Department of Trade and Industry, which deals with competition policy, but I would be grateful if the Minister could tell me whether a study of vertical relationships in supply chains will go ahead, and if so, when we can expect results. I hope that the study will be more adequate than the report by the Competition Commission, which asked the wrong questions of the supermarkets and therefore came up with the wrong answers.

Advantages for large retailers are built into the regulatory framework, and the biggest of them is the uniform business rate. I make no apologies for returning to this key subject, which was mentioned in the earlier debate, because many small retailers simply cannot understand why they are penalised in the proportion of their turnover that they have to devote to paying that unavoidable overhead compared with large retailers, with huge floor space, on the edge of town. I have repeatedly pointed out that the uniform business rate needs fundamental reform to make it fair.

[Mr. David Heath]

If we cannot have such reform, let us at least make an arrangement to mitigate the effects of the uniform business rate on small firms. My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) has already outlined a mechanism, using the equivalent of the personal tax allowance, that would allow a given amount of a small firm's turnover to escape the business rate. That would benefit many small retailers, freeing them from an overhead that they cannot afford. Some arrangements for exemptions from the uniform business rate were introduced before the foot and mouth outbreak, and others were made in response to foot and mouth. They are all welcome, but they are complicated, and they are strangled by unrealistic turnover thresholds and definitions of qualifying businesses. A wider system of exemption or mitigation would be much more beneficial.

Finally, on monopolies, I want to deal with retailers' relationships with the banks. The banks, too, virtually have a monopoly. There is competition in the sector, but all the banks operate in a similar way. There is an urgent need to implement some of the recommendations in the Cruickshank report, particularly to establish a payments regulator. That could be an additional function of the Office of Fair Trading. Will the Minister tell the House whether that proposal will be included in the enterprise Bill to be introduced later in this Session?

Criminality is a problem for small retailers throughout the country. Town centres are increasingly lawless, and small retailers are experiencing more and more problems in maintaining the security of their premises and stock. The Government need to address that more adequately. They must deal with town centre crime and support retail crime-fighting partnerships, where they exist, but they must go further.

We want to see a police presence in our town centres, but many police forces are unable to maintain that presence. There is a need for town centre premises, or cop shops, for patrolling constables, instead of police stations on the outskirts of towns which were built for a previous era and have very few officers who are visible to retailers or customers. The Government could usefully provide tax relief for the security measures that businesses increasingly have to apply and local government planning authorities should be more tolerant of the measures that are necessary to make premises secure.

No one wins from shop crime. Costs are passed on to the consumer and insurance premiums increase sometimes to the point that a business in a town centre is not insurable. We need to tackle that problem.

The smuggling of products that carry excise duty makes a significant difference to the small businesses that sell them legitimately. More attention needs to be given to that problem.

We should also pay more attention to the impositions placed on small businesses as a result of policing the present system. Small business representatives often point to the proof of age regulations. Depending on the purpose of the item bought, the age of a consumer—be he 12, 15, 16 or 18—has to be established. However, there is no formalised system for the identification of minors and shopkeepers must bear the brunt of the consequences of that.

As I have said, the changes that the Government could make to the uniform business rate are crucial. Regulation, however, is another problem. Businesses are over-regulated and it is a truism or a platitude to say so. We are all against greater regulation, but we produce more and more of them. I therefore make a heartfelt plea to Ministers to curb that practice.

This place produces regulations as if they were coming out of sausage factory and we sometimes gold plate European regulations. That is a ridiculous habit of the British civil service even though the European authorities should not produce many of those regulations in the first place. I am a great believer in subsidiarity and one of the arguments for it is that regulations should not be produced to ensure compliance and uniformity when variety and diversity benefit the consumers and the businesses involved. That point should be taken seriously.

The Government can reduce the regulations and the impositions that they put on business people. Small businesses often say that they spend so long working for the Government—I do not just mean producing the money to pay taxes, but literally working for the Government by engaging in self-assessment and dealing with inspection and requests for information—that they have little time left to devote to running the business effectively. We must bear down on that crucial problem.

One suggestion is to have a single inspectorate—I call it an inspectorate because it has an inspectorate's role but I prefer to think of it as assisting compliance—that can form a relationship with small businesses. It should tell them everything that they should do but should place a burden on them only when they do not comply with those requirements. That would be a much more healthy relationship. We could also introduce automatic sunset clauses into regulations so that they do not continue to apply when they no longer have a function.

There is much positive action that we could take to support small businesses, particularly those in market towns, because many of those towns are dying on their feet. There are still too many boarded-up premises and too many businesses that cannot survive in the market-town environment. The regional centres are thriving, and there must be a better balance between the two. Not everyone can drive 50 miles to buy basic clothes. We need to revitalise our smaller towns. Convenience stores must receive our support. Their advantage is that they are convenient, so we should not put obstacles in the way of people using them.

Niche businesses also need our support. They are often the motors for trade. We cannot have a town that is entirely full of people selling ceramics, but a few shops in the niche markets will bring people in who will do other shopping. Mechanisms should be in place to encourage the establishment of such shops. In that context, what has happened to policy action team 13, which was mentioned last week in the *Evening Standard*? It seems to have died a death, but perhaps the Minister will disabuse us of that by confirming that it is involved in many good schemes.

Finally, foot and mouth has had an almost incalculable effect on businesses in my constituency. Although we have had no cases, many different businesses have been affected by the disease, which has had extraordinary ramifications. The support that the Government have stated and advertised is not reaching businesses,

which are struggling to survive. Once the epidemic ends among livestock, it will continue as an epidemic among businesses. It will take us a decade to recover from the unacceptable series of business casualties that will occur in rural areas this autumn and winter unless action is taken now. It is in everyone's interest that that action is taken. If it is difficult for a firm to get through a fallow period in the winter and there are cashflow problems, we need to ensure that it survives to make a profit next year. We cannot allow it to go under because that puts people out of work and creates holes in the economy that are difficult to fill.

I am not sure whether the taskforce that was established in the dying days of the last Parliament understood the scale or complexity of the problem, or the fact that Ministers' good intentions were not being translated into activity on the ground. Many more shops will be lost unless aid is supported with cash, and we need to get that to businesses now. We cannot allow it to end up in a quango's sinking fund. We must get it to the people who can make it work so that they maintain their businesses.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise such important issues of support for small businesses. I am not prejudging what the Minister will say, but the subject seems to breed platitudes: we all support small businesses; we are all against regulation; and we all want those businesses to get a new deal. However, year after year, under successive Governments, it becomes more difficult to maintain, create and develop a retailing business in this country. It is important that the sector thrives, and I hope the Minister will tell us what he intends to do to make that a reality.

1.34 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): First, may I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) for securing the debate? He spoke forcefully—indeed, movingly—and from the basis of a real knowledge of his constituents' concerns about the importance of small retailers. He raised several matters that I hope to address.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government fully understand the vital role that retailing plays in the United Kingdom's economy. It contributes more than 5 per cent. to the nation's gross domestic product and employs nearly 2.5 million people, which is 11 per cent. of the work force. Some 58,400 new jobs were created in the sector last year, providing flexible job opportunities for women, part-timers, young people and returners to work among others.

More than any other sector, retailing affects our daily lives, as the hon. Gentleman made clear. Not only does every household spend £144 a week on average in retail outlets, but the availability of suitable shopping facilities influences where people choose to live, the value of their houses and their environment.

At one end of the scale, the vibrancy and diversity of retailing in Britain attracts huge revenues from tourists, while at the other, access to the local shop is far more than just a convenience. It is an essential local amenity, and one that can help in the regeneration of our high streets and market towns, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and in the rejuvenation of urban and rural communities in general.

Just as shops are an important part of any community, so is the local post office, a subject on which I had the pleasure of reading some of the hon. Gentleman's contributions to debates in this House. The local post office is more than just a retail outlet, especially in many rural areas. It represents vital human contact for many of its customers. This Government are committed to ensuring that the network is a viable business and that running a sub-post office is and remains an attractive business proposition. We are therefore introducing a range of measures to help post offices. One, which I had the opportunity to put before a Committee this week, is the establishment of a £2 million fund to make available subsidies in respect of the costs of establishing a sub-post office in settlements of fewer than 10,000 inhabitants.

The Government are also committed to assisting shops in rural areas such as the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The White Paper "Our Countryside: the future, a fair deal for rural England", published in November, announced a range of new measures to help rural services, including village shops.

Those measures include a £15 million community services grants scheme, administered by the Countryside Agency, which awards grants of between £500 and £25,000 to locally identified, innovative projects to improve access to services that may be declining or under threat; increased funding for market-town regeneration, which is expected to entail a £100 million programme for 100 towns to strengthen their role as service providers and growth points and to create a national beacon towns best-practice network; and new legislation providing 50 per cent. rate relief to all village food shops and new non-agricultural enterprises on farms.

I noted the hon. Gentleman's comments on uniform business rates. It was one of the pleasures of preparing for today's debate to read his speech in the debate on 30 April on that very subject. In last year's Green Paper, "Modernising Local Government Finance", the Government proposed a scheme to provide mandatory rate relief of up to 50 per cent. for all small businesses. We are currently considering the details of that scheme, in consultation with representatives of business, including small business bodies. We shall publish a White Paper on the next steps later this year. As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, we have already implemented the Green Paper proposals to provide additional help to small retailers in isolated rural communities. Mandatory rate relief of 50 per cent. was extended to certain pubs and petrol stations in designated rural villages with effect from 5 April.

I turn next to retail crime, which the hon. Gentleman raised. The Government are particularly concerned about the level of crime, as described in the policy action team or PAT 13 report to which he referred, that small retailers are suffering in deprived areas. Indeed, the Home Office is working closely with the retail sector through a ministerial advisory group on retail crime and the retail crime action team to develop initiatives to combat such crime. That has led to the development of active retail crime partnerships, the best of which are delivering some impressive results in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour in city and town centres. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 27 June a £15 million investment to improve the immediate environment of shops and enhance their security.

On the specific issue raised by the hon. Gentleman of proof of age, the Government do not believe that there is a case for introducing a national card. There are

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

already some good voluntary schemes—notably Prove It, CitizenCard and Validate—which have the Government's support.

The hon. Gentleman spoke forcefully about the regulatory burden on our retailing sector. In creating a dynamic and competitive economy including the retail sector, it is of course important that we pursue the objective of light-touch and proportionate regulation—regulation only where it is justified and to the extent that it is justified.

One of the primary functions of my Department's Small Business Service is to find ways of reducing regulatory and administrative burdens on small businesses. The SBS will work to ensure that the "think small first" philosophy is applied across Whitehall in respect of new regulations. It will seek to reduce the impact of regulations by eliminating them where possible, by simplifying forms and procedures and by encouraging higher standards of enforcement. The SBS also encourages Departments to make information on regulations comprehensive and accessible, including through the SBS information and advice service.

Following a request from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to Lord Haskins, the better regulation task force agreed to report on the regulatory burden faced by small and medium-sized enterprises, including small retailers as a case study. The report has recently been published and my Department is now considering the recommendations and how to implement them.

On the specific issue of supermarkets, concerns have been voiced that the Competition Commission inquiry into supermarkets might not have gone far enough and that small shops are at a disadvantage. However, the success of the supermarkets cannot be attributed solely to the prices that they charge: consumer buying patterns and habits are changing and we are witnessing the growth of the desire for one-stop shopping, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome recognises.

In completing its report, the commission considered carefully the impact of supermarkets on rural shops. It identified a number of practices engaged in by the larger supermarkets that it felt were against the public interest because they adversely affected the competitiveness of some of their suppliers and other smaller retailers. The commission's report recommended that the most effective way of addressing those adverse effects was a code of practice. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has recently received advice on the code from the Director General of Fair Trading; that advice is now being considered.

Another major concern was that supermarkets might be involved in the practice of below-cost selling, which could have an adverse impact on small retailers. The Competition Commission examined the practice of below-cost selling in detail. It found that persistent below-cost selling took place only in relation to a small number of products, most commonly economy lines and a few other high-profile items. It was impossible directly to isolate and quantify any adverse impacts.

The commission accepted that persistent selling below cost could be damaging, but considered that there were good grounds for not taking action against it: for example, there were difficulties identifying legitimate exceptions to a prohibition, and there was a possibility that supermarkets would circumvent a prohibition by forcing down supplier prices to allow them to set lower retail prices. A prohibition might also lead to higher prices for consumers. The former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), therefore accepted the commission's recommendation that no action should be taken in respect of persistent below-cost selling.

The location of large out-of-town supermarkets is the result of commercial decisions by retailers, albeit operating within the constraints of local planning regulations that are designed to encourage new growth within towns. The Government are committed to sustainable development that ensures the viability of town centres, and planning proposals are scrutinised against guidelines that strongly promote town centres as the focus for future retail development.

When drawing up their development plans and determining planning applications, and after giving consideration to the need for new development, we expect local planning authorities to adopt a sequential approach to the selection of a site: first preference should be given to town-centre sites, followed by edge-of-centre sites, and only then to out-of-town sites. The onus is on developers opting for out-of-town sites to demonstrate that all potential town-centre and edge-of-centre options have been thoroughly assessed.

I shall write to the hon. Gentleman on issues relating to the supply chain and the Cruickshank report. He specifically directed many of his remarks to the issue of small retailers. It is clear that retail delivers tangible economic benefits not only to the country as a whole, but to individual communities. The broader welfare advantages that it can bring were recognised by PAT 13, which confirmed that good neighbourhood retailing plays a vital role in improving community self-esteem, community engagement, skills development and training and social life. The maintenance of local retailing is vital to the lifeblood of a community, so I am extremely pleased to be undertaking that work in the Government. I acknowledge the progress already made in departmental implementation of PAT 13's recommendations.

For example, at our request, the better regulation task force examined the impact of the regulatory burden on small shops. Its report has been published and we shall give careful consideration to its recommendations on how to advance the issues. The SBS, through its franchises, is supporting initiatives to provide direct help to small retailers. For example, pilot projects are being supported in Surrey, where 800 small retailers are utilising e-commerce to achieve supply chain efficiencies, and in Birmingham, where inner-city retailers are receiving help in improving store standards and performance through advice on merchandising, training, customer service, health and hygiene, promotional projects and group purchasing. If successful, we hope that those projects and similar ones can be rolled out across the country.

Funding is available through the SBS Phoenix development fund, which is designed to encourage innovative ideas to promote and support enterprises in disadvantaged areas among groups of people currently under-represented in business ownership. Its purpose is to encourage experimentation, the evaluation of new ideas and the identification and spread of best practice in an

area where there is currently too little knowledge. The second round, which has just closed, specifically identified retailing as a sector in which applications would be considered.

The report also stressed the need for locally developed strategies, with the local community playing a full part in the process and working together with local retailers. Through the establishment of the PAT 13 movers' group, consisting of people who are actively involved with promoting the sustainability of retailing in local communities, we are identifying examples of best practice. They will be disseminated in a conference in January next year with the aim of encouraging local people to set up or sustain retail businesses in difficult areas by highlighting support mechanisms that are available. A signposting guide to both local and national support mechanisms will be launched at the conference, and will be available via a DTI-supported website. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that measures such as those sequential approaches help to provide small retailers with a more level playing field.

I turn to foot and mouth, which the hon. Gentleman raised in his conclusion. The Government continue their work in that area. We are already helping badly affected non-farming businesses to cope by deferring tax, VAT and national insurance contribution payments; we are providing extra funding for hardship rate relief payments; and are establishing a new regional development agency business recovery fund to provide grants to help businesses adjust and cope with the crisis. Already, more than 11,000 businesses have had tax, VAT and national insurance payments deferred without interest charges worth £71 million. However, I concede that work must go on across Departments to continue to cope with a serious crisis that has affected a large number of constituencies the length and breadth of the country.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue, and I assure him that we recognise the difficulties that small retailers currently face in adapting to changing patterns of competition and consumers' buying habits. Our goal is the sustainability of a vibrant and diverse retail sector, both physical and virtual, which can serve the needs of all social groups in all parts of the country. It is not, however, our role artificially to keep businesses afloat through subsidies, but to help them become more sustainable through innovation and the adoption of new technologies and best practice. Much excellent work is being developed and undertaken in communities across Britain; we want to encapsulate that and encourage a wider spread of take-up across the country. I therefore warmly welcome the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment as a Government to the retail sector, to working closely with it in future, and to any initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion and enhanced sustainability of social enterprises, in both of which retailing has played an important part. In conclusion, I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's success in initiating this debate in the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 3 July 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST in the Chair]

Housing (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Kemp.*]

9.30 am

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am pleased to debate housing needs in London. I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) on her appointment as the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and I look forward to her reply. I realise that she does not represent a London constituency, but she is a former leader of a London borough and must be acutely aware of the housing problems and other issues that Londoners face. Her background knowledge will be invaluable in persuading her Department, and perhaps reluctant colleagues, of the need for housing investment in London. I am sure that she will bring her skills to the problem.

Housing in London is a huge problem. During the election campaign, Londoners raised individual problems on the doorstep with candidates from all parties. Tragically, however, those problems did not surface in the reporting of the election. Indeed, most of the media reported the reporting of the election rather than the issues raised by the electorate, which was regrettable. It was also regrettable that London's media, with some honourable exceptions, seemed to deal almost exclusively with the private sector market and house prices. They continually wrote about the gains that people could make by selling their property rather than the desperate housing situation that many people face.

One does not have to travel far on the London underground to realise that there is an enormous and growing gap between the haves in London—those who are on the property boom ladder—and the have-nots. That problem is compounded by a new practice among building societies: they are offering huge mortgages for houses for private rent, which drives up the private rented market and house prices, and leads to an even greater gap between the haves and the have-nots in London.

Matters are not much different outside London. Much of the south-east suffers the same problem, with booming house prices and a shortage of affordable rented housing. However, the midlands and the north of England, and to some extent Scotland and Wales, suffer another problem: under-occupation of estates and the related question of housing management. That was brought home to me when I visited the May day rally at Burnley. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who spoke extremely well, said that the Government needed to sort out Burnley's housing problem: there are 5,000 empty properties in Burnley. That enormous problem leads to massive deprivation, vandalism and social exclusion. Clearly, it must be addressed. London, however, does not have that problem. London's problem is one of huge shortages. That is what I want to draw to hon. Members' attention this morning.

My borough of Islington has the same problems as most inner-London boroughs. My hon. Friends the Members for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) both represent London areas with acute housing stress. The constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate has areas of enormous wealth and of enormous poverty. Less than half a mile—in some cases, only a few hundred yards—separate them.

My borough suffers from much the same problem. There is an image problem. Parts of the borough are extremely wealthy. Everyone there eats in expensive restaurants every night and their only concern is whether to eat Indian, Chinese or French food; nothing else bothers them. In reality, my borough is the eighth most deprived in London. Unemployment is as high or higher than in many northern towns. The borough has massive housing problems, most of which I am told about at my advice surgery every week.

Over the years, Islington, like other London boroughs, has developed comprehensive housing strategies. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a great building programme, but I am glad to say that few tower blocks were constructed in my borough—it was mostly houses set on a traditional street pattern with gardens. In the 1970s, when my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities was the chair of its housing committee, the council adopted a policy of purchasing within the private sector. She expertly developed the policy, which meant that many families were moved out of the few high-rise blocks in the area and given houses with gardens—something to which we should all aspire, especially for families with young children.

Following the Thatcherite counter-revolution in the 1980s, for a while, London boroughs managed to borrow their way out of the Government's policies and continued expanding their affordable rented housing stock. Eventually, however, the policy became impossible to continue. The supply of new affordable accommodation dried up. The constant cuts in local authority expenditure meant that borough after borough tried to save money each year by not investing in housing repairs or capital improvements; they did not have the money to do it. My borough was no different. By 1997, when the Labour Government came to office, there was a £500 million repair backlog. Massive repairs had to be carried out. The Government had inherited a difficult problem.

At the start of this Parliament, I tabled several questions about the construction of dwellings in each London borough. I shall not weary hon. Members with all the details that I received, but just quote a few figures. In my borough in 1996-97, private enterprise constructed 49 new properties; registered social landlords constructed 17 and the local authority constructed none. In 2000-01, private enterprise constructed 213; registered social landlords constructed 44 and the local authority constructed none. The list that was provided in response to my question shows that the number of properties built for affordable rent is low.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

The London borough of Waltham Forest seems to have one of the best records. Almost uniquely among London boroughs last year, private enterprise constructed 216 dwellings, registered social landlords constructed 257 and the local authority constructed 260. I have not checked all the details yet, but I believe that Waltham Forest was the only borough that constructed more properties—they were aimed at people in need of affordable rented housing—than the private sector. Other boroughs had similar or worse results than Islington.

The consequences of either councils or housing associations not building sufficient properties for affordable rent are enormous. It is expensive, in both financial and social terms. People who visit my advice surgery live in grossly over-crowded accommodation, as do my friends. Let us imagine the social tensions of bringing up six children in a two-bedroomed flat, with one child wanting to play music, one child wanting to do homework and another child wanting to sleep. It is difficult to match those three activities in one room. We must bear in mind those tensions, as we must family break-ups, the lack of achievement by children at school, and youth vandalism and disinterest in society. Young teenagers often want to go out, but they also want to be able to return home when they want. If they can go home only to a flat that has one child sleeping in a corner, or to a bedroom that they must share with other siblings, they will prefer to hang about the streets at night instead.

I invite hon. Members to visit hostel or bed-and-breakfast accommodation, some of which is appalling. London's children are living in abominable conditions: 40,000 families are living in temporary or bed-and-breakfast accommodation without proper washing or cooking facilities. That is disgraceful. Such accommodation is also expensive—local authorities pay hundreds of pounds per week through the housing benefit system straight into the pockets of bed-and-breakfast landlords. In addition to the financial cost of such accommodation, there is the high cost in social terms—the under-achievement of school children and ill health.

The local authority could decide that the only solution to the problem of family X living in over-crowded accommodation is to move them out of the borough, which sounds good. There are empty properties in Lincoln, Coventry and Newcastle, to which they could be sent. However, life is not so simple and I do not believe that we live in a centralised state in which local authorities or the Government can order people to move to designated areas.

One family showed me their offer of accommodation 150 miles away from London, which, at one level, was attractive—it was a reasonable property with a bedroom for each child. However, what would happen to the grandmother living down the road, the family's jobs and the children's education? Why should a family be uprooted from the area in which they have grown up and that they love, merely because we as a society are not prepared to recognise the housing needs of such families? I hope that the Government understand those concerns.

The alternative to renting affordable accommodation—buying housing in the private sector—is not realistic in London because of the high cost involved. We must consider the consequences for all of us of the housing shortage in London. Towards the end of the previous Parliament, the Government proposed a scheme to provide specialist housing, initially for teachers, police officers and nurses. I understand the Government's reasons for doing that. We are all acutely aware of the shortage of teachers, especially in inner-London schools, the difficulty of retaining such teachers and the consequences of high teacher turnover. Similar problems affect the recruitment of police officers and nurses—at high cost to the national health service, which is forced to employ agency nurses because of the impossibility of employing permanent staff, who cannot find affordable local housing.

The offer of specialist housing may be an attractive proposition for a teacher, but, in some parts of London, there is a shortage of postal workers and, in other parts, a shortage of hospital cleaners, road sweepers, plumbers or carpenters. There will be shortages of all sorts of people if we allow such a massive imbalance in housing provision to continue. I urge that we look rationally at the matter and ensure that a greater proportion of new dwellings in London is in the affordable rented sector. I hope that the Minister will offer some hope that that will happen.

Research has been conducted into the problem. There is a mass of books and glossy and not so glossy reports, of which I have a few, including the Government's Green Paper and the excellent report from the Mayor's Housing Commission, chaired by Chris Holmes of Shelter, entitled "Homes for a World City". Many people who are actively involved in housing were members of the commission. Another good document is the Association of London Government's "A housing strategy for London" which is a good summary. In the preface to that document, Tony Newman, chair of housing on the ALG, talks of the challenges in improving the quality of housing stock in London:

> "These challenges are a consequence of under-investment in London's housing over the last twenty years. We must respond to those in the most acute housing need as well as helping a much wider group of Londoners who cannot afford to rent or buy property in the capital including key workers who are essential to keep London running and to serve as a basis for...long-term sustainability"

of the city.

We have inherited problems in London such as the poor quality of housing stock and management, and the huge level of repairs required. There are 48,000 households in temporary accommodation in London, of which 6,000 live in B and Bs. One hundred thousand households need permanent housing in London. There is clearly a need to deal with that. Additionally, 31,000 new households come to London every year, of which a proportion—perhaps a third—will be in need of affordable rented housing.

I hope that the Minister will reflect on the problem of the sale of existing council properties and the demolition of some parts of estates to create a better quality of life. I support the latter policy because it is possible to make a deeply unattractive housing estate much better by selective demolition of parts of it to create more open

and communal space and to develop community facilities. That can turn a community around. However, there is a cost: the loss of some housing stock that must be replaced elsewhere.

On the sale of council houses, I realise that the Conservatives' campaign in 1979 was largely based on offering £10 notes for a fiver to tenants on housing estates—buy the property and all will be well. Sadly, some people bought property in very poor condition and, as a result, are paying high repair bills, service charges and all that goes with that. Other people bought street properties that were later sold. It is sometimes galling to go to an area where the council formerly owned many street properties for people in housing need. Those houses were sold to tenants who later sold them in the private market. They are now inhabited by extremely wealthy people, or rented to people on housing benefit, which means that we the public pay housing benefit of £200 or £300 a week, rather than £70 or £80 a week on exactly the same property. The only difference is that the money is paid to a private landlord rather than to the local authority.

Again, that is a hidden cost to the public. The strategy of the sale of council properties has led to a huge reduction in affordable rented stock, which seldom, if ever, comes back to the public sector. Perhaps initially, we could give local authorities the opportunity to buy back properties that have been sold. Homelessness costs are rising because of that problem, but we must examine the way out. We must build and purchase more properties in London.

The land supply issue in London is huge. It is not possible to build our way completely out of the housing crisis, although by planning and examining every vacant site it is possible to do a lot. Indeed, "A housing strategy for London" suggests that in the next 15 years it will be possible to construct a further 381,000 properties in Greater London. I do not know what proportion of those houses will end up as affordably rented, but it is clearly possible to make a big dent in the problem.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful contribution, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. Does he support the proposal in the Mayor's spatial development plan that, in all private developments of more than 15 houses, 35 per cent. must be social housing and a further 15 per cent. must be intermediate housing? Does he think that that will increase housing in those categories?

Jeremy Corbyn: I support the principle behind the Mayor's spatial development strategy, although I feel that he has set the figure rather too low; I suggest that such housing should make up half of the development site and that the threshold should be lower than 15. In my borough, few sites are large enough to come under the spatial development strategy because most sites are very small.

When intervening on the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions yesterday, I made the point that I would like the opportunity to intervene on planning decisions to force half of developments to go to affordable rented housing and that the threshold should be lower than 15 houses—seven or eight even. Most of the developments in inner London are very small and we miss out as a result. Indeed, the figures that I cited earlier show that last year only 8 per cent. of new property in Islington was for affordable rent. The council could do little about that because of the law. I support the principle behind the Mayor's proposal, but the figure should be lower.

The other stark issue that we must consider is house prices in the private sector. As I said, the opportunity for people to buy their way out of the housing crisis in London is extremely limited. People in my borough and, I suspect, in Camden and neighbouring boroughs who are on quite good incomes find it impossible to buy anywhere to live. The cheapest property available in my borough costs about £100,000: that would, with luck, buy a one-bedroomed flat above a shop on a main road. A two or three-bedroomed property or a house with a garden in inner London would cost about £300,000 or £400,000, and in some parts even more. Unless they have inherited income or lottery winnings, for example, a couple buying such a home—an ordinary property in London—must have a joint income of more than £100,000 a year. Average incomes in London are slightly higher than in the rest of the country, but not that much higher. The housing opportunity gap is much greater in London than in other parts of the country.

Before I conclude with a few policy thoughts, I bring to hon. Members' attention a grim statistic relating to the supply of housing for affordable rent, whether council or housing association. As a result of council house sales and the demolition of parts of badly designed estates, in the next 20 years, there will be a net loss of about 130,000 properties in Greater London. The issue is not, therefore, that current building is insufficient, but that current building does not even begin to meet the gap created by demolitions and loss. A radical agenda is necessary to make a genuine dent in London's housing needs, which I hope the new Government will be able to do.

I should like the Minister to consider three policy issues. I hope that this is not the only time that we debate housing in London. I suspect that we shall return to it time and again. I intend to keep returning to it, because I can no longer stand being in advice surgeries week after week with families coming to me with sick, under-achieving and badly behaved children because they simply can no longer cope. They and the community as a whole deserve better.

The post-war Labour Government managed, despite shortages and financial turmoil, to build much good-quality housing for rent that radically improved the lives of many Londoners, such as the wonderful London county council cottage-type estates that were built after the war. I realise that times have moved on, that supply of land is not what it was and that we cannot necessarily achieve that. However, local authorities developed imaginative solutions in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s for good-quality housing—high density but on a street pattern—and changed the lives of a lot of people. I look to this Labour Government to achieve similar results, so that we may reverse what happened in the 18 years when the previous Government missed those opportunities.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

I should like the Minister to comment on three policy issues. The first is estate transfers in London—an issue that is deeply controversial and about which many tenants are extremely worried. It is hardly a level playing field when tenants are offered a ballot that essentially states that they can transfer their estate if they want to do so, and that if they go to a housing company or association they will receive money for improvements and development and if they stay with the local authority they will not. That is hardly fair. The documents that were presented to the Labour party conference and the national policy forum made it clear that an awful lot of people felt that we should offer a level playing field in decision making. A level playing field means that all the options are open and that public investment is the same, whether the transfer takes place or responsibility remains with the local authority.

My second point relates to the growth of housing companies and registered social landlords. Last week, I asked a parliamentary question, which the Minister answered, concerning the structure, democracy and running of housing associations—or registered social landlords, as they are now more commonly known. Although I accept that there is tenant representation on their boards and that, usually, there is local authority representation and some independent representation, we need to look again at the issue of democracy with regard to the running of housing associations. Although they often started out as small enterprises, many of them are now major landlords that are involved in massive financial dealings, and they have a huge impact on people's lives. They also eat up large sums of public money through various forms of subsidy, and they use that as an accelerator to borrow even larger sums from the private sector. Democracy and accountability with regard to housing associations must be addressed: we must ensure that they are well run and properly account for their money, and that tenants have a far greater influence over what happens within them.

My third point concerns housing benefit and its administration. In Camden, which is ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate, it has been demonstrated that it is possible for housing benefit to be well run in-house by public employees in the public sector, so that the people who deserve benefit, receive it—and those who do not, do not. It is not rocket science; it is about getting money in, and then giving it to the right people. Unfortunately, the boroughs that have gone down the road of outsourcing to a private contractor—my borough has outsourced to a company called ITNET and there are many other such companies in the area—face unbelievable chaos, which causes terrible stress to the tenants concerned. If contractors fall down on the job, we should say bluntly to the local authorities concerned that they should terminate the contracts, bring them back in-house and ensure that they are run properly. It is appalling that people should be subjected to such high levels of stress as a result of the bad administration of what is, after all, not a local benefit, but a national benefit—although for some bizarre reason, in 1981, the then Prime Minister decided that it should be handled by local authorities. I thought that her decision to make them responsible for a new benefit that they did not want to administrate was her perverse way of saying that she disliked local government.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is possible to get rid of a private sector administrator of housing benefit. Unfortunately, in Kingston, a company called EDS—Electronic Data Systems—administered our housing benefit. After two years of chaos, the council eventually acceded to my demand and that of a local Labour councillor to get rid of EDS. Now the service is back in-house and is working very well.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am relieved to hear that, and I am sure that the people of Kingston are even more pleased about it. After the debate, would the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to make a telephone call to the Liberal Democrat leader of Islington council to tell him that, on 19 July, he has an opportunity to end, rather than extend, the contract with ITNET? If the hon. Gentleman is free on that evening, perhaps he will join me on a demonstration outside Islington town hall calling for the end of the ITNET contract. I will accompany him on the train to Islington, if he thinks that he might have difficulty in finding his way there.

With regard to the wider issue of housing benefit, figures from the past 10 years or so demonstrate that public investment in bricks and mortar as a proportion of total housing expenditure has more or less halved, and public investment in housing benefit has roughly doubled. I am, of course, not asking that we abandon the principle of supporting people in housing need by assisting them with their rent, but we should take a hard look at a strategy that creates millionaires by putting so much housing benefit into the pockets of private and bed-and-breakfast landlords. It seems that we are moving in the wrong direction. We should perhaps be investing in bricks and mortar to provide affordable rented properties in our society.

This is the first debate on London's housing in the new Parliament, and we will frequently return to the issue, but I want to repeat the points that I have made—and that many others will, I am sure, keep on making—over the coming years. London's children deserve something better than the quality of accommodation that so many of them live in. If we invest in good-quality housing, we will give them a good start in life, which in turn solves other problems. If we continue down the expensive road we have taken so far and do not provide good-quality accommodation, we will reap a social whirlwind as a result. I hope that the Minister, with all her experience of London government, will recognise that these problems, difficult as they are, are not intractable or impossible. However, central Government need to take a determined approach to bring about the solution to London's housing problems that London Members so desperately want.

10 am

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing the debate. He is a determined and expert advocate on behalf of those in housing need. I also congratulate the Minister on her promotion, which brings with it her new responsibilities

for housing. I am especially delighted to welcome her as a former London council leader. Members of Parliament and the general public often complain that Ministers do not understand what it is like on the ground. I know for a fact that this Minister does. The downside for her of that understanding is that even greater expectations will be placed on her to deliver. She has had to deal with the frustration, devastation and sheer hopelessness of so many who wait on housing lists throughout London, hoping for the chance to have a decent roof over their heads. I know that she will do her best to move housing up the agenda.

It is no coincidence that my first speech following the general election should be on housing. No other single issue affects my constituents more than poor-quality housing. During the election campaign, I was accosted—although that word may not exactly convey what I mean—by hundreds of people in Tower Hamlets, who said, "Please do something about housing. Come into our houses and see how we're living." I never want to sound rude to any of my constituents, because I am horrified by the conditions in which so many live, but such invitations happen so often that I have to say, "No, I'm sorry, I can't come to see the 12 members of your family living in two bedrooms. I know that there are six of you to a bedroom, that you have a mattress in the bath and that some of you are sleeping on the floor. I know that your children are sick, that they have asthma, that their education is suffering and that your life is being ruined by the lack of proper housing." Even when I say that, my constituents still want me to visit. They cannot believe that in this day and age such things can be happening to them and that no ambulance is arriving, siren blaring, and that no one is coming with a solution to their problems.

The problems go back a long way. Council housing began in the east end before anywhere else in Britain, because historically the area has the worst housing in Britain. The Boundary estate was built exactly 100 years ago on the edge of the City of London, on a site that was a notorious slum in the 19th century. It was known as the "Old Nichol" and immortalised by Arthur Morrison in his book, "Child of the Jago" and reflected in James Thomson's "City of Dreadful Night". Unfortunately, London remains a city of dreadful night for many people who do not get a decent night's sleep in their houses. The Prince of Wales opened the Boundary estate in 1901. The design was groundbreaking and an architectural vision of the future, but if a week is a long time in politics, a century is virtually a millennium in terms of social housing. Residents would not call the Boundary estate an architectural vision of the future—they regularly tell me that it is a vision of hell.

Will the Minister examine what makes life on the Boundary and so many other estates in Tower Hamlets such hell? There are two aspects to the problem. One, as we all know, is the lack of repairs. When the Labour party took office after the Tories, there was a £19 billion repair backlog. The other aspect is overcrowding. Families often have to wait on the housing register for five, 10 and 15 years. Someone even came to me who had been on the waiting list for 19 years. While waiting, families often live in situations of terrible overcrowding, such as those that I described.

Will the Minister be good enough to undertake to visit Tower Hamlets to see the worst overcrowding in the United Kingdom? Tower Hamlets has the highest density of poverty in the country, which is obviously reflected in the housing. Will she also consider the rules that govern statutory overcrowding to see whether there is any way of reducing levels of overcrowding?

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North dealt very well with another issue that causes my constituents great distress. Their children do not have a hope in hell of being able to afford a house in east London or to stay in the area in which they were brought up unless they earn more than £50,000 a year. That is the figure for a couple. The average house price in London is £150,000. To get a mortgage for a very small house, a single person would have to earn a Member of Parliament's salary. That is truly disgraceful. The need for more affordable housing runs through this entire debate. If we cannot create a greater stock of affordable housing, we shall be unable to solve the problem.

Another part of the problem is the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which I know that the Minister discussed yesterday. I am pleased that, in response to concerns about the growing use of such accommodation and to the Adjournment debate that I secured in the previous Parliament, Ministers have set up a bed-and-breakfast taskforce. I am especially glad that it is to consider setting targets for local authorities to reduce the use of such accommodation. However, I hope that Ministers will give it a strong steer by acknowledging today, or when the Homelessness Bill is in Committee in the near future, that the use of bed and breakfast for anything other than a reduced four-week initial assessment period is simply unacceptable.

I know that the Minister is well aware of the recent papers by Shelter and the National Housing Federation, which set out clear methods for reducing the use of bed and breakfast. The problem is that that will always involve additional investment, but I trust that she recognises that it is a much more sensible approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North outlined in some detail how much money we are wasting. Nowhere is that more evident than in the extortionate rents charged by many owners of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is no wonder that landlords are amenable to the rich pickings that can be made at the taxpayer's expense.

The problems would be eased if we could guarantee the level of investment required to tackle housing need in London. I am pleased that the Government started by concentrating their efforts on tackling street homelessness and people with priority need, but we must tackle the even deeper problem of hidden homelessness, which accounts for so much of the overcrowding that I described. We must do much more to help those trying to raise young families in single rooms, and we need to build more family-sized accommodation for those who live in overcrowded one-bedroomed and two-bedroomed flats.

I was encouraged that extra funding was identified in last summer's comprehensive spending review. Although that Government money far outstrips anything that the Conservatives ever invested in social housing, it is not enough. We need more. Only in the final year of the comprehensive spending review will we even begin to approach the levels of funding needed.

We are not yet planning to build new homes in the numbers needed to reduce the waiting lists in London, which in itself forces more and more families to

[Ms Oona King]

approach the local homeless persons unit. The London Housing Commission estimates that 43,000 homes will be needed in London in addition to the 57,000 planned in each of the next 10 years. The majority of those homes must have an affordable rent. I hope that the Government will consider again the number of new homes that are planned, and increase further the advance development programme funding available to the Housing Corporation. In turn, I naturally have to say that I hope that the Housing Corporation will ensure that the area currently ranked in greatest need in terms of housing—Tower Hamlets—is given more money, so that it can add to its stock of affordable housing.

The other issues that I would like to raise centre on the fact that the way in which the system deals with the homeless and housing problem in London wastes money. I want to see the Government's commitment to improving public sector services broadened to cover housing. The country is debating the need to improve public sector services, and the Prime Minister is specifically considering health, education, crime and transport. The first three of those problems are directly affected by poor housing.

Without decent housing, the costs on the national health service increase incredibly. Think of the cost alone of nebulisers to treat children with asthma. Nebulisers are handed out by doctors who have told me that they want to prescribe a decent home for their patients, rather than a short-term measure that does not deal with the root of the problem. Similarly, how can people attain what they ought to in education without anywhere to study, without any peace and quiet and without things that middle-class children take for granted?

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Before my hon. Friend leaves the question of health, I should like to say that I have been an inner-city Member of Parliament for 14 years, and I am sure that she will have seen, as I have, many women come into advice sessions and burst into tears. Those women are suffering from acute depression because of having to put up with overcrowded and damp housing conditions and the family problems that ensue. Depression among working-class women on our estates is an important issue.

Ms King: I thank my hon. Friend for raising mental health issues, which are critical. One cannot escape such issues when one holds a surgery. It seems that 90 per cent. of the people who come for help have their prescriptions in tow and are desperately depressed. The problem is especially acute in ethnic minority communities.

Housing should be at the top of the agenda. For that reason, I ask the Minister to arrange a meeting with Lord Macdonald, who will be heading the delivery unit, or with the other organisations that have been set up by the Prime Minister to help the Government deliver on public services, such as the Office of Public Service Reform.

The other issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North, such as stock transfer, are very important and should be examined in the same way that the Institute for Public Policy Research has been examining the relative costs and benefits of public and private sector involvement in our public services. I would like a similar amount of thought and energy to be given to housing.

I hope that the Minister will be able to find the time to come to see the reality on the ground in Tower Hamlets.

10.16 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I welcome the Minister to her position and congratulate her. I am glad to hear from the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) that the Minister has experience of London's housing problems. That is welcome news, and I hope that when she replies to the debate she can give hon. Members good news about her approach to the problems.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn). He has a strong record of raising housing issues in the House. He has been a persistent challenger of all Governments on the issue and has raised it in his usual forceful manner today.

The hon. Gentleman was right to stress the extent and nature of the problem in London, and how it has changed over the years. Clearly, it was very different just after the second world war, when hundreds of thousands of houses had been destroyed and many damaged. The housing challenge for Government during the post-war period was different. The population was lower and land was less scarce.

The environment now is different even from that 10 years ago. The population of London is growing relentlessly; in the recent past, it has grown faster than it did 10 or 20 years ago. Those population growth trends look as though they will continue, so the pressure on London housing stock and on land for the building of affordable housing will be ever greater.

The challenge that we face today in London is completely different from the challenge that we have faced in the past, so we need a different response. Unless we tackle the housing problem, it will put a brake on the London economy. Private sector employers are already experiencing shortages of labour for key undertakings across the diverse economy of Greater London. Wage inflation is picking up in London because of the shortage of housing. Children are affected because many now have to travel much further to school than they used to, and so is the public sector. The Greater London Assembly report, the Mayor's report and the Assembly reports on the problem of housing for key public sector workers are important contributions to the debate. I hope that the Minister will reflect on them.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow was right to link the debate on public service reform to housing: they are inextricably linked. In my constituency and, I am sure, in other London constituencies, housing problems are at the root of difficulties in recruiting and retaining quality staff for schools, hospitals, the police force and the wider public services. Until we tackle that problem, we shall not be able to improve our public services. In London, probably more than anywhere else in the country, housing is fundamental to the Government's agenda. If they do not tackle housing, they will not solve the problem.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow that the Minister should talk to the new Office of Public Service Reform. I also recommend that she speak to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is undertaking the latest comprehensive spending review, which is to report in June 2002. A recent written answer from the Treasury set out the remits of that review, and of the cross-departmental reviews that it will encompass. One—I think that it was the second listed—included a look at the overall labour market in the public sector and its recruitment and retention requirements. We as London Members and the Minister with that responsibility need to feed into the cross-departmental review to ensure that the housing needs of public sector workers in the capital are reflected in the cash and policy innovations that result from that review.

I should like to highlight a Liberal Democrat recommendation that was picked up in the Assembly's report on key public sector workers and housing needs in London. It concerned the need for a London weighting—an independent index of how much it costs people to work in London, identifying extra housing costs. There used to be one under the Labour Government in the early 1970s. Not surprisingly, it was one of the things that Baroness Thatcher got rid of when she was Prime Minister. She did not like it because it told her that she might need to spend more money in the capital. It needs to be resurrected; it will strengthen our argument with colleagues in other parts of the country and with the Treasury. If we want a higher level of public service, we must ensure that the London weightings for key public sector workers are larger than they are now, so that such workers can afford to live in Greater London.

It is important to arm ourselves with statistics about the grants to London councils to tackle some of their problems. Let us be honest: we have heard rumours that such grants are under threat. We need to ensure that the Government recognise the greater cost of providing services in London. An index should be published—it may be available somewhere, but if it is, it has been given no prominence—to show the post-tax, post-housing cost incomes of Londoners. If we compared the incomes of Londoners, after deducting tax and housing costs, with those of people living in other parts of the country, I bet that our incomes would be substantially lower at almost all levels, even before adjusting for quality of housing. Until we have such figures and indices in our armoury, we shall not be able to win the argument.

Ms Abbott: That is a very important point, and I shall take it further. The take-up of the working families tax credit, one of the flagship poverty alleviation measures of the Labour Administration, is lower in London because the inflated housing costs there result in its having become not worth claiming.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Lady makes a good point. The reform of housing benefit was part of the unfinished business of the previous Parliament. Some of her colleagues have told me that they are worried that housing benefit is too complicated. That is a worry because it is most relevant to the needs of Londoners. People on low incomes need help with their housing costs, and housing benefit is not meeting that need.

I shall be slightly parochial for a moment and return to my constituency of Kingston and Surbiton. I am the first Member for an outer-London constituency to speak in this debate. It would be dishonest of me to say that the housing problems in my constituency are as severe as those in the constituencies of the hon. Members who have already spoken; of course, they are not. However, housing problems in some parts of my constituency are nearly as bad.

Kingston is sometimes thought to be a leafy borough. It was given that label by the Deputy Prime Minister in his first local government grant settlement speech in the previous Parliament. That did not go down well in the housing estates of Kingston. The borough is not homogenously wealthy and prosperous. It has pockets of severe deprivation. On the Jarman index, the Norbiton ward is the most severely deprived ward in outer London. My constituency has pockets of severe poverty. When I visit those estates—I recently delivered quite a few leaflets there—and when I hold advice sessions, it is obvious that Kingston has some severe housing problems. I recognise some of the descriptions that have been given, and I strongly support some of the solutions.

Some of Kingston's problems are parochial. The cash that Kingston council receives for dealing with its housing problems has been restricted in recent years. The cap on housing benefit has made life particularly difficult for those of my constituents trying to rent in the private sector, because the rents are sky high and housing benefit covers only a portion of those rents. They have been priced out of the private rented sector as a result. Although the local government grant settlement made some changes to the way in which the housing benefit regulations operate, it did not go far enough.

I refer again to my exchange with the hon. Member for Islington, North about the administration of housing benefit. I shall pass on to the leader of the Liberal Democrat administration in Islington our experiences in Kingston, although they may be different from Islington's. To meet its internal financial targets, EDS, the private sector firm that managed that contract, slashed the number of people dealing with administration. It claimed that, by introducing net technology, it would be able to overcome that reduction in labour.

The reality is that housing benefit claimants often need help to fill in forms and to follow up their claims; they need a high level of customer service, which the computer is not able to give. Unfortunately, EDS and possibly other private sector suppliers did not realise that. That is an example that the Government should take on board: an example of private sector involvement not providing a better service. It helped to reduce costs in the short term, but in the longer term it massively increased them. In an outstanding court case, Kingston is trying to extract compensation from EDS, so I shall not say more about that. However, it shows that messing up the administration of housing benefit can have knock-on effects on the provision of social housing.

Even though EDS has been long gone, the problem that the people of Kingston are still living with is that private sector landlords will no longer rent to housing benefit claimants. They did before EDS came on the

[Mr. Davey]

scene, but because they were fed up with the bungling, the delays, the incompetence and the downright rudeness of EDS, they decided not to rent to housing benefit claimants. Winning back their confidence and trust will be a long job. Unfortunately, in some cases, it will be impossible.

The landlords became so fed up that they took the capital gains that were available to them and sold up. That was much less hassle than obtaining the rent by way of housing benefit from the council. Our problems in Kingston were exacerbated because of that experience. From the looks and nods that I have been receiving from hon. Members, it seems that they are aware of the problem.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I was one of the hon. Members who nodded vehemently at the hon. Gentleman's comments. However, I was nodding on behalf of my borough, which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) defined as excellent in delivering housing benefit in-house. Putting housing benefit services into the private sector has had a knock-on effect throughout London. That is increasingly so because private sector landlords have heard the horror stories and will not consider taking on a tenant who pays his rent via housing benefit, even in a borough such as mine where the administration of that benefit is extremely good.

Mr. Davey: I am disturbed by the hon. Lady's remark. It shows the extent of the problem. When the Government are digesting the recommendations of the Institute for Public Policy Research and some of their other advisers, they should be careful how they introduce the private sector to such matters. I am not saying that it does not have a major role to play in solving such difficulties. In terms of public-private partnerships for capital spending and investment, the private sector is the key to London's housing problems. The challenge for the Government is to know how to use and to work with the private sector. If they get that right, such a partnership can be fruitful.

Planning is the answer to some of London's housing problems and several of the Mayor's recommendations are heading in the right direction. A much greater proportion of affordable housing needs to be set down in planning agreements. The under-15 rule needs to be scrapped. We must consider allowing section 106 conditions to apply to smaller developments. We also need greater flexibility. We must not examine only one application, but a whole group. Councils must have the powers to examine applications more widely—to examine what is happening in their boroughs as a whole.

I look forward to the Minister's remarks about how to change planning powers in London. Some private sector builders are worried at the prospect of a higher proportion of affordable housing being attached to planning applications. They are saying that they would not build if such a rule were introduced. I do not believe them. Many private sector builders would still be keen to build. There are still many opportunities for profit. It is in the community's interest to demand a share from those developers. Let us remember that, without the key workers—those who clean the roads, teach the children and police the streets—private sector properties will be devalued. I hope that the Minister will bring her experience to bear on the issue and regard it not only as an isolated matter, but as one that impacts on all the lives of those who live in London.

10.34 am

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing the debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on relieving me of the burden of having to detail some of the housing realities of many of my constituents. I shall not go over that ground again—my hon. Friends have given graphic accounts of stories that could have come from any inner-London borough. They also detailed reasons why so many people in this great capital city live in the most appalling housing conditions. The question is not why the situation is as it is, but how we can ensure a better future for our constituents.

It is interesting that the debate is entitled "Housing (London)". The London boroughs, the Mayor, the Greater London Assembly and, perhaps more importantly, the Government, should examine London's housing problems with a pan-London vision. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow urged the Minister to meet her, her constituents and members of the Government who have been given the clear responsibility to improve public services. She made the extremely strong point that there is no more important public service in London than affordable social housing.

If the Government are not moved by the human tragedies that the appalling lack of affordable social housing lays on too many people in London, I make a side point. This city has always been presented—as indeed it is—as one of the greatest, most powerful, richest and interesting cities in the world. What is detailed less often is that within London we have the largest number of deprived wards in the United Kingdom. Unemployment rates are higher than in the north-east of the country and, regrettably, London lost out during the first comprehensive spending review due to the lack of money that the Government are affording London's budgets. Labour Members know and applaud the Government's reason for making that shift, which was that they were putting much-needed money into coalfield communities. The Government argue for equality of opportunity, tackling child poverty and eradicating poor health, which I strongly endorse. However, there is little point in that if they do not take on board the fact that a contributory factor to all those demerits in our constituencies can be laid clearly and succinctly at the door of poor housing.

Equally, I ask the Minister to endorse other of my hon. Friend's comments. When the meeting between the great and good of the Government is arranged, the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be present, as should the Mayor and other representatives of the Greater London Authority. London needs more money—it is as simple as that. The better delivery of public services will rightly place greater burdens on local authorities. However, it is not enough to get agreement from leaders, chief executives, and directors of various departments. There must be money to retrain, co-

ordinate and modernise many local authority services to ensure that we, the public on the ground, see the benefit of such public services. There is no sector in which that is more important than housing.

The point that I initially attempted to make before I was carried away by my own eloquence was that, if the Government are not prepared to accept what we as London Members see as the overwhelming human case for more money to be pumped into London, will they acknowledge the economic case? The Chancellor has rightly said that the London is the dynamo for the national economy. For every job that is created in London, two jobs are created in the greater hinterland of the United Kingdom. However, we will not be able to maintain London's primacy, attract inward investment and be the great financial centre, in or out of the euro—however the country decides on that matter—if London's infrastructure does not function, and it will not function if key public workers cannot afford to live in this city.

All accept that the headline key public workers are teachers, nurses and policemen. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North rightly made the case for another group of key public workers in this great city, and they are the people who clean the streets. Without them, will we be able to attract people to the city? The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) mentioned leafy streets. If leaves are not swept up in the autumn, elderly people may, as has happened in the past, slip on compacted wet leaves and injure themselves. We are a great nation of dog lovers. If dog faeces are not cleaned up and pavements and roads are not properly maintained, will we be able to attract people? The houses might be nice, but if the surrounding environment is lousy, people will not want to live in London.

The same applies to transport. The Government are pouring more into public transport than ever before, but doing so will do no good if, because they simply cannot afford to live in their city, there are no drivers for the buses and tubes or wardens to give tickets to people who are parked illegally.

Many of those involved were born in this city, as were their parents and grandparents. If we cannot tackle the issue quickly, we shall, as my hon. Friends said, create even greater resentment that will cost us more as a nation because it will create social imbalances and possibly, in some instances, disaffection that will express itself physically or verbally on the ground. As constituency Members of Parliament, we want no more constituents with unbelievable stories about the harassment that they are experiencing as a result of a neighbour-from-hell scenario.

We are running short of time, and I shall conclude my remarks. I strongly urge the Minister to take up the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow of a high-level meeting between the Chancellor, members of the Government who are responsible for the improvement of public services, and representatives of the tier of London government that the Government—much to our credit—introduced to ensure a pan-London approach to some of the most essential and complicated difficulties that beset this great city. Housing should certainly be at the top of the agenda, and the issues can be thrashed out.

In the interim—or, rather, as an addendum—will the Minister ensure that the bed-and-breakfast taskforce imposes what we would consider acceptable standards for the facilities provided in bed-and-breakfast establishments? I also urge her to speak to our right hon. and hon. Friends who are responsible for the benefit system. We have spent a great deal of time this morning discussing the inequities of the housing benefit system, which often result from the privatisation of benefits. Equally, the Government have imposed on the system enormous complexities that have a serious impact, especially on the voluntary sector that delivers services to homeless people and rough sleepers in London. I urge the Minister to argue with our right hon. and hon. Friends that, rather than housing benefit taking a decade to improve, it too can be improved in an infinitely shorter period.

I welcome the Government's commitment that they, like all Labour Members, believe in the benefits of affordable social housing. The Homelessness Bill, which received its Second Reading on the Floor of the House last night, is a step in the right direction. I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of tackling quickly the issue of socially affordable housing in London.

I welcome many of the measures that the Government have introduced, in particular starter packs. However, that was simply throwing good money after bad, as all that it did was further inflate rents. We shall tackle the issue only by building. People are available to effect the plans, and the ideas and creativity are there, as London has experienced the problem for many years, but we shall not achieve anything in the time scale that is essential without more money from the Government. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow will make that point when she arranges a meeting with those who are responsible for improving public services and our right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

10.45 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing the debate. We have covered a lot of useful ground and I cannot possibly say all that I want to in the six minutes remaining to me. I shall give the Minister, whom I also congratulate, her full 10 minutes—because that is only right with a new Minister.

I congratulate, too, the hon. Members for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). Although there are great ideological differences between us, I found myself agreeing with much of what they said.

I hope that we can move on from the point often made in debates that we have had in the past, that everything the private sector does is bad and everything the public sector does is good. In fact, there is good and bad in both. As the hon. Member for Islington, North said, we should harness what is best in the private sector to solve the dreadful housing problems, not only in London but in all our constituencies, although London's problems are probably worse than those in most of the rest of the country.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

I accept that bad housing causes personal misery, as graphically illustrated by the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow. It leads to family breakdown, mental health problems, crime, antisocial neighbours and all the other problems that we desperately want to solve.

I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Islington, North about voluntary large-scale transfers to housing associations. There has been such a transfer in my constituency. Housing association tenants do not have enough say in how associations are run; that is something that the Government should be able to tackle. We should also engender greater competition between housing associations because, in my experience, there are good and bad associations and the difference between the worst and the best is enormous. By better auditing techniques, initiatives and targets, we could encourage the worst housing associations to rise to the standards of the best.

I should put one or two statistics on the record. At a housing conference on 5 March 1996, the Prime Minister promised that Labour would do everything in its power

"to end the scandal of homelessness, to tackle the spectacle of people sleeping rough on the streets and to end the waste of families sleeping in bed and breakfast accommodation."

We would all say "Amen" to that, but we must judge the Prime Minister on his record, which tells us that homelessness has risen by 8,000 in the past three years, from 102,410 to 110,790. The gap between the rich and poor has risen since 1997. The Government's statistics show that 700,000 more people live in poverty now than in 1997. The number of empty houses has risen since 1997 by 7 per cent., from 81,200 to 87,186. Many of the key indicators from the past three years suggest that things are going the wrong way.

I make those points in a genuine spirit of wanting to improve the lot of Londoners—and it is a genuine spirit, because the task of all of us in politics should be to improve the lot of all our constituents, especially those in the country's capital. I agree with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate that London is the country's economic driver and that we must ensure that London operates better than anywhere else.

One or two common misconceptions arose in the debate, especially in the points made about housing benefit. I was on the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, which considered housing benefit many times. The essence of benefits is to keep them simple. We have had 85 changes of regulation in housing benefit—one for every fortnight that the Labour party has been in power, and such tinkering makes it difficult for the council or a contracted-out service to deliver a housing benefit service with efficiency. We must shrink things to the lowest common denominator instead of trying to alter regulations to cover every possible eventuality.

In the little time available, I wish to be constructive about what a Conservative Government would do. We would allow local authorities greater discretion over where houses are built instead of dictating everything from the centre, which has led to many disadvantages. We would create new regeneration companies. It is especially important that we see more money being levered in by the private sector. The sort of development that I was thinking about when I intervened on the hon. Member for Islington, North is the monolithic diktat from the Mayor that all housing developments over 15 houses must contain 50 per cent. social and intermediate housing, which will lead to less development by the private sector. If the hon. Member for Islington, North and his friends really want to increase development in London, they should stop that sort of monolithic approach and examine each proposal on a case-by-case basis. We should determine how much a private developer can afford in a particular development and make him meet set targets and raise or lower them depending on the case. It is not sensible to adopt a monolithic approach.

I promised to leave the Minister 10 minutes, but she has only nine. Suffice it to say that I sympathise with the problems in London, but I have the same problems in my constituency, albeit to a far lesser degree. Nevertheless, the Government need to tackle those problems and I look forward to the Government doing better in this second term than they did in the first.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing the debate on this important issue. From the contributions that have been made, it is clear that the debate will continue and that people have extremely strong and clear feelings about the matter.

Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was council leader in one of the most deprived areas of inner London. I was probably responsible for some of the worst housing in the country.

Jeremy Corbyn: I think that my hon. Friend should rephrase that.

Ms Keeble: No, because that was the way in which I saw the problem. Whatever party is in government, one cannot duck local responsibilities. I still believe that to solve London's housing problems we need a partnership between local and national Government and the various housing agencies. There is no way to escape that.

A Conservative Government were in power throughout the time that I was council leader. We should expect nothing from the Conservatives, just as people in London could not. I will take no lectures from Conservative Members on the subject.

Two issues were raised: first, the quantity of housing and the amount of money that goes in; and, secondly, the quality of housing and what is delivered on the ground. In terms of quantity, the problems in London are well recognised by the Government and substantial extra funding has been put in. Between 1997-98 and 2001-02, allocations of housing investment for local authorities and registered social landlords in London amounted to some £31.8 billion, £1.3 billion of which was extra resources made available by the Government. That represented almost 30 per cent. of total national extra resources and reflected the Government's concern at the high level of deprivation and need that exists in the capital.

We have put in extra money through the new major repairs allowance. We expect authorities in areas of high demand such as London to use some of that extra money to fund new affordable housing where it is a high priority. Clearly, if we are to solve some of the quantity issues, we must look at extra funding streams—hence the emphasis on stock transfers and on partnership arrangements to ensure that we get the maximum return in terms of quantity for the amount of money that the public sector can put in. However, there are profound issues concerning quality.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) asked whether analysis would be conducted of how stock transfers have worked. Hackney has undertaken more stock transfers than any other London borough, and our experience has been unsatisfactory. We want some analysis before the policy is further promoted.

Ms Keeble: I am sure that everyone will look at the lessons of stock transfers. However, there are many ways to attract different funding streams to provide social housing in London and throughout the country. If we are serious about increasing the amount of housing, we must look at all those options, and deal with issues concerning quality.

The particular issue that I want to deal with is overcrowding, which has been raised repeatedly. One of my first impressions of housing in London was how overcrowded it was; it formed part of my case load as a councillor. The overcrowding regulations are very outdated, and I share the concerns that were expressed about them by my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). I undertake to review them, although I do not undertake to prejudge the outcome of that review. However, they need to be reviewed. It is unacceptable that families in overcrowded conditions have to resort to, for example, converting airing cupboards into bedrooms. Some parents have to sleep in their cars. The general curse of an overcrowded household must be addressed: not only its health implications, but the difficulties that face children doing normal things such as homework.

Issues about the extension of rights, particularly the extension of housing rights to young people, have been raised. They were debated at length last night. As we set about recognising the housing needs of a wider range of people—including, in particular, 16 and 17-year-olds—it is quite likely that extra pressure will be put on the housing stock, at least for a time. We must be clear that, if we are going to recognise housing need and to deal with equality issues, we must look carefully at the consequences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North raised issues about the problems of reducing stock, and what then happens to housing densities. He rightly said that, if property should be demolished because of its inadequate condition, that must be done. However, we must bear in mind that that reduces the overall stock. If we are going to increase the densities and the stock, we must be more careful about where we build the new housing. There are some innovative ideas about increasing it around, for example, shopping areas and transport nodes. I am sure that we can take such matters forward, while bearing in mind that the composition of households differs greatly.

Several hon. Members raised issues about bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The Government are conscious of the increasing use by some London authorities of bed-and-breakfast hotels as temporary accommodation for homeless families with children. We believe that people have a right to decent accommodation, and Government policy is clear that such accommodation should be used only as a last resort. In May 2001, a new taskforce was established to work with the worst affected authorities. The unit will help to develop solutions and disseminate good practice to assist authorities to avoid or reduce their use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Several hon. Members asked for assurances about that. In taking an interest and following through the work of that taskforce, I shall certainly try to ensure that we reduce its use as far as possible, especially for families with children, as for them it is clearly undesirable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow asked whether I would visit her area and consider some of its problems. We are not supposed to give such assurances, but I would be happy to pay such a visit.

Foot and Mouth

11 am

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise a matter of pressing—indeed searing—importance to my constituency. I welcome the Minister, who is making his debut for DEFRA, which I am told is Welsh for "wake up", or something like that. I am not sure how good his Welsh is, but perhaps he will clarify that in due course.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Let me clarify for the right hon. Gentleman, as my Welsh is perfectly adequate to the task, that the spelling is different but that "deffra" means "awake!". The Department for Environment, Food and Regional Affairs is certainly wide awake.

Mr. Curry: In the next quarter of an hour we may find out just how wide awake the Department is, as that is the purpose of the debate.

Since the election was called, in Craven, which is within the area of North Yorkshire that I represent, and in the neighbouring parts of Lancashire—notably but not exclusively the Ribble Valley—there have been 86 confirmed cases of foot and mouth, nine cases of slaughter on suspicion and 345 premises culled out as part of a contiguous cull. About 39,000 cattle and 219,000 sheep and lambs have been slaughtered since the election was called.

First, I want to praise Dr. Steve Hunter, who is the director of operations in Yorkshire, for his handling of the matter. However, in doing so, I also give thanks to all those who have worked to tackle the disease and who have not been thanked enough, including the secretaries in what was the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the administrators, the Army, the vets and those in local authorities who worked hard to contain the outbreak and find a way through it.

The key fact is that businesses in my constituency, including farming, were closed down long before the first outbreak of foot and mouth there. The outbreaks in Hawes, in Wensleydale in North Yorkshire, in Lancashire, to some extent in Cumbria and in Bradford had frozen all normal activity in my constituency for weeks before an outbreak occurred within its boundaries. The shutdown had enormously wide ramifications even before the disease affected the constituency itself. Because foot and mouth arrived there relatively late and intensely—in Craven, the intensity of the disease rivals that in Cumbria—for many businesses, especially in the tourist trade, the summer has been shot through already. Businesses in Malham Dale, Grassington and Three Peaks—indeed, all those in north Craven and the Pennine dales—live largely off tourism, especially but not exclusively during the summer months. For many of them, the real crisis will be winter survival. Even when the last case of foot and mouth is dealt with and the last farm premises have been cleansed and can look forward to restocking, the business crisis will be only beginning for some businesses and will be in full torrent for many of them.

The problem is that the Government's assistance for areas affected by foot and mouth was allocated before the outbreak hit my area and the neighbouring constituencies. The Government announced business rate relief for three months, with Government participation of 95 per cent. for businesses below £12,000 rateable value and 75 per cent. in an on-going programme for those above £12,000. However, that scheme ended two days ago. Craven district council sent out 579 applications for relief. Of the 198 applications that have come back, 24 had a rateable value of more than £12,000. There have been 87 awards, but the scheme has ended.

The Government made allocations under the rural recovery programme via the rural development agencies. In Yorkshire and the Humberside area, the money—£2.5 million—was allocated when foot and mouth was confined largely to the Wensleydale outbreak. Cumbria received £11.8 million. I am sure that my colleagues from Lancashire will point out the similar discrepancy between the sums that Lancashire constituencies will get and the sum for the whole north-west. Both allocations pre-date the incidents in Craven and most Lancashire constituencies.

We must also consider the Government's scheme to match funds raised by charity. In Craven on Wednesday, the Craven Trust was launched with a target of raising £1 million. People are generous, have lived near the crisis and have seen its searing effects closely, so I think that that money will be forthcoming. The Government promised to match such money, but the scheme ended two days ago.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the right hon. Gentleman also note that the same problem has arisen in the west country? The *Western Morning News* launched an excellent "green wellie appeal", but it seems that the Government are again backsliding on their original promise to match funding.

Mr. Curry: I merely wish to point out what is happening in my constituency and its neighbouring areas, because the epidemic started much later there. That does not mean that the problem does not exist in many other parts of the United Kingdom.

On aid for tourism, I am in favour of trying to encourage overseas visitors back to the United Kingdom. I merely point out that in the Yorkshire dales, for example, 90 per cent. of our visitors are national rather than international, and that of that 90 per cent., 80 per cent. are regional. We want to attract people back from Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Sheffield.

I have raised the subject on four previous occasions. I have seen the Minister, and was one of the first Members of Parliament to meet the new Secretary of State, to whom I am grateful for responding so rapidly to my request to meet her. I raised it in the Queen's Speech debate and following the foot and mouth statement. Each time, Ministers told me that I had an excellent point and that they were reviewing matters and taking them seriously. I thank them for the sympathy, but that will not put any people back in business and keep them there. I do not want sympathy; I want Ministers to do something about the problem now.

My next theme is agriculture and the recovery programme. The people worst affected in my constituency are farmers in heavily infected areas whose

farms are not themselves infected. One could argue that it would be in the farmers' economic interest for their farms to become infected. By common consent, the valuations are relatively generous. Most farmers opt not for the standard scale but for individual valuations. Although the money paid for what is in effect a compulsory purchase is relatively generous, I do not claim that it in any way takes away the trauma that farmers suffer, or that it is preferable to being able to carry on business. I merely state that funding has been made available, sensibly in this regard. Those farmers can do nothing. They are practically frozen, and are in the worst situation possible. It is the same situation as for many businesses, but perhaps without the hope of being able to recover as quickly.

There is also a problem of bottlenecks in cleansing and disinfecting. It is fair to say that, in my constituency, most people regard the operation up to slaughter, culling and transport to have been carried out not merely efficiently, but with great sensitivity. Recently there has been much more controversy, because certain things went wrong with a cull that happened close to Skipton, as such incidents always seem to, so it was much more public than the others. Since then, some groups of people have been desperate to find anything that has gone wrong and any little incident has been magnified into fiction worthy of Harry Potter, of whom I am a devotee. Myth has run riot, partly because little proper information was issued at the beginning. Now, the smallest fragments of circumstantial evidence are woven into tremendous horror stories.

Once a cull is over, the animals have been carted off and the sheeted lorries have disappeared, the real problems begin. There have been problems with people not being allocated a case officer for long enough, and with the rotation of case officers. It is rather like when a relative dies: everyone is busy until after the funeral. The busyness keeps them occupied, but then they have to cope with what follows. People have not been given adequate information about what follows. Different case officers are involved, so the information that farmers get about what they can do—whether they can make hay or store it—has differed from farmer to farmer and from place to place. The timetables have differed. There has been no consistency.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I draw hon. Members' attention to my connections with farming, which are set out in the Register of Members' Interests. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who have lost their stock need the Government to give a lead on the role of British agriculture? If we are to get such people back into agriculture, they must make important economic decisions after the six-month quarantine period. They will have to buy expensive stock, which will take time to reach peak production. They are wondering whether it is worth going back into agriculture, and we need a lead from the Government to get them back.

Mr. Curry: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Indeed, that point will form the content of some of my concluding remarks.

If negligence and non-observance of the rules in the agricultural industry have contributed to the spread of the disease, let us hear about it and see the evidence. If there are to be prosecutions, let us have them. Far too many stories have attributed the spread of the disease to such things, but none has been given substance. Nothing is more anguishing for farming communities than to be told that they are somehow responsible, but that no one will ever bring a case. I know that obtaining evidence is difficult, but if cases are to be brought, let us knock off the non-attributable stories about how the farming community has contributed to its own crisis.

I also draw the Minister's attention to the circumstances of children in my constituency who have come from farms where culling has been taking place to sit public exams. There is evidence that the cull in my constituency coincided precisely with the period of public or internal examinations and of standard assessment tests. Will the Minister ensure that examination boards understand that individual children might have been under great pressure when taking exams?

I want now to deal with the farm crisis that is looming in the autumn. I said that the business crisis will continue well after the cull and when the disease has, I hope, been eradicated. The end of the epidemic does not mean that farming will escape. We already know that the new premium is at an historic low because of the price on the continent. Even after the cull and welfare disposal, which will take care of 3 million to 3.5 million lambs that would have gone into consumption, there will still be a surplus of 1.5 million to 2 million on the home market because of the closure of the export market, which would normally take 6 million lambs a year. Many of those would have been the lighter lambs. The Government need to consider their response. There is a case for aid to private storage, and there might also be a case for a Government scheme to remove some of the lighter lambs. Otherwise, we shall have immensely low prices and we shall simply move from the present crisis to the resumption of the economic crisis that was a four or five-year constant for agriculture before foot and mouth hit.

I want to talk a little about the aftermath of the crisis. Some farmers who have lost all their stock might be able to quit the industry. To be frank, they might be better off economically than they would have been if they had quit before the epidemic struck. Others might be able to stay, and the process of restocking could accelerate the development of scrapie resistance in breeding flocks, which would be a small gain. Those people might also think a little about the management of their systems. I have been struck by the fact that many farmers are so busy running their farms that they can no longer think about how they manage them. They are run off their feet: they have shed all their labour and pared things down to the bone and they work every hour that God gives simply to keep things moving from day to day.

It is also true that the industry, particularly the sheep industry, will emerge smaller but perhaps fitter from the crisis. We all acknowledge that there was a significant surplus of as many as 3 million sheep. That fact has given rise to the great myth that somehow the foot and mouth epidemic was a vast, planned economic cull to scale the industry down to size. However, it is none the less true that, following the crisis, we are able to examine factors such as stocking densities and management systems.

[Mr. Curry]

There are some reflections for the Department that I would like to bring to the Minister's attention. It is true to say, although I say it with some caution, that the Department—MAFF as was—has become rather disconnected from the industry that it is supposed to be supervising. It was a tremendous shock for it to discover that in my constituency farms did not all sit in nice, compact holdings. They were scattered over many different locations and were fragmented. Had that sunk in sooner, perhaps some of the movement permissions that were granted earlier would not have been granted, in recognition of the risks involved.

The Department has lost knowledge of the industry. That is partly because ADAS—the old Agricultural Development Advisory Service—has been floated off, and partly because the staff of the Department largely fulfil a gendarme role in policing the giving of grants. The issue is serious and needs to be addressed.

It is a myth that we need more vets. We need many more people at the technical level, such as animal health officers, because vets are doing many jobs that they should not do. We need far more competent people at the level below vets. They would have helped a great deal with the crisis. Vets should be integrated fully into the mainstream administration of the Department. It does not make sense for the vets to be in separate hierarchies, parallel to the main administrative organisation. That has been a real problem in the handling of the epidemic. Vets are not supposed to be managers and it is much more effective if they are integrated into the management system.

In my experience, the Department has been reasonably good at giving statistics. I have no complaint about the statistics, once the indigestion caused by data protection legislation had been overcome, although we need to examine the effective workings of that legislation.

The Department is not good at communicating issues. Halfway through the epidemic, the word "biosecurity" suddenly appeared and the concept was treated as if it was an eternal truth that everybody had taken in with their mother's milk. I did not have the faintest idea what biosecurity was—I thought it was an organic washing powder. Suddenly, farms were being told that they were breaching the rules of biosecurity, but it is only in the past few days that a video has been produced to tell farmers what biosecurity is. They can hardly be reproached if they are suddenly told that management systems that have operated for generations are somehow dangerous.

There is still no piece of paper setting out for farmers the route from cull to restocking. We know that it is difficult and complex, but a timetable is necessary, setting out the steps and showing who does what and who approves what. To have in one's hands a piece of paper that sets that out clearly is important. The problem partly arises because of the Department's reliance on the wretched internet. In my constituency, most farmers are not connected to the internet and old-fashioned bits of paper are of a great deal more use to many people than a constant reliance on electronic communications, which are irrelevant to many farmers. Perhaps that will change.

We must reflect on media handling. Department officials have been thrust into the cauldron. I attended a meeting 10 days ago—a sort of anti-cull protest—to which people had come from all over the country. It was not violent, but it was extremely rowdy. It was an outdoor meeting of about 400 people. It is the sort of thing a politician has to do—it is good training, and when one has finished one is glad to have dealt with it.

A few days later Steve Hunter had to deal with a similar meeting, but it is not the job of officials to be in that political forum. Ministers ought to do that job. We need to think hard about where the role of officials ends and that of Ministers begins. The crisis has placed officials in front of the media more and more, taking the flak. They are inevitably asked to respond to political questions. All that they can say is, "Sorry, I carry out the orders." However, people shout and scream from the audience that they should denounce those orders. There should be a sensible review of that matter.

We need to look again at co-operation between Departments. It is an old story, but the epidemic has shown yet again the problems that arise if there is no proper coterminosity. In addition, we need to reflect on the circumstances in which vaccination might have a role. It is simplistic to say that there is a clear choice: that we should either kill or vaccinate. We all know that it is a great deal more complex than that, but the sooner that is spelled out, so that the argument can be conducted on sensible scientific territory, the better.

Finally, I come to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). We must avoid saying that because foot and mouth disease and BSE have happened, agriculture is heading for a radical departure. I do not believe in radical departures, and in any case such matters have to be agreed at European level. BSE has probably had a greater impact on the continental way of thinking than foot and mouth, which will simply push us further in the direction in which we were already going. That is not a bad thing. We must think much harder about what we want from farmers and about what public good farming is delivering. We must then crystallise our thoughts about what we are willing to pay for that public good, especially in terms of food production—higher quality and going upstream in food production—of recreation and of the environment.

People want a better balance between the broad economic sectors in the countryside, and between the ecology and the industrial activity there. This debate gives us a chance to set that out in an intelligent fashion, bringing people with us, rather than giving the impression that everything that went before foot and mouth was somehow a culmination and a preparation for the epidemic and that we will now go back to a new annus mirabilis—some anno domini in which everything will change. The world is not as simple as that. A sensible evolution is not only imperative: it is inevitable. The more signposts that we can put along that roadway, the better it will be for everybody.

I am grateful for the Minister's attention, and look forward to his reply— particularly his reply to the first part of my remarks, so that my concern about those schemes having come to an end may shortly be abated. Then we shall know that he has really woken up.

11.22 am

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who spoke with real feeling and practical knowledge of the difficulties that affect his constituents. He sketched out some of the longer-term issues that face rural communities. Before I come to those, I should like to point out to those in Parliament and elsewhere who try to run a divide between rural communities and urban ones that the foot and mouth outbreak has implications for the urban community. There are two examples in my constituency. A maggot farm in Clipstone that sells angling equipment has had difficulties because people from urban areas have not been able to go out to the countryside. For the same reason, a textile company in Hucknall in Nottinghamshire that makes high-quality visible protective clothing has seen its sales drop and the business is in peril.

Of course, there are real problems in the countryside. The significant lesson of the foot and mouth outbreak is the importance of tourism to the countryside. The right hon. Gentleman said that he wants to get people from Leeds and Sheffield back into the countryside. In the Peak district we must get people from Derby, Nottingham and Leicester back. It is all very well for colleagues from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to go abroad and promote our countryside in Europe and America, but the reality is that we must get local people back. One of the dangerous political divides that have arisen in recent years is that between urban and rural areas. We must recognise that the two interrelate. However, I have been impressed by the importance to the countryside of walkers, climbers, anglers, canoeists and birdwatchers. It is clear that pubs and bed-and-breakfast places have faced real difficulties. The significance of closing the rights of way network throughout the country has only just been realised.

I was tempted to read some of the research undertaken on the subject, and came across a helpful paper written by Peter Midmore, professor of rural studies at the university of Wales, on the economic value of walking in rural Wales. His conclusions were striking. He found that, each year, walking and climbing bring £77 million into Wales and contribute to 4,250 jobs. He compared the cost to the public purse of the subsidies for farming and agriculture and for the tourist industry. The public cost for climbing and walking—the leisure business—was £433 a job, whereas that of supporting jobs in agriculture in Wales was almost 10 times higher, at £4,279.

I was also struck by the Scottish natural history survey of 1998, which showed that open air recreation accounted for 29,000 jobs in Scotland—almost the same as farming. The Countryside Agency in England has not been slow to follow that: it found that on any given weekend more than 7 million people visited the British countryside, that the main source of transport was by foot and that the majority of visitors lived less than 30 miles from the places visited.

The implications for rural communities, following the closures caused by the foot and mouth epidemic, are significant. It is bizarre that some local authorities still deny it. Lincolnshire county council has done little to reopen its footpaths. East Yorkshire, another county with tremendous tourist potential, has done little, as has Hertfordshire. Some county councils—including Kent, which made a good start in opening up its footpaths—are now slowly coming off the accelerator. I know that the Minister has been looking closely at whether to remove the blanket ban and I will be interested to hear what he has to say on the matter.

Mr. Tyler: I know that the hon. Gentleman has walked extensively in Cornwall. He will be glad to know that, as from 9 am today, virtually all footpaths in the county are open.

Paddy Tipping: I am aware that bodies such as the National Trust have been quick to enter into the discussion and that beaches and coves were opened early. Tourism and outdoor recreation are indeed important.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Dartmoor national park has been closed for far longer than necessary, and that when national parks are closed people do not visit the area? Does he agree that the Government should give special help to tourist attractions in the national park areas and to hoteliers who are on the verge of bankruptcy?

Paddy Tipping: We need to examine the measures that have been put in place to help rural businesses. One of the questions that will arise at the end of the crisis is how successful those measures have been. I suspect that they will not be as successful as was thought at the outset. However, the hon. Gentleman is right that it is vital to reopen Dartmoor as soon as possible. Again, I look to my right hon. Friend the Minister to say something on the subject.

People visit the countryside because of the landscape. There is a symmetry between what farmers and landowners do and what tourists want from the countryside. As the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said, the outbreak will lead to an acceleration of thinking on the subject. Like him, I do not think that it will lead to anything radical: I believe that the bones of a new approach are already in place.

In Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, many farmers and landowners are looking for alternative businesses. We must reconsider how the planning system works in rural areas. There is much evidence to suggest that there is a black economy of industry that brings wealth into the area, taking place with no planning permission in farm buildings throughout the country. That is of little detriment to the countryside and I hope that we will take the opportunity to ease planning conditions.

In the longer term, there will be a move away from the manner in which we support agriculture. The common agricultural policy will face radical reform that will be driven by the enlargement of the European Union, not by the current crisis. As new countries such as Poland and Hungary enter the EU, it is inconceivable that the CAP will not have to change. Change is driven by foot and mouth and the other crises of the past four or five years: BSE, low commodity prices and overproduction. The strength of the pound against the euro has also been a factor.

The English rural development programme has set the path on which we must go. We must switch from a system that rewards production to one that brings other

[Paddy Tipping]

benefits into the area. I have mentioned changing the planning system to bring new business into the area, but as I said, it is the landscape and environment that bring tourists in. Increasingly, we will pay farmers and landowners more green premiums to develop and look after the countryside and to introduce new planting, walls and hedges to make it more attractive to visit.

That process will not be painless—it will be extremely painful. It will be timetabled over a number of years. It is clear that, however much is done with organics, local marketing and the development of a market in energy crops, commercial farming faces real difficulties and big challenges. That is why I tell the Minister that whatever the difficulties—I know that there are real difficulties with colleagues in the Treasury about retirement and outgoer schemes—we must give farmers whose capital, livelihood and family are tied up with their farmstead a chance to leave with dignity and some money in their hands. The problem is one of new entrants and substitution and we must work hard to develop a system to allow change in the countryside.

Many people, and particularly incomers to the countryside, want a countryside that is preserved in aspic and does not change. I had hoped to go to the Yorkshire dales this coming weekend—I am a Yorkshire lad from the urban textile town of Halifax. One of my favourite walks is to the top of Buckden Pike. I used to take my children there, and as we looked down over Upper Wharfedale the kids would say, "Nothing's ever changed." However, in Upper Wharfedale, everything had changed, from a land that was soggy and woodland to one that was intensively used. The challenge is to make and plan such change

I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that all the voices in the countryside, not only landowners and farmers, are crying out for change. We do not have long to act. I welcome the suggestion of an independent commission. We must move quickly. The sign of DEFRA's success will not be a change of nameplate on the door of Nobel house, but a change that creates a new and living countryside—a countryside that is in stark contrast to the barren fields and desolation that we see in many parts of England and Wales at present.

11.35 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): There is a widespread belief in many rural communities that the Government do not understand the depth of the crisis and how it has affected so many different businesses and people. The Prime Minister has said that we are on the home straight, however bumpy it is. Perhaps we are over the worst, yet many businesses are entering what should be their more lucrative period with much trepidation.

We hope that hotels and small businesses connected with tourism in Devon and Cornwall are now facing good weather and many visitors. It has been estimated that 97 per cent. of them have been affected in some way by foot and mouth. Small businesses—sometimes even micro-businesses comprising one or two people—that always live to a certain extent on the precipice are now clearly faced with possible disaster. That such businesses would not be readily connected with farming has been a difficult problem for some district councils considering applications for relief. For example, the boat storage business in my constituency is not connected with agriculture or foot and mouth, but it has been affected significantly. Even the fancy dress hire business is looking bleak because it has not had the advantage of young farmers club events or mystery evenings put on by hotels and so on. Such tiny businesses have missed out significantly and can ill afford to lose what is literally a few thousand pounds.

Large agricultural shows such as the Royal Bath and West show and the Devon and Cornwall show are the shop windows for many small businesses, which market themselves and take a huge number of orders during the few days of the show. The orders keep them going for the rest of the year. They have other opportunities to market their products, but the shows are key. A further problem is the temporary closure of an enormous number of National Trust houses and attractions. They have their own problems with admission fees, but what about their ice-cream suppliers and so on, which are often micro-businesses?

We want the Government to understand the depth of the crisis and how it has affected small businesses in rural areas. It has been dealt with principally by the provision of hardship rate relief. As has already been said, that has now ceased, but many businesses are still suffering considerably as a result of the foot and mouth crisis. We want an extension of that relief. When it was introduced, it was intimated that the Government would review the position before the end of the three-month period to determine whether it would, in fact, be extended. The case has been made, and I hope that an announcement will be made that the scheme will be further extended for a minimum of three months.

The scheme does not deal with all businesses that have a rateable value of up to £12,000. I understand that about 3,500 applications have been made nationally. We were told that a £12,000 limit would include 75 per cent. of all businesses that might be affected. If only 3,500 have made applications, something is seriously amiss. Consideration should be given, perhaps during the extension of the three-month period, to raising that limit to, say, £50,000, so that businesses that are affected can obtain some relief.

Apart from agriculture, tourism is probably the economic activity that has been most affected. In many tourist areas, there is a feeling that England has missed out considerably in terms of Government support for tourism compared with Scotland and Wales. Many of the hardest hit areas of tourism are in England. A significant increase in marketing support and promotional activity is necessary to benefit tourism.

One of the other aspects that we should consider is why we did not learn enough from the 1967 outbreak and the 1969 report. Although many comparisons made are erroneous, as the 2001 FMD outbreak is significantly different from that of 1967, comparisons can be made about the effects and how the disease can be controlled.

I hope that the Government will agree to hold a full, open and independent public inquiry. Many people—not only those involved in foot and mouth but the entire country—want to understand how the Government handled the matter. Indeed, in my area, a telephone poll—they are not always entirely accurate—taken by

the local daily newspaper, the *Western Morning News*, asking people whether they would like a public inquiry, showed more than 2,200 in favour and only 61 against. The impression from that relatively small number of people, who nevertheless come from the entire south-west, show, the Government how important it is to have such a full and independent public inquiry.

We need to do more, and quickly. Many lessons can be learned in the absence of an inquiry, such as how farmers' and local markets can be encouraged in local towns. The Government are putting public money into the regeneration of small market towns, but is it not nonsense to continue to allow planning applications for out-of-town shopping centres at the same time as we are trying to regenerate towns? Joined-up thinking is necessary to reap the benefits of both. Larger out-of-town shopping centres have benefits, but they should not undermine local town centres. We need planning permission that avoids one competing with the other and public money ultimately having to be put into town centres.

Long discussion on food and farming policy is necessary. Many of us have been calling for that for some time. Before the commencement of foot and mouth disease, it had become apparent that the common agricultural policy and other factors had had an impact on farming. We have been producing more and more and creating surpluses, there has been a reduction in world prices, and farm incomes have rapidly disappeared. If there can be an advantage to a crisis such as this, it may be that it will concentrate minds and create real change.

People sometimes say that everything that happened before foot and mouth was bad and that everything after it will be all right. Although there is a place and a niche market for the smaller, local, organic farm supplying produce for the local town and its restaurants and shops, and such farms may produce local cheeses and meats, they can never supply the need for wider food production. The larger agribusinesses will continue to thrive, operating on a national and international scale, supplying large supermarkets and food processing businesses.

Surely, however, a place must remain for the less intensive, more traditional food production farming units, which even now comprise the vast majority of farming enterprises throughout the country. They still provide a significant amount of the food that we want, including an enormous amount of food for processing. Day by day, week by week, year by year, they continue to trade and to be profitable in their own right—if we discount the problems of FMD for the moment. They have been looking after, enhancing and producing the very countryside from which tourism and the whole country benefit. Somehow, however, despite being a significant number, they have been excluded from the debate.

We need to incorporate such farms in any future policy decisions. Yes, we want to move away from more intensive farming and promote organics as a niche, but we will never reduce significantly the large number of farming enterprises that fall between, not being hugely intensive or totally organic, but provide much of the food that we eat. We should not neglect them, because they also provide the countryside that is so important to us. If we tried to change that, we would change significantly the whole way in which the rural economy operated.

I hope that one of the effects of foot and mouth will be that we take a good look at how we produce our food, and at how the rural economy could fit together to include all types of business. However, let us not forget that an enormous number of farms—often family farms—that have operated quite satisfactorily for a long period, may feel alienated by a policy that considers only agribusinesses and smaller, organic businesses.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. I intend to call the Opposition spokesman at 12.10. Before that, at least three people want to speak. With a little self-discipline, they may all be able to do so.

11.48 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I shall do my best to follow that advice, Mr. O'Hara. The debate is not an opportunity for a long discourse on the origins of foot and mouth in relation to the current crisis. I want to focus on the implications that the outbreak has for the way in which the Government deliver services to the farming community and, specifically, to the culture and performance of former MAFF services that are now the responsibility of DEFRA.

This crisis has demonstrated a number of things to which those of us who have been close to farming and to MAFF have frequently drawn attention. First, this is a Ministry that does not naturally develop strategies for the delivery of its services, or for the future of the industry that it seeks to guard and help. Several speakers have made lucid arguments concerning the fact that a strategy has been lacking for some time, and have pointed out that a rural strategy that encompasses the role of farming in the future is desperately needed.

Secondly, the Ministry has never had a good track record with regard to contingency planning or preparedness for dealing with major crises. As I said in the House a few days ago, a major outbreak of foot and mouth disease was not an unknown possibility, as it has happened before. However, although it is an eventuality on which much administrative time was spent in the 1960s, there is plenty of evidence that the Ministry had little in place to guide it on how to deal with an outbreak on this scale. It lacks preparedness and long-term thinking for dealing with such major biological crises.

Thirdly, the Ministry has had an introverted and defensive culture, which has made it peculiarly hard for it to engage with other parts of the public service or with other groups that may be able to assist it in dealing with such crises. That is evidenced by how slow it was to engage with scientific expertise to give guidance on the mapping of the crisis and how it would spread across the country. The issue of the engagement of the Army in logistical tasks also provides evidence to support that opinion. I recognise that this is a politically sensitive matter, but it was apparent to me at an early stage that the Army's help was required, because the Ministry was ill-equipped to deal with the scale of the task facing it in some parts of the country, and yet it went into denial for a critical few days before recognising that that was necessary.

[Mr. Mark Todd]

However, it should also be pointed out that MAFF officials are tremendously nice people. Reports from my constituency, where there were eight cases of foot and mouth disease, support that point: there was positive feedback on the ground concerning how the officials did their work. They were sensitive: they recognised that the tasks that they had to perform were awful and that they were working on other people's property and destroying their livelihoods. They conducted themselves with a degree of sensitivity and tact that must not be lost. Although I will talk about some of the things that must be lost if MAFF is to change into a Department that serves rural areas far better than before, that local feel was present, and it was appreciated by people who were going through the worst experiences of their lives. It is only fair to point that out.

However, a painful—and, occasionally inconceivable—amount of bureaucracy was sometimes imposed. I handled cases in which, to apply for a local movement, a form had to be completed that had to be sent to Nottingham, from where it was transmitted to Cambridge, before being routed back through the process. The apparent reason for that was that it did not seem possible for MAFF to devise a one-stop process for dealing with the matter. To resolve it, two regional service centres had to be involved.

Similar problems arose with regard to the welfare scheme. Some cases in my constituency had to go through an appalling process. It has been remarked that often the worst-hit farmers did not have foot and mouth disease on their farms but were restricted in their movements and activities. There were some awful welfare cases, and sorting some of them out took up a significant amount of my time. That the wrong rates were set for the welfare scheme was not helpful. Most of us who know a reasonable amount about the subject would have said straight away that the rates were too generous. They produced a secondary marketplace into which everyone immediately dived, thereby overloading the bureaucracy. That could have been spotted immediately.

The paperchase process was then imposed on people seeking to go through the welfare scheme. I have local examples of that, one of which is someone who did not have lifting gear available to deal with carcases, and was told by one person that it was his responsibility to provide it, but by another that the Ministry could do so. The muddled communication was bad news for local farmers.

The compensation payment arrangements also provided plenty of room for complaint. They were often slow. They were sometimes unfair in certain respects, and I have taken up such cases separately with the Department. In one critical area—the payment for previously redundant farm workers to carry out certain cleansing tasks—the arrangements in my constituency were so woefully slow that people who lived on little money in the first place were often denied any income for six to eight weeks. First, someone would check off the payment in Stafford, move it to London to be authorised again, and then to Alnwick, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), for someone finally to pay it off. I cannot understand how we can tolerate such jobsworth bureaucracy when dealing with a crisis.

The blood tests, which were critical in finally clearing up the cases in my area, were slow. Someone made another mistake and missed a critical farm, which delayed the process, so restrictions were in place for far longer than necessary. The people might be nice, but what a painfully bureaucratic muddle there was. To call the operation byzantine would seem only a mild criticism.

Communications were awful. The example given earlier on vaccination was right, as the explanation of what vaccination meant was muddled. Various meanings of that word never got through to some farmers, although most farmers in my area grasped the issue reasonably clearly. To the public and the media, the dichotomy was clear between vaccination, as a way to save animals, and the alternative, to kill them. As most of us know, that is a woefully simplistic view of a complex subject.

I hope that, as a result of the change of nameplate on Nobel house, there is a powerful change in the culture, management style and key management personnel in the Department that delivers such key services. We cannot accept that such a level of bureaucracy should be applied to a critical sector that needs regeneration, new thinking and new strategies. I find it hard to conceive that some of those involved will be able to deliver such powerful change in the future.

My key message is that we must change the culture and performance of the key services as a direct outcome of the crisis. If one positive change can come out of the crisis, I hope that that is it.

11.58 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on initiating the debate, as the issue has had an enormous impact on my constituency, not only on the blighted farmers and those who have been directly affected in terms of tourism and agriculture but on people in the towns and villages who are related to or know those farmers. A dark cloud hangs over the areas that have been directly affected by the disease.

My right hon. Friend was right to say that when there is a withdrawal of information, the rumour mill can and does take over. I have heard daily rumours on how the disease has spread and where it will go next. We need to fill the vacuum to ensure that the rumour mill is displaced.

It is impossible to overestimate the impact of foot and mouth in my area. As I said, its impact has been felt not only by those directly affected: the contiguous culls sometimes affect 16 other farms. We can only imagine how many animals are taken out with each outbreak.

It has been said that the vast majority of culls have been carried out sensitively, and I thank those involved for that. However, that is sometimes not the case. I have had a letter from John Barber of the Lancashire Rural Stress Network telling me of a cull that took place in West Bradford. There were not many animals, and they belonged to the lady who runs the post office. The road was not closed, and passers-by who had become attached to the animals—including some children—saw the cull taking place and were affected by what they saw. I ask the Minister to ensure that it is stressed yet again

to those who take part in the culls that they deal sensitively with the people who live in the area and with those who are directly affected.

Compensation has been mentioned, and I pay tribute again to the charities for the role that they have played during the outbreak. I should like to think that the Minister will today announce new initiatives to support those affected by foot and mouth, rather than withdrawing the initiatives that have already been announced, some of which were inadequate in the first place. I hope that he can reassure us that some of the schemes that have been started will continue and that some of the problems that can be more clearly seen now that we are way down the line can be properly tackled.

Hon. Members have mentioned the future and the fact that it might be six months before those who are affected by foot and mouth can restock. I want to know about the long-term future. I also want to know about the long-term future of those who get compensation. I heard today of someone whose animals were culled virtually at the start of the outbreak, but who still has had no money, while others, whose animals were killed a month ago, have had theirs. There might be difficulties in that regard.

Are farmers supposed to live on the compensation until they can restock? If they have to eat into money that is earmarked for the replenishment of stocks, there will be so much less when they finally get round to restocking. We must reconsider exactly what the money will be used for. We have heard about new entrants, but we should talk about the old entrants who want to stay in farming. We must ensure that they are properly compensated and can support themselves during this difficult time. It has been stressed that it would, ironically, be better for some people if their stock got the disease. People who are not involved in dairying have been unable to move their animals and have had no income since the outbreak of the disease. We need to reconsider what compensation and support can be given to such people.

I ask the Minister yet again to restate that the Government will hold a public inquiry into the disease so that farmers and those involved in the industry can give evidence. People want to know how the epidemic started and spread. There are rumours that helicopters were involved and about foot and mouth living on the beaks of birds and being spread by vermin. Indeed, there was a suspicion that MAFF officials were spreading the disease by not properly disinfecting premises—not deliberately, of course.

I was delighted when the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs visited Gisburn in my constituency, which houses the DEFRA headquarters for the outbreak in my area. She also met several people involved in tourism, and we need to see what more can be done in that regard. Absurdly, the tourism industries are often those that diversified out of farming in the first place because there was no money in it. Now, they have been clobbered because there is no money in tourism that is related to farming, as agriculture has been blighted.

I ask the Minister to re-examine cases where businesses can prove that their income and turnover have gone down by a considerable percentage, and to give them special relief. Conservative Members have suggested one scheme and I am sure that the Government can come up with another. Labour Members have expressed sympathy today, but farmers and the tourism industry cannot bank sympathy. We need something far more tangible, and I hope that we will hear it from him today.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *rose—*

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that I intend to call Mr. Paice at 12.10.

12.5 pm

Mr. Beith: I thank the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) for ensuring that we share the last few minutes of the debate between our two constituencies, both of which have been seriously affected—mine from end to end—by the foot and mouth outbreak. The few areas that have remained clean throughout the outbreak are of course affected by the secondary effects that have spread into the towns as well. In the limited time available to me, I would like to list some of the serious problems, some of which are less obvious to the outside world than they are to those of us in the area.

Many businesses other than farming are adversely affected. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) mentioned agricultural shows. From now until the beginning of October, there is one every Saturday in my constituency—but not this year. All the businesses that exhibit at the shows will lose out badly as a consequence. A sweet seller told me that 95 per cent. of his business was at those shows. He has no source of income this year.

Many other businesses serve and provide for agriculture, and investment and even day-to-day spending are no longer taking place in those businesses, because the income is not there to provide for it. Some of those businesses are medium-sized rather than small, employing quite a few people, and have therefore not been significantly helped by the schemes that the Government have announced so far. People employed in such businesses who have been laid off, such as drivers and mart workers, have had no source of employment throughout this year and have no prospect of it in the near future.

Tourism businesses of many kinds have been affected, but especially those dependent on hill walking, canoeing, pony trekking, and other activities that have been restricted. That has particularly affected the Wooler area in my constituency.

Outdoor clothing sellers and manufacturers have had a terrible year. One famous national firm has taken to selling outdoor clothing in the car park of my local supermarket, because all its normal business outlets at the shows have disappeared. I do not suppose that it can begin to replace the business, because people do not buy clothes for activities that they do not engage in.

There are other, quite surprising victims. Specialist cheese producers have been prevented from using unpasteurised milk by foot and mouth restrictions, even though the scientific basis for this decision seems very doubtful indeed. Their cheese entirely depends on the use of unpasteurised milk.

[Mr. Beith]

Farmers and others who let grass parks have not been able to let them at all this year. That includes a variety of organisations, including in one case a church in my constituency, a substantial part of whose income comes from letting grass parks that have been gifted to it by previous generations.

Some in the farming industry are affected by movement restrictions. People who want to move clean cattle are not able to sell before the animals reach 30 months, because of movement restrictions, and lose financially if they have to go into the over-30-months scheme. The Minister has written letters saying that the Government are trying to find a solution. What is the solution, and will it deal with the substantial losses that the restrictions are causing farming businesses?

Farmers are prevented from moving cattle to the Ayr abattoir for slaughter because of restrictions placed at the Scottish border by the Scottish Executive. I have taken up that matter with the Scottish Executive, who have been helpful in changing and relaxing some restrictions. Cattle from an infected area exactly identical to one just over the border are not able to go to the nearest available slaughterhouse in Ayr, just because they are on the wrong side of the border. There is no scientific or veterinary difference—there is simply a national boundary. Suddenly, cattle from clean areas are not allowed to cross the border. According to the Scottish Executive, this is because there has been an outbreak in North Yorkshire—which is much further away than the abattoir is from my constituency—and they must maintain a restriction at the border. That is an unfair and unreasonable decision. Farmers wanting to move grain and oilseed rape from contiguously culled farms are not able to carry on their business.

In my constituency, there have been disposal problems. About 130,000 carcases have been buried at Widdrington, with a number of errors made in the way in which it was first done. About 3,000 carcases were burned and the ashes now have to be taken away from the sand dunes where the burning took place, because they cannot safely be left. The areas around Widdrington deserve compensation—for communities and even for households.

The Government should start a national scheme to reduce the council tax for those communities. That would provide direct help to those households that suffered from the burning and the fumes—and from anxiety about the health risks that they were exposed to when the massive burials were taking place. Previous Ministers have met my constituents. The Prime Minister met them, as did the Minister's colleague, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who was then a MAFF Minister, and the former Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). They expressed sympathy and said that there would be some kind of Government help for the communities affected by that disposal activity—help in the form of Government investment and so on.

I welcome the new Minister, but people expect a lot from him. They regard all those promises and commitments as binding on successor Ministers. New evidence has strengthened their case for help for the businesses affected and for the communities that suffered so greatly from the disposal operations. We look to him to do everything that he can to help those communities.

12.10 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I welcome the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) in his latest incarnation as Minister for Rural Affairs. He comes with the support not only of his own party, but of the Opposition. I was interested to read recently that, in his time in the Welsh Assembly, he was highly regarded by Welsh farmers. I hope that he manages to extend that regard in England.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on securing the debate and on the way in which he introduced it. He brings a wealth of knowledge, not only because his constituency is seriously affected but because of his experience as a former Minister in the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; he has many years' expertise on agri-policies and the like.

As my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members have said, the sorry saga of foot and mouth continues. My right hon. Friend listed the impact that it has had on his area since the Prime Minister said that we were on the home straight. Tens of thousands of farms—and families—are still affected by the crisis and, as so many hon. Members have said, many other businesses are affected. I shall not repeat the list, but it is generally understood that the disease has implications far beyond farming. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) said, they go beyond rural areas, and are now affecting urban areas.

I join my right hon. Friend in thanking the many people who have been involved, who are widely respected by the real sufferers, including MAFF staff and others. They have treated with sensitivity what has been a dreadful scenario for the farmers concerned.

The first issue of substance is the present fluctuating situation, and I hope that the Minister can explain it to us. We had no new cases on Sunday and four yesterday. It has been like that for some time, and we expect it to continue for some time. People want to know the truth about the outbreaks. Questions are being asked about dangerous contacts that have been slaughtered but not tested because no one knows whether they would be confirmed cases. Indeed, as happened on a farm in Wiltshire last week, some slaughtered animals have not appeared in any statistics. We do not know why they were slaughtered. Can the Minister shed some light on that? As my right hon. Friend said, wherever it happens, myth starts to run riot if people do not know why animals have been slaughtered. People start to make up their own stories about why it might have happened.

Next is the cause of new outbreaks. The Secretary of State said that last week that there was no evidence of walkers having transmitted foot and mouth disease. She is probably right, but there is no evidence—one cannot prove a negative—that they did not do it. As my right hon. Friend said, the same applies to all comments, including those of the Secretary of State, about farmers and farm contractors and machinery spreading the disease. We need to be clear whether there is evidence of

it happening or whether it is just supposition, otherwise we give the impression that farmers are bring blamed for their own problems. As my right hon. Friend said, if some individuals have behaved badly and caused outbreaks, we should jump on them hard, because they have let down the entire industry.

Will the Minister speak about the serological testing that we understand is going on in many parts of the country? To what extent is it taking place? What findings are beginning to emerge as to how endemic the problem is, especially in the sheep flock? I was concerned to read the latest information this morning, which is that Carwyn Jones, the Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs, says that the recent cases of foot and mouth in the Brecon area mean that it has been there for "several weeks". That is worrying, and I would welcome the Minister's comments on it.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) touched on the first point I wanted to make on unrecoverable losses. On 27 February, the Opposition highlighted the problem of cattle going over the 30 months and the immediate devaluation that it created. It is somewhat regrettable that the Government have even now done no more to deal with that than make sympathetic noises. There is an issue about cattle on the over-30-months scheme, which have not generally been moved off farms. Using pre-outbreak statistics, my estimate is that there must be about 200,000 such animals awaiting disposal.

There are other unrecoverable losses. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) said the other day, he wrote to MAFF in April listing our proposals for compensation for unrecoverable losses, and there is still no prospect of any positive response.

I also want to ask the Minister about the disposal and methods of marketing of store stock. We are now beginning to approach the period—August, September and October—when hundreds of thousands of store lambs and store cattle are brought off the hills and traditionally sold in large store-market arrangements, often in a temporary purpose-built fairground, so to speak. They are sold to lowland farmers for onward growing and finishing. What thinking has the Department done on how it can help in the disposal of these hundreds of thousands of animals, especially sheep? They have to be sold, as there is no facility to keep them on, so how can that be accommodated?

I stand to be corrected, but I understand that farmers have an option to restock with what are described as sentinel cattle. If the cattle catch the disease, it proves that it is still around, and if they do not, it means that it is not. Farmers also have the option of not keeping stock on the farm for four months after disinfection. Problems arise—they have done so in Scotland—when two adjoining farms take different routes, and the farmer who opts for the four-month clearance period finds that his neighbour has sent in sentinel cattle. If those cattle go down with foot and mouth, the consequences for the farmer who opted for the alternative are serious. Some rationale must be established.

No one suggests that there be a full inquiry until the disease is resolved. Every effort must be concentrated on that first, but there must be a full inquiry afterwards. The Secretary of State has refused to accept that it would be a public inquiry, as she says that that would have legal connotations and cause delay. That is not necessarily the case. It is critical that an inquiry have the powers to interview everyone involved or with a view on the subject. That includes former Ministers and former civil servants who may have left the civil service by the time that an inquiry takes place. A Select Committee does not have such powers, and nor do internal requirements.

We need to know what took place. If it takes a little longer but we get to the bottom of the matter, that is how it should be handled. A programme tomorrow night on Channel 4 will examine the background to the period, especially March, when the disease was clearly out of control, despite what the then Minister was saying. It was not until the meeting on 21 March that the Government accepted advice to aim for a target of slaughter within 24 hours of diagnosis. The Government then took more than a month to achieve that target.

Many questions have arisen for the Minister to deal with and I will not encroach upon his time, so I conclude by saying that some of this morning's debate has concerned wider issues of the countryside and DEFRA, which are important. I have not spoken about them because of the lack of time, but I hope that the Minister will persuade his colleagues in charge of parliamentary business of the genuine interest in this matter. Perhaps a full-scale parliamentary debate on the future of the countryside, even on the Adjournment, would be appropriate.

12.20 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on securing this debate and on the constructive manner in which he introduced it, which set the tone. That tone was reflected in the final remarks of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), speaking for the Opposition. We need constructive and searching debate on this issue. One of the strengths of Westminster Hall is to introduce that sort of atmosphere to the debate.

I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman started by paying tribute to all those who worked hard—and continue to do so—to eradicate the disease and to respond to many of the problems that have arisen. Last Wednesday, I visited the west midlands, where I saw officials returning from an exhausting and demanding period on the front line dealing with foot and mouth disease, and then immediately beginning the work of trying to give urgently needed advice and help to farmers and businesses. For them, the immediate future is as demanding as the period that they have just gone through. The impact of foot and mouth disease on rural areas has been complex and wide-ranging as well as devastating. All three of those characteristics were reflected in the debate.

I welcome the opportunity for the debate, but the time is too tight to cover the myriad issues raised. I undertake to write to colleagues, especially on specific and detailed points, and copy those remarks to others who have taken part.

[Alun Michael]

The right hon. Gentleman was right to highlight the nature of the business crisis. I am committed, as are the Secretary of State and my other colleagues, to delivering action, not words. He was also right to say that at present, relief schemes are limited to the end of June. We are assessing the needs in the light of pressures and developments, and will comment on that more fully shortly.

In relation to the Government matching charity funds, which was an issue raised by some hon. Members, that reflects the Government and the public showing generosity. The money donated is used with a flexibility that only the voluntary sector can provide in practice. The steps generally taken by the Government to encourage giving, such as the tax relief provided by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other such incentives, also assist in making that money as effective as possible.

On rate relief, applications are not excluded because they are not yet dealt with or they are still coming in. They can be back-dated to April, with relief given until 30 June.

The right hon. Gentleman said something important when he urged people not to jump on everything that goes wrong, or to help with the spreading of unfounded rumours. I share his liking for Harry Potter and agree that myth is fine in its place, but is not helpful to decision making at a time of crisis, or to those trying to decide their way forward in difficult times.

For a Welshman such as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) to ask the Government to get rid of the rumour mill is a triumph of hope over experience, but I agree with the sentiment and I hope that all hon. Members, individuals and organisations concerned will help. Should there be concerns or worries, it would be best if the facts or rumours are provided to us and my colleagues and I will try to look as quickly as possible into any problems that arise. An example is the reference made by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire to a case in Wiltshire. I understand that testing and analysis has taken some time to complete. As soon as we have the facts, I will write to give them to the hon. Gentleman and others.

Similarly, in relation to Brecon, I understand that it is true that disease has been identified on farms at the bottom of the hill. Testing of the sheep that have moved on to the beacons is still being carried out and results will be available shortly. My officials are in contact with officials at the Welsh Assembly because, of course, we are all in this together. I undertake to provide that information when it is known. If we are given concerns, we will do our best to get to the bottom of them rapidly and to provide information. However, I appeal to everybody not to treat rumour as fact and confound the situation.

The hon. Gentleman is right that one cannot prove a negative. However, on both sides of positives and negatives, we must work with the available evidence. We should not be like the individual who throws paper balls in the air and says that that scares off the elephants. When it is pointed out that there are no elephants in the air, it is said that that proves that the practice is effective. I am trying to make the serious point that it is more difficult to prove a negative, but we should not allow impressions to develop if there is no scientific and evidential basis.

In his introduction, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon also referred to prosecutions. He will appreciate that it is difficult to provide evidence when rules have been breached. It is for the local authority to investigate whether there have been breaches of the law or regulations, and we will want prosecutions to occur in those circumstances. I agree that we should not talk up situations or beliefs unless there is evidence. It would be wrong of me to give a blanket assurance to stop prosecutions—he will agree that the matter is not that simple. We should try to be as clear as possible and not allow false impressions to develop.

The hon. Members for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) and for Ribble Valley asked for assurances that there would be an inquiry to get to the bottom of events. We have repeatedly given such an assurance, but it would be irresponsible to bandy about words, such as public inquiry, which have specific meanings. The use of such terminology is not casual and the worst possible outcome would be to end up with a long-delayed and bureaucratic inquiry. We must deal with the emergency, eradicate the disease, bring business back into action and do the things that are currently putting pressures on officials, and then have an inquiry that gets at the facts quickly and clearly, and genuinely gets to the bottom of events. That is the approach of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but we must be clear about the sort of inquiry that will best serve the public interest and the interest of those affected by the disease.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the video about biosecurity. We have tried to give out clear and crisp messages in the light of events surrounding foot and mouth disease—in some cases, messages that we thought were clearly understood by those directly involved. The video was issued because the message needed to be clarified.

The right hon. Gentleman was also right to underline the choices for farmers who have been directly affected and who must decide about compensation—whether to restock or to change direction. That is not for the Government to dictate, and I have talked to officials about how to ensure that that advice is available. A survey in the west midlands that I saw last week highlighted the impact on farmers and other businesses. It also showed that 80 per cent. of the businesses had not sought advice and that 60 per cent. had made no change to the way in which they carried out their business or marketing and had no plans to do so. That shows that we have a big job to do.

I have tried to deal primarily with the issues raised by the right hon. Gentleman. I shall write to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about the matters to which he referred. The issues are complex and 10 minutes is an extremely short time in which to respond to what has been a first-rate debate. I agree that we need plenty of time in which to debate such matters and I hope that Conservative and Labour Members can agree on a mechanism to allow such a debate to take place.

Prostitution

12.30 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I shall explain briefly why I asked for this debate. Like many large cities, Birmingham has areas where street prostitution and kerb crawling occur. Two such areas, one off Pershore road and near Balsall Heath and one off Hagley road in the Rotten park area, are mainly in my constituency. Prostitution takes place in many different establishments, such as so-called massage parlours, saunas, brothels, hotels, and sometimes in private dwellings. It has been with us for centuries and it will never be completely eradicated.

I believe that prostitution is ultimately exploitative and can—and often does— involve the very young and vulnerable. However, for the purposes of today's debate, I shall concentrate on street prostitution in residential areas. Why is it a special problem that deserves the attention of the Chamber? I shall quote a resident who came to one of my advice surgeries. She said:

"I find it totally unacceptable for me to come out of the house in the morning and find used condoms and needles in my front garden. I find it totally unacceptable for my 8-year-old daughter to grow up in an environment where she thinks it is normal for women to stand on the roadside and be picked up by men for money. And I find it totally unacceptable that I can't walk up to the papershop in the morning or evening without being accosted by some punter who wants to know whether I am doing business."

To be frank, I had little to say to my constituent other than that I agreed with her. She was almost kind about the problem in not mentioning a matter that she could have legitimately raised—that street prostitution is associated invariably with drug abuse. When street prostitution takes place in residential areas, there are inevitably drug dealers. Street prostitution is often a means by which people finance their drug habit. Associated with such a public nuisance is increased criminality closely connected with drug abuse.

Such problems are not new. In the past 10 years, the problem has sometimes been dealt with better than at other times in Birmingham. Sometimes we have seen sudden surges of activity. The argument arises about whether prostitution is a matter of displacement—about whether the minute it is dealt with in one part of the city, it moves to another part. Last year, Birmingham city council set up a panel composed of councillors and community representatives, including the police. I pay tribute to its work. The panel considered a variety of factors and it will report to the full council in due course. It considered environmental aspects such as street lighting, road configuration and litter collection. I visited some areas where different street lighting had been installed. It no longer provided the anonymity of darkness and began to reduce the problem. Similarly, the blocking of some roads prevented rat runs for kerb crawlers.

Such changes can, however, cause inconvenience to ambulance drivers, for example, who have difficulty in reaching certain places quickly. The panel considered housing and inter-agency arrangements to deal with information exchange. A big problem is tenancy agreement violations and the use of professional witnesses. However, some progress is being made in that area. The panel also considered children and young people. It agreed to work with Barnardos and the police to identify and target vulnerable young men and women. The Barnardos Girlspace project, which was established in late 1998, has been successful, and I hope that the council can find money to extend it.

An often overlooked aspect is public health. In Birmingham, the Safe project encourages street prostitutes to ask for health advice and distributes free condoms. It is an extremely valuable project in terms of public health. However, the anger and resentment generated among local residents is easy to underestimate. They feel that people handing out free condoms makes their residential area an attraction. However, in relation to Birmingham's HIV infection rate, it seems to have been successful. There is no one answer to the problem. It involves living with the reality of something that we would all rather did not happen and dealing with it safely and acceptably.

The panel considered possible legislative changes. Since entering the House, I have campaigned for kerb crawling to be an arrestable offence. It currently results only in a summons. I am extremely pleased that the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 made the necessary changes to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, a point to which I shall return.

Consideration was given to extending provisions for naming and shaming. The panel took evidence from the West Yorkshire police kerb crawlers rehabilitation programme, which I should like extended. The programme has been disbanded as insufficient referrals were made, but the principle behind it was that a kerb crawler stopped by the police was given a simple option. He could either appear before magistrates and possibly face a fine, or he could attend a day's rehabilitation programme and face up to the consequences of his actions, which included meeting local residents, who would ask, "What do you think it feels like, living here with people like you crawling along kerbs and stopping women?" Those men also had to meet prostitutes who had stopped working on the streets and face up to the unpleasant reality that most street prostitution is not an adult's choice of life style. It is not a question of an adult making the choice, saying, "I wish to earn my living by selling my body." Prostitution usually involves young, vulnerable people caught in dependent relationships or drug abuse, and is sometimes simply a form of child abuse. Initially, the programme seemed successful, but insufficient referrals were made. I hope that we shall consider it more closely. Ultimately, only if we stop kerb crawlers will we stop the associated problems.

Although there are many aspects of the report that I welcome and on which we need to build, one aspect caused me great concern. It seemed to suggest that, should the law on soliciting be changed, a multi-agency panel in Birmingham should actively consider a safety zone, or zone of tolerance, in a non-residential area, where the practice would cause the least alarm, nuisance and distress to residents, although the report was mindful of the physical safety of the female prostitutes who work within it. That sounds tempting as a solution to the problem, but I and agencies such as the police do not believe that it is. Where would the wonderful zone of tolerance be? I challenge any councillor to go to a Birmingham ward meeting, look in ward members' eyes and say, "We have now decided that your back yard is

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

the area in which we will tolerate it." We would have to move to areas with no residential element, which would mean industrial areas of the city. Part of what kerb crawlers look for is anonymity, which residential areas provide. They would therefore not go to those industrial areas; it would be blatantly obvious why they would do so.

In one project in my constituency, the car numbers of men reported kerb crawling were analysed. An amazing number of those cars were registered in women's names. The men did not want to use their company car for kerb crawling, so they used the family car, which was often registered in the wife's name. Anonymity is important to the kerb crawler. Zones of tolerance in industrial areas would not provide that anonymity. To put it in the crudest terms, parallel markets would evolve and street prostitution would increase in residential areas.

There is an argument that the zones would be safer because the police would be able to enforce the law more selectively in relation to drug abuse and pimps. I would not want to accept any system in which the law was enforced selectively in some well-established areas. That would put an unacceptable onus on the police.

The final point that is often cited is that the zones work in Europe, but I do not think that they do. First, they do not create the ideal situation that people like to claim. Secondly, people on the continent have very different attitudes to sex. Zones of tolerance on the continent are usually made in agreement with the prostitutes and the local authority, because the system of pimps does not exist there to the extent that it does here. The zones on the continent operate without the involvement of pimps, but that would not happen here, so there is no analogy between the two situations.

Will the Minister tell us about the Home Office's attitude to zones of tolerance? Are there plans to change the legislation? I was interested to hear that, last year, some £500,000 was made available to cities bidding for projects in relation to street prostitution. The bidding criteria specifically excluded plans for setting up zones of tolerance. In Birmingham, local elections will be held every year for the next three years, and the question will rear its head. It would be useful to have a Government statement on the matter.

What should be done as regards prostitution? I pay tribute to the work by the West Midlands police force in the past few years in tackling a difficult situation. The force has set up microbeat offices, so there is much closer association between individual officers and problem areas. After a slow start, the force has succeeded in proceeding with some 21 antisocial behaviour orders, 15 of them against prostitutes. So far, only one of them has been breached, which resulted in a custodial sentence. The police and local authorities, as well as housing associations, have recently issued eviction orders when drug dealing was taking place alongside suspected prostitution in private dwellings. The police continue to report kerb crawlers for summonses.

I welcome the Criminal Justice and Police Act, which makes kerb crawling an arrestable offence, but I understand that the commencement order has not yet been laid. Will the Minister tell the Chamber when the measure will be introduced and whether it could be brought forward more speedily? West Midlands police tell me that they would welcome it as soon as possible.

One group that is often overlooked is the local residents. In both the areas that I have mentioned, there is an active street watch. In one street watch, which is well established and goes back some seven or eight years, the dedication of the local residents is exemplary. The beginning was difficult: the project arose from the anger of local residents, so they were accused of being vigilantes. However, now they work with the local police. In the past month alone, some 50 letters have been sent to drivers as a result of reports from street watch. Although it is usually not a good idea to single out individuals, I want to put on the record a tribute to the efforts of Raja Amin. Over the years, he has been involved with the local street watch and he has continually given his time and effort, as have many of his helpers.

Finally, I ask the Minister whether he and the Home Office will give special consideration to applications for closed circuit television in locations where property crimes and drug offences are particularly connected with street prostitution, and whether further thought has been given to the idea that I raised some years ago—although for a variety of reasons I could not pursue it—of putting penalty points on driving licences for kerb crawling. It would be a good disincentive if kerb crawlers were to lose their licences when they had accumulated a certain number of penalty points, as is the case with speeding.

As I have said, street prostitution raises a number of moral and ethical issues. However, in this debate, I am particularly concerned with its public nuisance effect. Although it is tempting to say that the introduction of zones of tolerance is a way forward, I do not agree. I think that it is a misguided idea and would not work. Rather, local authorities, police and residents should continue to work together within a legislative framework that allows them to deal with the problem.

12.45 pm

The Minister for Prisons (Mr. Keith Bradley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) on securing this important debate, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to many of the points that she has raised.

The Home Office is keenly aware of the nuisance associated with the activities of prostitutes and kerb crawlers—and, in particular, the considerable distress that is caused to local residents, which my hon. Friend has so graphically described. I want to add my words of tribute to local residents who participate in schemes such as the street watch scheme in Birmingham that she mentioned.

The power of arrest for kerb crawling that is contained in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 will be of great benefit to the police in tackling the crime. It is an important and long-awaited reform, and I am delighted that it is now on the statute book. The measure will be implemented on 1 October 2001. We recognise that providing the police with an extra measure to tackle kerb crawling is a priority. When a new power of arrest is introduced, it is important that police forces are properly informed. It is customary to delay

implementation of such provisions while guidance is produced, and we shall issue a circular to police forces that informs them of the change and gives them time to consider how best to use the power in their regions.

The stigma attached to kerb crawling is a powerful disincentive, and I hope that the threat of being arrested may deter some potential perpetrators from engaging in this destructive activity. For that reason, I do not consider that the introduction of fixed penalties for kerb crawling would be useful. If an offender does not face the prospect of appearing in court and the publicity that may result from that, he might not be dissuaded from such behaviour.

The Act also contains measures to tackle another form of nuisance associated with prostitution—prostitutes' cards in telephone kiosks. From 1 September 2001, it will be an offence to place advertisements relating to prostitution in public telephone kiosks. Such cards are an increasing nuisance in our cities, and they often carry explicit images. I know Birmingham well, as I was born there, and the measure will improve the quality of life for the residents of affected areas, whom my hon. Friend mentioned, and for visitors. At present, the problem is mainly confined to London and Brighton, but the new offence will cover all areas, so it will help to prevent the spread of this nuisance.

The Act also contains an order-making power to extend the measure, by affirmative resolution of the House, to other public structures. The power is available for use should the cards be placed in other structures, such as bus shelters. The nuisance and misery that street prostitution can cause to communities is evident from what we have heard in the debate. It is important that the police use the powers available to them, in consultation with residents, to tackle the problems. The allocation and deployment of officers, and the arrangements for the day-to-day policing of an area, are, obviously, the operational responsibility of the chief officer of the local force. He or she is responsible for investigating any acts of crime and disorder in the area and to enforce the legislation available.

My hon. Friend mentioned the policy development panel in Birmingham, and I reiterate her praise for it. Such multi-agency groups also have a role to play in considering local solutions to the problems faced by local communities.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government do not think that zones of tolerance will assist in dealing with the problems that we are debating. The Association of Chief Police Officers is also opposed to zones of tolerance, as my hon. Friend mentioned. Kerb crawling and soliciting are criminal offences, and we have no plans to relax the law in that regard. It would also be extremely difficult for communities to agree on the location of zones of tolerance. It is important that difficult problems, such as those associated with prostitution, are given careful consideration and not simply shifted from one area to another. More importantly, we are concerned that any such scheme might encourage demand for the services of prostitutes and put children at risk of becoming involved in prostitution. One primary concern is to prevent the exploitation of children through prostitution. Children involved in prostitution are primary victims, and those who buy their sexual services are sex offenders. That position is the subject of the guidance document "Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution", which was published last year and has been widely welcomed by agencies involved in the protection of children.

We are also concerned about the growing trade in trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. By its nature, trafficking is organised and often part of a major international crime. It is important that measures that are taken to deal with the nuisance associated with prostitution do not create an environment in which trafficking can flourish. Trafficking treats people as commodities and targets the vulnerable. We are determined to tackle this crime and have been actively negotiating the final text of a European Union framework decision to combat trafficking in human beings. The report of the sex offences review also recommends a new offence of trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. We are now considering the responses to that recommendation.

Our other priority is to tackle the crime and disorder associated with prostitution. That is why we are funding 11 projects as part of the crime reduction programme to find out what works in combating the problems associated with prostitution. Such multi-agency projects involve measures to reduce the nuisance caused to residents, as well as longer-term strategies to assist those who want to exit prostitution to do so. Each project will be evaluated independently so that we can learn which strategies are effective and should be implemented elsewhere.

I regret that the bid from Birmingham did not meet our selection criteria. One reason was that any interventions would depend on the decisions of the policy development panel, which had not been made at the time of the bidding process. The funding is available only until March next year and the selection panel considered that other bids were better able to deliver measurable outcomes in the short time available.

Whether or not an area has a project selected for funding, we strongly believe that the funding will be of great benefit to all areas that are affected by the crime and disorder associated with prostitution. Projects should provide some ideas about good practice and help to demonstrate what works in tackling prostitution and, equally importantly, what does not work. I look forward to seeing the results and I am sure that Birmingham will be able to learn from the pilot schemes and implement good practice.

The projects focus on the effects of prostitution, but we are also committed to tackling antisocial behaviour in general. The police or the local authority may apply to the magistrates courts for an antisocial behaviour order to prohibit an individual from specific antisocial activities that are likely to cause alarm, harassment or distress. The breach of an order is a criminal offence, and the fact that no more than one in 10 antisocial behaviour orders is breached shows that they are effective in themselves. More than 200 antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in England and Wales since 1 April 1999. They have been used successfully in a variety of cases, including those tackling harassment to residents caused by prostitutes and their clients.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

I understand that antisocial behaviour orders have been used against 15 prostitutes in Birmingham, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend. The breach of one of those orders resulted in a 12-week prison sentence. I look forward to hearing about the effectiveness of other orders when that information becomes available. Birmingham is one of many centres of good practice in using this method of tackling disorder. Those who have still to use antisocial behaviour orders should note other successes and follow their example.

Local authorities and the police are required to get together with other agencies to form crime and disorder partnerships responsible for developing and implementing strategies for reducing crime and disorder in their areas. We have written to crime and disorder partnerships reminding them that they should include antisocial behaviour orders as a separate element of their strategy, and that they should monitor such behaviour in their areas.

I understand that the policy development panel in Birmingham is in favour of a further review of the law on prostitution, as my hon. Friend mentioned. Although street offences were beyond its terms of reference, the report of the sex offences review, "Setting the Boundaries", recommends that there should be a further review of the law on prostitution. That is a recommendation to Ministers and it will be considered in the light of the responses to the consultation exercise. The period of consultation ended in March 2001and we received more than 650 good responses to the document, which we are considering in detail.

"Setting the Boundaries" also recognises the need for effective legislation to deal with those who exploit others for the purpose of prostitution. It recommends separate offences to cover the exploitation of adults and children, to set an unambiguous standard that the sexual exploitation of children is wrong. It is important that we tackle both the problems to which prostitution can give rise—exploitation by pimps and the nuisance that the activity of sex workers and their clients can cause especially in residential areas—as my hon. Friend has clearly recognised. The Government are therefore undertaking a comprehensive review of all the legislation in that area. This debate has enabled us to focus on some of the areas that my hon. Friend rightly identified. However, I am sure that she will recognise that these are complex issues, and that we need to be clear on the broad direction in which to tackle them.

Recent changes in legislation have made a real improvement in the lives of residents in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere in the country. However, she will realise that legislation is only part of the solution. Local initiatives and the involvement of communities in tackling such issues are vital if we are to find good practice. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has highlighted the good work that is going on in Birmingham, the good practices that are being established and the work that has been done by residents involved in the new initiatives. I am sure that, working with the local authority and with my hon. Friend, residents will try to ensure that everyone living in areas blighted by this problem will have a better quality of life. I look forward to seeing some results in the coming months.

Heathrow

12.58 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the opportunity to introduce a short Adjournment debate on the future of Heathrow, a subject that is topical in south and west London and in the counties surrounding Heathrow.

I welcome the new Minister and congratulate him on his job. I do not know whether he likes controversial appointments, but I am sure that he realises that he is at the centre of what could be one of the biggest decisions that the Government will make during the next few years.

To state where I am coming from, I represent one of many constituencies that have a dual interest in this problem. There is a major preoccupation in my constituency with aircraft noise and pollution and air traffic safety concerns, but I also have a significant number of constituents who work at the airport and who value their employment there, and a significant number who use it for business travel. There is clearly a trade off to be made between those different interests. Personally, I emphasise the environmental aspects—that is the centre of gravity of public opinion in my constituency—but I realise that there are two sides to all the arguments about airport development.

I have secured this debate for two reasons. First, I want to register some concern about the way in which the public debate is evolving. I appreciate that the Minister is not responsible for speculation in the press. However, in the past few weeks a debate that has been conducted for several years on the future of terminal 5 has suddenly broadened out into the possibility of a third runway. Again, this is pure speculation, and I would not expect the Minister to be able to give any definitive comment on it, but it is none the less a worrying matter for those of us who have airport-related constituencies.

I hope that the Minister can help us. I should like him to give us some reassurance that the airport-related questions will be looked at in a holistic, coherent way, and that there will be a properly managed national debate. The interconnected issues of terminal 5, a prospective third runway, a new system of regulation using market mechanisms for slot allocation—which even the Chancellor of the Exchequer endorses—and flight capping should be examined together and in a consistent way.

I realise that the Minister is circumscribed because of the dual role of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in setting policy and as a last source of planning appeal. I recognise his difficulty and do not expect too much from him. However, I should like him to give us some indication of the Government's thinking on flight capping and the level of flights. That is not a land use issue; it is quite specifically an aviation policy issue. The Government have direct say in the area. The Government's decision on future acceptable legally binding flight limits sets the framework within which the planning issues will be pursued.

That is where I am coming from, and that is why I have raised this subject for debate. Within that broad context I should like to touch on several specific issues.

I do not want to make a speech on terminal 5—I am sure that there will be a statement soon, probably from the Secretary of State, and we will all have an opportunity to comment on that. The arguments have been endlessly rehearsed.

I want to raise the way in which the process has been managed during the past six months, since when, I understand, the Vandermeer report has been in the hands of the Government. People who seem to know what they are talking about—although I cannot verify it—tell me that large-scale works are being carried out on the site of terminal 5. I am told that an underground road is being constructed, the sewage farm is being cleared and major capital investments are being undertaken. I find it difficult to believe that a public limited company would be risking its shareholders' money on a purely speculative venture, unless it had a pretty clear indication of what was happening.

There are only two explanations for those stories, with which I think all the Members who represent constituencies in our part of London are familiar. One is that they are complete fabrication—it may well be that nothing is happening, and that this is entirely incorrect information. Somebody may be scaremongering and putting around rumours that are untrue. The other explanation, which is equally worrying, is that the British Airports Authority, the developer, is confident that it knows what the outcome of the inquiry will be and is acting on that assumption.

I do not expect the Minister to give an answer today. I simply hope that when the statement is made we will receive assurances that the process has been properly honoured and that there has been no premature action on the planning inquiry report. It is a simple matter of fact as to whether the gun has been jumped or not. That is the only point that I wish to make about terminal 5.

The second issue that I want to talk about is a more important issue of substance: the resurfacing of the debate about a third runway at Heathrow, which for some years has been in abeyance. The British Airports Authority, as the developer of terminal 5, always made it clear that it did not see a third runway as necessary to the logic of its project; indeed, it specifically asked the inquiry to rule it out as unnecessary. In the past few months, we have heard more persistent reports that a third runway is being considered. I shall read the Minister some quotes with which I am sure that he is familiar. The first in the series appeared on 1 April, and we might have thought that it had something to do with April Fools' day. An article in *The Observer* said:

"The Government is 'evaluating' a new full-length runway at Heathrow to increase capacity".

The speculation then died back, but on 25 June, after the election, there were detailed reports in two newspapers that are not normally given to extreme speculation. One was *The Independent*. The key passage stated:

"Secret plans for another runway at Heathrow are expected to be approved by the Government...Airlines have submitted the plan for an extra runway...as their main solution to increasing demand for air travel...Ministers are expected to favour the Heathrow project and announce their approval next year, but wanted the storm over Terminal 5 to die down first."

On the same day, a different reporter in a different newspaper stated:

"Ministers are seriously considering building a third runway at Heathrow".

So, someone is talking out of turn.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Has it crossed the hon. Gentleman's mind that the source of those stories might be the anti-T5 brigade, which is desperately trying to wreck the future of my constituency by opposing T5 and putting pressure on the Government to do something other than what I hope they will do?

Dr. Cable: There are all sorts of possible sources for the reports, and one is indeed the protest movement. Another is the company that would have an interest in the matter, and still another is the Department, although I hope that that is not the case. Clearly, however, there is a lot of what seems to be informed speculation that the process is under consideration.

I am well aware that, as I am sure the Minister will point out, the south-east regional airport study by the Department is considering a variety of runway options. Hitherto, we had assumed that that would preclude a third runway at Heathrow, but it might well now include one. I shall simply say in passing why many residents consider that to be a worrying development. First, it will be wholly contrary to people's assumptions and to the assurances that we have been given in the past few years, particularly by BAA. Furthermore, I am concerned that it comes at the same time as the Government's announcement of a new approach to planning. We have yet to see the details of the legislation, but the Government have made it clear that they want a much more truncated and permissive approach to large planning projects. Indeed, one of the Minister's colleagues has responsibility for introducing new powers to ensure that that happens. Under such new powers, it would be much easier for a Government who were so minded to introduce a runway project without the planning difficulties that have occurred in the past.

Clearly, I cannot expect the Minister to say yes or no in response to questions about what is happening, but I wanted to bring up the concern, wherever it comes from, about the possibility that Heathrow expansion is going ahead far faster and on a far bigger scale than we had hitherto thought likely.

That leads me to the third issue, on which I hope that the Minister will be able to comment, which is flight capping—the level of flights that should be permitted into Heathrow. That is the key factor, which affects the environment and the balance between it and economic development. As I am sure that the Minister knows, BAA assumed, in the various projections made for future demand for flights, that the level of flights into and out of Heathrow around 2015 would be about 453,000 a year. On another set of assumptions, I think that the final figure was 470,000. The striking fact is that that level has already been reached. That raises questions about how committed the Government are to managing demand. Do they believe that it is the task of the Government to provide infrastructure to meet whatever level of demand exists? Are they willing to manage it and insist that it be managed? At what approximate level of flights should the cap apply?

[Dr. Cable]

Should the cap be legally binding? How should any legal bind apply in practice, considering that it has not been effective in the past?

Although I cannot expect the Minister to comment on the planning inquiry or prospective planning inquiries about a runway, I hope that he will suggest how he sees this key area of aviation policy, for which he is responsible. I also hope that he will suggest something on one dimension of the broad issue of flight capping. He will know that protesters from the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise have taken the issue of night flights to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The Government have been asked to provide evidence to that inquiry to demonstrate whether a national interest justifies the intrusion into family life arising from early morning and late night flights, which is considerable if one is under the flight path. I hope that the Minister will suggest how that evidence will be provided. Will it be published, if so, when, and what form will it take? The night flights issue and the capping of night flights have disproportionate importance in terms of the wider debate.

I want to touch on how Government thinking is evolving on regulation of airports, as it applies to Heathrow. There is some common ground between the objectors to and the supporters of further development at Heathrow, which is that one cannot operate indefinitely on the basis of predict and provide. There must be some management of demand. Hitherto, the market for landing at Heathrow has been highly distorted. The landing charges are low by comparison with other major international airports and landing slots are provided free of charge because there is no optioning of slots.

I convened a debate on the subject almost exactly a year ago, which was answered by the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill). He gave a helpful and forward-looking approach, which suggested that the Government had an open mind on revisiting the regulatory problems and reopening the issue—the rules were set in the mid-1980s—about how the airport should be regulated. It suggested that the Government were willing to consider adapting landing charges and licensing slots. The Chancellor has taken that fully on board. In his Mansion House speech, referring to the economic reform agenda, he included:

"air liberalisation, with reforms to the allocation of take-off and landing slots that introduce market mechanisms to allocate scarce capacity."

The Chancellor, who is clearly a very big fish in the Government, sees the need for reform on the issue.

I mention the matter not simply because it makes for an interesting academic debate, but because if the system of charging is radically changed—if airlines have to pay substantially more to land at Heathrow, which is the implication of the reform—the demand will be considerably less. I want some suggestion from the Minister as to how the new approach to regulation will affect expectations about demand for Heathrow flights. How will the two elements of the exercise be knitted together coherently?

I shall bring my remarks to a close to give the Minister plenty of time to reply and to give those hon. Members who represent other constituencies near Heathrow to intervene if they wish. I reiterate the two central points. First, I am concerned about how the debate on people's fears and anxieties about the third runway has evolved. Secondly, I ask the Minister to reassure us on the dangers of over-development and to say what is the Government's view of flight capping.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing this important debate. This is my first aviation debate since taking up my post as Minister, although plenty of debates seem to arise on other transport matters, and I am sure that it will not be the last.

It is important that the Government respond to such debates as fully as possible; I realise that hon. Members are raising important matters on behalf of their constituents. I appreciate, too, that the matters raised today are of considerable importance to the hon. Gentleman and to those whom he represents. I know that he has been assiduous, as other hon. Members here today have been, on the matters raised today, and I assure hon. Members that they are being considered most carefully. However, just as there is an imperative on me to answer as many questions as I can, the hon. Gentleman will know from answers to previous questions that, to a large extent, Ministers are restricted in what they can say about the enlargement of and the other major proposed changes to the airport. I know that the hon. Gentleman is thoughtful, and that he appreciates the limits within which I speak today. Notwithstanding that, I shall attempt to answer many of his questions. I shall put them in a more general framework, and he may be able to draw out some of the answers to the specific questions that he was right to ask.

The hon. Gentleman asked about recent press speculation on Heathrow, but it is not for me to speculate on that speculation. However, I assure him that the underground road that is being constructed stands entirely remote from any other decisions that may be made at Heathrow. I can also tell him that the Perry Oak sludge works is being decommissioned and will be replaced. Again, that is not relevant to other issues raised today.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, I state clearly that I will not be answering questions on any issues that concern the planning application or the inquiry into the fifth terminal at Heathrow. To do so could prejudice the Secretary of State's consideration of the inspector's report, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates the reasons for that. I also recognise, as did the hon. Gentleman, the strategic and national importance of Heathrow and the contribution that it makes to the local and the national economy. Its contribution to the United Kingdom should not be underestimated.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): We all understand that the Minister is restricted in the comments that he can make on terminal 5, but I wish to

raise a matter that he may wish to pass back to the Department and perhaps to the Leader of the House. The statement on terminal 5 should be made on the Floor of the House and it should be given adequate time for debate. It should not be part of a grubby process one day before a recess. All Members should have the opportunity to address the long-term implications of the new terminal.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I am sure that what he says will be carefully noted.

The trade handled at Heathrow makes it Britain's largest port and it is a major employer in the area. Indeed, 68,000 people are directly employed there, a proportion of whom live in the constituency of the hon. Member for Twickenham. It is estimated that as many as 250,000 jobs nationwide are related to the airport. It is recognised as a key asset in the promotion of London as a world city. I also recognise, as the hon. Gentleman said, that Heathrow has a substantial impact, on the environment and on a great many of the people who live in its immediate vicinity. Far more people suffer from aircraft noise caused by Heathrow than by any other airport in the United Kingdom.

There has, however, been a substantial improvement in the noise climate around the airport during the past 20 years. I restate our policy: the Government will continue to do everything practical further to improve the noise climate. We are well aware that the role of Heathrow in the future provision of air travel in the UK is central to our aviation and airport policies. We said in the Labour party manifesto that our plans for aviation and airports in the next 30 years would be produced next year; and so they will.

Heathrow handles more international passengers than any other airport in the world and, in 1999, the overall number of passengers made it the fourth busiest, trailing only behind Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles. However, other European airports are catching up.

The previous national airports policy statement was published in 1985, so a new one is long overdue. The aviation world has changed dramatically since 1985; UK airports now handle more than double the number of passengers. Our forecasts show that demand for air travel in the UK might almost double during the next 15 years from approximately 170 million a year to about 340 million passengers by 2015.

The Government are aware that some of our major airports, particularly in the south-east, are already working close to their capacity. The demand for air travel for business and for leisure is rising inexorably—and from both UK residents and foreign visitors. We need urgently to decide how to respond to the problem, and that is what we shall do.

Our drive to review national airports policies was established in the 1998 "New Deal for Transport" White Paper, which announced our intention to prepare a UK airports policy that would lay down the framework for the sustainable development of UK airports for the next 30 years. Those policies will be brought together in a new air transport White Paper, which will assess the social and—most importantly—the environmental and economic impacts of airports and of aviation.

Mr. Wilshire: I am concerned about the delay suggested by the Minister. I am not being party political; successive Governments have dithered. The Minister referred to what is happening elsewhere in Europe and the fact that other airports are catching up. Does he accept that it is crucial that Heathrow remain Europe's No.1 hub? If it does not, the impact on the jobs in my constituency will be catastrophic.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We are mindful of the need to carry out these policies in due time. However, many other matters, such as those raised by the hon. Member for Twickenham, have to be balanced in our discussions.

The Government are aware of the uncertainty that surrounds airport development and we are conscious of the need to put policies in place as early as possible. However, before we prepare the White Paper we need to consider carefully the options for the development of airports, to appraise thoroughly their impact, and to consult all those who have an interest. I hope that that answers some of the hon. Gentleman's points.

There are three main building blocks to the formation of the new White Paper. First, in December 2000 we published the "Future of Aviation" consultation document, which is concerned with national policies and does not deal with specific airports. The deadline for responses passed in April, and we received more than 500 responses. That is encouraging and shows the level of interest in aviation in the UK. There are many detailed and constructive comments and we shall make a summary available.

The other two building blocks are consultation on options for the development of regional airports and consultation on options for south-east airports. That is probably of interest to the hon. Member for Twickenham and is related to his arguments today. We plan to issue those documents around the turn of the year. The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study is examining a wide range of options at existing airports and new sites in the south-east. Options for the future development of Heathrow are clearly key considerations in this work.

I must stress and make it patently clear that, contrary to recent press speculation, Ministers have not seen and do not know what options are being considered in the SERAS study. Consultants carrying out the work on the Government's behalf have identified a large number of options at all the south-east airports, and I understand that the number of options runs into three figures.

Some of the options being evaluated would provide additional terminal capacity to make the maximum use of existing runways; other options would provide additional terminal and runway capacity. Obviously, it would be impractical to carry out detailed appraisal of all the options. However, I understand that officials will shortly ask Ministers to decide on a much shorter list of options, which will go forward for full and detailed appraisal in the next stage of the study.

It has sometimes been suggested that we should release details of the options that have been eliminated and those that have been taken forward. We do not

[Mr. Jamieson]

agree with that approach. We understand that it might reduce the anxiety of some people. However, even when we have narrowed down the number of options, there will still be a substantial number in the frame, and to publish them would do far more harm than good. It would be premature, would spread unnecessary blight and anxiety and would not enable meaningful public consultation. I hope the hon. Gentleman will therefore understand my lack of references in this debate to Heathrow.

Following Ministers' decisions, the next stage of the SERAS study will involve more detailed analysis of options. Once this work has been undertaken, we will then decide on a shortlist of options for public consultation. I should make it clear that the study does not include projects for which planning applications have been made or are imminent, as we do not want to be studying those at the same time as they are being considered in the planning system. That would lead to duplication and delay.

Although we are keen to retain and promote the contribution airports make to the economy—nationally, regionally and locally—we also acknowledge that there are strong environmental and social concerns associated with airport development, both at Heathrow and at other airports. That is why in the SERAS study we have devised a full and rigorous appraisal framework, which will be a crucial tool to assist Ministers to reach the right decisions on where and how airports are allowed to develop.

The appraisal framework seeks to be comprehensive and evaluate all issues relevant to expanding existing airports and creating new airports. It also seeks to ensure that proposals brought forward to meet or restrain demand can be compared on a consistent basis. The issues covered are grouped under four main headings— economic effects, environmental impacts, accessibility and integration.

Indicators for each of the issues will be set out in appraisal summary tables. They will highlight the trade-offs between the various options. In addition to the south-east airports study, work is continuing on options for our regional airports. As I have said, we aim to consult on those around the turn of the year.

Airports affect all our lives and there are many conflicting views about what action the Government should take towards airport development and some of those have been reflected in the contributions to today's debate. I am sure that, when our policies emerge, we will not please everyone. However, in establishing our policies we will consult widely with all organisations and individuals who have an interest in airport issues and we will consider their views carefully.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the issues again and for the way in which he raised them. If he feels that I have not done justice to some matters in the short time that I have had, and if he brings them to my attention, I shall happily ask my Department to write to him.

Employee Pension Schemes

1.29 pm

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an important matter on behalf of many of my constituents. I congratulate the Minister on her appointment, as I have not had a chance to do so before. I raised the closure of the Ravenhead Glass plant in an earlier Adjournment debate, but I should like to spend some time explaining the background to the problem and how it affects my constituents.

Ravenhead Glass went into administration in December after a long history of producing first-class tableware in St. Helens, where the factory had been for more than 150 years. In its heyday, it employed more than 5,000 people, but when it closed in December, it had fewer than 350 employees. Nevertheless, that is a significant number of jobs in my constituency.

Those 350 Ravenhead employees are not numbers but people, such as Dave Rotherham, a constituent of mine who worked at the plant for 30 years. His father had previously worked in the plant for 50 years. Dave Rotherham has lost his job and now found that he has a 20 per cent. shortfall in his pension. In a matter of months, his life has been turned upside down.

Ravenhead Glass was not a two-bit operation. It was owned by Durabor, which was owned by the Belgian regional government. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) and I have already contacted the Department of Trade and Industry and the Belgian Government about the closure and how the pension scheme was managed, and we await a DTI report on the issue. We have also met Belgian Ministers, who have promised to consider a claim for compensation for the 20 per cent. shortfall in pensions. We will continue to put pressure on the DTI and the Belgian regional government to see how we can help our constituents.

Most of the Ravenhead workers had worked there for 25 to 30 years and intended to retire from the company in the next 10 years. They would have hoped for gold watches and presentations after 25 years' service, good pensions and the opportunity to finish their working lives with good pay and working conditions. That was not to be the case, so they want answers to some questions. They want to know why the company was placed into receivership and what happened to their pension scheme. Why did the company take the decision to have a contributions holiday, and why was it allowed to do so? How was the company pension scheme managed?

I want to thank the DTI Ministers for the help and assistance that they have given so far. However, after a series of disasters in the pension world, I am concerned that things still do not seem to be right. I understand that the Government have initiated Paul Myners' report, which is about changing the legislation on protection for employment pension schemes. I welcome that review. It important that the pensions of loyal workers who have worked in companies for 25 to 30 years be protected. The Government should give them statutory protection.

British workers need better protection in employment and pensions, and I hope that the Government will take the opportunity of that review to consider the

Ravenhead scheme and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) also wants to raise issues that affect some of his constituents. I hope that we will take the opportunity to change the system for the better. The Maxwell scandal and the situation at Ravenhead Glass are merely two examples of what can go wrong.

The review seems to have been dominated by the Treasury and the pension industry, and I understand the need for both to take a view on the issues. However, they may have been driven by the need to improve economic performance and to maximise long-term support for the markets. While those two matters are important, the No. 1 priority of any review should be to ensure that employees' pensions are protected in the future.

I should like the Minister to answer a number of questions that my constituents have raised during the course of their problems with Ravenhead. I am aware that some of the questions are technical and complex and if the Minister does not feel that they can be answered today, I shall be happy for her to write to me later to clarify her and the Government's view.

Do the Government believe, as the Trades Union Congress does, that defined benefit schemes offer the best deal for working people? If so, what action will they take within the review to encourage employees to move along that road? I believe that those schemes offer the best protection and value for money to employees. I should like the Government to widen the scope of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority so that pension protection plans can be assessed. That would allow pension plans to be examined and ensure that protection plans that are put forward by the pension schemes give adequate protection to employees.

Will the Government consider setting up a pension protection fund, so that the liabilities from pension schemes that are discontinued would pass to a mutual company that would protect the funds of affected pensioners? There is an argument for ensuring that all pension schemes have a mutual insurance scheme, so that they all protect the liabilities of each other and ensure that employees are also protected.

Is the Minister considering examining whether pension schemes should be allowed to take contribution holidays? Employers should not be allowed to take a contribution holiday until a buffer zone has been built into the pension scheme and there are enough resources in the scheme to cover any deficit that might occur between valuations.

Is it right that company trustees should play a role in pension schemes? I can see no reason why companies should have representatives as trustees. Once the agreement has been made on a pension scheme, the company should be removed from the trustees' reviews. I should also like annual appraisals of pension schemes. Some pension schemes appraise annually, but many leave it for three or four years. The movement of the markets—as in my case—can make such a difference to a pension scheme that it may move from a surplus to a deficit.

I am aware that the Labour Government have done a great deal in recent years to strengthen pension and employee protection. However, the cases of Ravenhead and others, demonstrate that there is a lot more to do.

1.38 pm

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) for allowing me to encroach on some of his time and make complementary points to his, which have been raised by my constituents and cause them concern. I also thank the Minister for agreeing to allow me to make the points to her at immensely short notice and I fulsomely congratulate her on her well-deserved appointment. I also thank you, Mr. Benton, for allowing me to catch your eye.

My hon. Friend made his points particularly, although not exclusively, in the context of Ravenhead Glass. It may be thought from the presence of hon. Members today that this is exclusively a Merseyside issue, but it goes wider than that. My constituents have expressed many concerns about employee pension schemes and occupational schemes. They do not believe that the balance of interest between the employee and the fund is right.

There have been concerns about the absence, as my constituents see it, of sufficient constraints on the way in which trustees may act. Pension schemes may, for example, contain discretionary provisions that are exercised exclusively by the trustees. Moreover, those of my constituents who have corresponded with me—of which there are many—consider that the representation of pensioners on trustee boards can be inadequate. They do not believe that, because employers provide occupational pension schemes, it is up to them alone to decide the nature of the scheme and its benefits. They do not consider that that in itself is enough to secure the common good.

My constituents are not content that members are not always obliged to consent when their accrued pension rights are transferred when, for example, employers are taken over, merge or restructure their pension provision. There are particular concerns, for example, that occupational schemes are not required to provide pension benefits before the normal retirement age in cases of ill health. When such provision does exist, it is discretionary and in the hands of the trustees, and there is no reason to provide reasons for refusal.

There are also worries about how pension funds handle grievances and the fact that the first stage of a complaint is handled entirely unilaterally by one of the parties to the scheme. My constituents are concerned about the way in which pension schemes can appear to be administered secretively. They do not believe that it is equitable that schemes seem to be administered as though the funds have been contributed by one party alone. As in the case of Ravenhead Glass, to which my hon. Friend referred, pensioners contribute much over many years and must find a life after the demise of the company. In some cases, the pension scheme has disappeared. They also worry about the management of funds that can cost the pensioner money. There are well-publicised examples, but a constituent of mine, who is a clergy pensioner, believes that he has also suffered in that regard. Another constituent believes that his union pension fund was transferred because it was regarded as voluntary, so his rights were not protected.

[Mr. Ben Chapman]

There are a range of other issues, but I shall not bore the Chamber with all of them. However, one fund removed the corporate trustee without consultation apparently simply to streamline expense and reduce administration, and one of my constituents feels, rightly or wrongly, that such action removed some of his protection. Overall, my constituents believe that trustees should not act without prior notice to members and that there is insufficient consultation and a lack of independent scrutiny. There is a limit to what the Government can do. It may be a notion of big government, but we must look at the provision of occupational pension schemes to see what, if any, role the Government can have. The worries that have been expressed to me seem to be sufficiently widespread to require some consideration. I hope that that will happen. I merely wanted to raise certain points. I do not seek an answer to them from the Minister today, but I hope that, in the fullness of time, such matters can be examined.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): It is a pleasure to be replying to my first Westminster Hall debate with you in the Chair, Mr. Benton, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) on initiating the debate. As a fellow Merseyside Member of Parliament, I am aware of the matter that he has raised. He has raised it before in the House, and I have particular sympathy with those of his constituents who have found themselves in the position that they do as a result of the insolvency of Ravenhead Glass. St. Helens has long been identified with glassmaking and it was a blow to the town's morale for such a closure to occur.

The firm itself is of long standing and has been in existence for more than 150 years, as my hon. Friend reminded us. Many of those affected are long-standing employees of more than 30 years who will suffer the double blow of not only losing their jobs and being reduced to statutory redundancy pay, but finding a hole in the pensions in a defined benefits scheme that they had every right to expect would provide them with a well known, fixed amount when they retired. It is a double blow for them and for the town, and I understand why my hon. Friend has brought the matter to the attention of the House.

If time allows, I shall respond to some of my hon. Friend's points. I am grateful to him for giving me some notice of them. Doing so always helps me give hon. Members clearer answers. I shall respond to his points in the context of the more general law. Pensions law is tremendously complex, and issues that might seem to hon. Members, outsiders and members of pension schemes to be relatively straightforward and simple can be devilishly complex because of the law and how the schemes work. I shall explain the background before dealing with my hon. Friend's points.

The Government want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the nation's rising prosperity. We are determined to protect the long-term security of pensioners and other pension scheme members in occupational pension schemes. We all know that that security will be guaranteed not simply by the basic state pension but in large part by occupational schemes and funded arrangements. It is therefore in the interests of us all to ensure that they are as secure as possible.

We want to ensure that schemes are properly run, that contributions are properly paid in a timely fashion and that schemes are adequately funded. We believe that schemes should have investment policies that are appropriate to the circumstances of the employer providing them and that if something goes wrong measures should be in place to protect members.

Private pensions should be attractive to members and scheme providers. We must bear in mind that employers do not have to provide pension schemes but do so voluntarily. We need to ensure that as many of them as possible do so. We are taking steps to simplify the private pensions system while safeguarding the security of scheme members.

The vast majority of United Kingdom pension schemes are set up under trust law, which is at the heart of pension law. It is often said that trustees are secretive. Trustees have an exacting legal obligation to beneficiaries to ensure that they behave properly, and we must consider how to deal with trustees and pension schemes in the light of trust law. The duty to run a pension scheme lies with the trustees rather than the employer. Although employers may have members who are trustees, they have the same obligations to beneficiaries regardless of their status. They must ensure that the rules of the pension scheme are followed and comply with the law. They hold the scheme's financial assets for the benefit of members and have a fundamental duty to act prudently, conscientiously and honestly.

The framework of trust law was reinforced by the Pensions Act 1995, which introduced measures to protect members of pension schemes. It placed extra duties on trustees and established the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority. As my hon. Friend said, we have been actively monitoring and reviewing the provisions of the Pensions Act to build on and improve existing measures.

OPRA is the independent pensions regulator. It investigates complaints about occupational pension schemes not complying with the 1995 Act. It has powers to impose financial penalties, bring criminal prosecutions, disqualify trustees if they do not fulfil their obligations, and refer cases to the police or the special fraud office. However, OPRA's role has limitations. It can investigate only matters relating to the Pensions Act 1995. Many schemes were established under previous legislation.

Professionals such as actuaries have a duty to the scheme. Anybody can report a pension scheme to OPRA if they think that it is not being run properly, but the scheme's auditor and actuary have a statutory duty to blow the whistle when they have reasonable cause to believe that the Pensions Act 1995 is not being complied with. Therefore, there are some safeguards.

The Pensions Act 1995 also introduced legislation to give scheme members the opportunity to have member-nominated trustees. Members' trustees help to give trustee boards a better balance of outlooks and experience; they also help to give members confidence,

and they encourage schemes to look carefully at how they are run. While I was listening to the points that were raised by both of my hon. Friends, I was struck by the fact that many of them arise out of suspicion that the trustees are acting secretively and are not acting for the benefit of members, and I think that getting more member-nominated trustees would go a long way towards reassuring members of schemes that are well run that they are well run, and towards ensuring that schemes that are beginning to be badly run, or are beginning to fall short of the law or their obligations, can be pulled up more quickly. Therefore, member-nominated trustees are a good way forward with regard to trying to reassure members of occupational schemes.

The presence of member trustees would help avoid some of the difficulties that have been raised and which are faced by some well publicised schemes that have gone wrong. That is why the Government want every scheme to have member-nominated trustees on the trust board. We will introduce measures to ensure that it is compulsory for schemes to appoint member-nominated trustees, and to simplify the procedure under which that is done. We have already taken the power in primary legislation—in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000—and we will consult regarding a package of regulations before the end of the summer, so that we can start to introduce the new requirements before the end of the year. The intention is to ensure that a third of all trustees are member nominated. That would be a step forward.

One of the central features of the Pensions Act 1995 was the introduction of the minimum funding requirement. It was designed to promote security for scheme members. It requires defined benefit schemes to hold the minimum level of assets to meet their liabilities. The aim of the minimum funding requirement is to ensure that a scheme that is funded to at least the level of that requirement will, in the event of the employer becoming insolvent, be able to provide pensions. It is also intended to provide younger members with a fair value of their accrued rights, which they can then transfer to another occupational pension scheme, or to a personal pension.

The minimum funding requirement came into effect in April 1997. If a scheme is underfunded on a minimum funding requirement basis—I understand that that was the case with regard to the Ravenhead pension plan—it must make good any underfunding within time scales laid down in regulations.

The matter of contributions was also raised by my hon. Friend, and they should be paid promptly and at the correct level. Under the minimum funding requirement rules, there must be a schedule of contributions, so that the difficulties of trying to find out if and when contributions were paid never have to be faced. Schedules show the contributions that must be paid by the employee and the employer, and the dates by which they must be paid. They will also include any additional contributions required to meet any shortfall in funding. Schedules must also be certified by actuaries, who should be content that they are sufficient to maintain the funding level of the schemes, or to restore them to the recommended levels, if they have fallen below that level. Trustees monitor the payment of contributions on the scheme's payment schedule and must tell OPRA and scheme members when contributions have been paid late, or not at all.

With regard to the Ravenhead Glass case, I understand that pension contributions were paid on time until two months before the company's insolvency. I also understand that that has been reported to OPRA, and that an independent trustee has made a claim for the outstanding contributions to the DTI's redundancy payment fund. When an employer becomes insolvent, the legislation requires that an independent trustee be appointed, and I understand that that has happened. The role of the independent trustee is to ensure that the interests of the members are represented in insolvency proceedings, and to make any necessary decisions about winding up the scheme. In this case, I understand that Berry, Birch and Noble Trustees Ltd. is the independent trustee that has been appointed by the administrators to deal with the issues that have arisen out of the case in my hon. Friend's constituency.

It is right that measures should be in place to protect the interests of members of a scheme whose funding has gone wrong. If a scheme is not fully funded on a minimum funding requirement basis when it winds up—which has happened in this case—the outstanding amount becomes a debt on the employer, and the independent trustee is responsible for pursuing recovery. The debts amount to the sum required to bring the scheme back to full funding on the minimum funding requirement basis. That is all very well if the employer is solvent, but it does not help if the employer is insolvent, as in the case under discussion. The provisions will not guarantee that the money owing to the scheme can be recovered. They are directed a fairly long way down the list of creditors as are the other obligations that the firm may have had.

The redundancy payments scheme was set up to protect members who were victims of their employer's insolvency, as happened in the Ravenhead case. When an insolvent employer has failed to pay contributions into the scheme, the scheme may be able to recover some of the missing contributions from the national insurance fund via the scheme. The contributions that may be recoverable are the employer's contributions as well as employee contributions that the employer has deducted from wages, but not paid over to the scheme. A claim has been submitted to the Department of Trade and Industry's redundancy payment fund for the contributions that were outstanding to the Ravenhead company pension trustees and I see no reason why they should not be fully recoverable.

Scheme members should be protected as far as possible if there is fraud or dishonesty, but it is not possible to say at this stage whether any such actions were involved in the case under discussion. Provisions for financial compensation were introduced under the Pensions Act 1995 and those provisions are administered by the Pensions Compensation Board. The board pays compensation to an occupational pension scheme if it has suffered a reduction in its assets because of dishonesty and if the sponsoring employer were insolvent. We introduced improvements to the pensions compensation scheme under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 and they came into effect in April. Schemes will now be able to claim compensation if their assets fall below a new protection level.

[Maria Eagle]

I understand that the trustees of the Ravenhead pension scheme decided to trigger the winding up of the scheme with effect from the end of April this year. I am aware that several concerns have been expressed about the length of time that it can take to finalise arrangements when a scheme winds up. That is often not a matter of bureaucracy, but of trying to trace some members of the scheme with deferred benefits. It is not always as easy as it looks to find out where everyone is and to make sure that they receive the fair value of their contributions.

We shall shortly be consulting on a package of measures aimed at speeding up the winding up of occupational pension schemes. OPRA will have a more proactive role in facilitating the winding up of schemes and supporting the trustees. The new rules will make those involved in the day-to-day administration of the scheme more accountable for unreasonable delays, but, as I said, delays are not always unreasonable. When the provisions become law and have had time to bed in, members of the scheme in wind-up should receive their benefit entitlements more quickly.

We are constantly reviewing the pensions regulatory framework and on 3 March this year we published the paper entitled "Security for Occupational Pensions". My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) may have read it. If he has not, I suggest that he does and that he takes part in furthering the Government's work in that regard.

I cannot deal with all the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North, so I shall write to him about them, and that applies to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South, too. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North asked if the Government would consider giving powers to OPRA to assess pension plans. We are placing a statutory duty on the scheme actuary directly to the scheme members. Currently, he has an obligation to the trustees, but it is important that he also sees his obligation to the members. That may help him in clarifying and enhancing his whistleblowing role—a statutory role if something goes wrong.

My hon. Friend also asked if I would consider setting up a pension protection fund that could take on the liabilities of discontinued pension schemes. When we consulted on such an issue, it received little support although my hon. Friend was right in that many of those who responded to the consultation were from the industry. There is nothing to stop anyone else answering the consultation and letting us know their views. The difficulty with such an approach is that often good occupational pension schemes do not become insolvent, but provide good benefits to their members. We must bear in mind the difficulty of good schemes having to pay up for bad schemes. There is a matter of balance to be considered, although I understand my hon. Friend's concern in that regard.

My hon. Friend asked whether I would consider requiring all pension schemes to take out a form of mutual insurance that was financed by a levy. The same balance of views must also be considered. If we have to put costs on the good schemes to support the bad schemes, we must take fully on board the implications for pension levels under the good schemes before saying that such action will be taken.

My hon. Friend asked me for an assurance that no pension scheme would be allowed to take a contribution holiday until there was a buffer zone. The current situation is that contribution holidays can be taken only if the scheme has a statutory surplus. I am sure that he will understand that transparency and member-nominated trustees may help to provide information to the members about contributions payments. I am conscious that I am running out of time. I shall, of course, write to my hon. Friend about the other matters that he raised.

It being Two o'clock, The motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 4 July 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Dementia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I am pleased to have the opportunity to initiate a debate on the important subject of care services for people with dementia.

I have some personal experience of the subject, because I have shadowed three carers for the past three years, two of whom were caring for people with dementia. I want hon. Members to imagine what it is like to work an 18 and a half hour day every day with no holiday for five years. One of my constituents, Joyce Evans, has led such a life for the past five years. I met her during last year's national carers week.

I spent a morning with Joyce and her husband, shadowing her and seeing what the role of a carer is all about. To be honest, one cannot do that role justice in a morning, just sitting, talking and listening. Albert has Alzheimer's disease. It has robbed him of his memory and has robbed Joyce of a lifelong companion. They have been married for 41 years. It was a humbling experience to talk to Joyce and learn about her life. She has a wicked sense of humour that seems to keep her going. However, a darker side comes through in her letters, which reveal the struggle of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease. Joyce has to plumb the deepest reserves to keep going. She said that she had been given a lot of support since the diagnosis of her husband's disease. They had received help with applying for benefits, such as attendance allowance. Social services had helped arrange for Albert to attend the Downsday day centre four days a week, and Joyce's doctor had been very supportive, once visiting at 2 am.

The Downsday day centre is crucial for Joyce, giving her space. Since Albert has stopped shaving himself, helpers at the centre do that for him and also give him a bath. Joyce has a strong and supportive family who live locally and a network of friends with whom she can have lunch. Albert is 78. He worked as a gas fitter. When the Shanklin estate in my constituency was built some time ago, Albert was one of the team that did the fitting work. On the day that I visited Albert, he was in a good mood. Joyce told me that, when he is in a bad mood, he tells people to bugger off. Sometimes he may go further than that.

When I arrived at the house, it was locked up like Fort Knox. Joyce explained that Albert was wont to go roaming. The only way to stop him was to ensure that the whole house was securely locked. Her son-in-law came to the rescue and fitted the locks. Extra locks might stop Albert getting out, but they can stop Joyce getting in. On one occasion, Albert locked her in the back garden for half an hour, and there was no way out of the garden. It sounds funny now looking back, but it was not funny at the time.

Joyce is eight and a half years younger than Albert, and she needs to be to cope. Five years of solid care have taken their toll. Joyce is physically and emotionally drained. Unless one is a carer, one cannot put oneself in a carer's place and understand the mixture of emotions that are stirred up by caring day in and day out. It struck me that a combination of formal and informal help had made it just possible for Joyce to carry on caring for five years.

Should society expect Joyce to carry on caring? That is fine if that is what she wants to do. However, it is wrong if it is out of a sense of obligation, and because the alternative is degrading and unacceptable. Surveys show that most of us want to carry on living in our own homes for as long as possible, which I support. We must make sure, however, that the unsung heroes such as Joyce do not shoulder an unbearable burden. That is the reason why I chose this topic for debate.

Happenstance and good fortune, and the drawing of ballots for the Adjournment debates, have meant that we are debating this subject during Alzheimer's awareness week. This year, Alzheimer's awareness week is based around the theme of everyday matters. I know that that is true from my time shadowing Joyce. Alzheimer's disease is a label that commands fear before sympathy. People with the disease, and those around them, experience social exclusion and isolation.

Research recently published by the Alzheimer's Disease Society shows that 75 per cent. of carers for people with dementia see their friends less often than they used to, and 40 per cent. have less than an hour to themselves each day. Certainly, that is the experience of Joyce and of Lillian, a carer whom I met last year. Lillian powerfully communicated her deep isolation to me one day when, as I was about to leave, she said, "It is nice to have someone to talk to." She did not normally have that.

There are more than 700,000 people with dementia in the United Kingdom. Dementia affects one person in 20 over the age of 65, and one person in five aged over 80. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, but there are others. As the population ages, the total number of sufferers will grow, even if drug treatments reduce the prevalence of the illness. The combination of mental frailty and physical disability makes those who are affected by some form of the disease vulnerable. As dementia progresses, sufferers require increased care and specialist support.

I do not intend to caricature the Government's record on dementia, because there have been some achievements. The national carers' strategy and the national service framework for older people are two examples of that. There is much common ground between the political parties on what we must achieve for people with dementia and their carers. However, I question the pace of progress and whether the Government's thinking is informed by adequate ambition and urgency.

In January 2000, the Audit Commission published a report entitled "Forget Me Not—Mental Health Services for Older People". The Audit Commission reported a massive disparity in the funding provided for

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

services for older people with mental health problems; a difference of 8:1 from one area to another. It also found that

"specialist help for users and carers is patchy and often uncoordinated."

The Audit Commission said that all the elements of a comprehensive service needed to be drawn together strategically. It identified the following: a need for clear goals on the intended balance between home-based, day, out-patient and hospital services; good quality information to inform planning, including monitoring of service quality; and an approach that promotes innovation and works towards jointly commissioned services by health and local authorities, as emphasised by national policy.

The "National Service Framework for Older People" was published 14 months later, in March 2001. Much of its content should be applauded, although it misses the opportunity to secure significant improvements quickly for those who require dementia care. Although the standards set out in the NSF are welcome, they lack the ambition and the practical standards necessary to effect change.

On the time scale, the first milestone for mental health in the national service framework is not due until April 2004. In three years' time, the plans should be drawn up, and the methods of communication and assessment will have been worked out, but what about the services? The Audit Commission has mapped out the key elements that must be in place to improve services. Why cannot April 2002 be a milestone for the completion of the review of local mental health services, referred to as an action point in the national service framework? Surely the cross-cutting audits that were set in motion by the Audit Commission's report "Forget Me Not" should assist that process. There seems to be no reference to that important exercise.

Health and social care services should devise, agree and implement local protocols by December 2002. Why has everything been left to 2004? Action plans, which set out how to develop, and—if necessary—reconfigure home-based, day, out-patient and hospital services, should be drawn up and finalised by April 2003. These milestones must be set in stone before 2004. We must not allow the wholesale reorganisation of the national health service to get in the way of establishing such services as soon as possible. We should take meaningful steps to address the huge funding inequalities identified by the Audit Commission. The need is urgent. There are hundreds of thousands of Joyces and Alberts out there.

Earlier this year, I sent a questionnaire to 150 social services authorities around England. Sixty responded; a 40 per cent. response rate, which is not bad for research of that sort. Some 72 per cent. of social services departments that responded are unable to meet current demand for nursing beds for the elderly and mental ill; 68 per cent. are unable to meet current demand for residential EMI beds; 62 per cent. report shortfalls in provision for older people with challenging behaviour; and 58 per cent. report shortfalls in provision of specialised dementia care. One could say that those findings demonstrate that nothing has changed since the Audit Commission report of January 2000, based on auditing work that was done during the previous year. The shortage of specialist care means that vulnerable elderly people and their families are left in limbo; too often the spotlight seems to fall on bed blocking or delayed discharges in the national health service.

The untold story is that of a family struggling to cope with the complex needs and challenging behaviour of loved ones in their own homes. The Government have not adequately addressed that, particularly in the care homes sector. A collapse in confidence has led to large-scale closures of homes, a piecemeal loss of beds and a loss of capacity, which means that areas that need provision no longer have it and others have too much.

There is a need for investment in those specialist services—I am sure that we will hear more about that from the Minister—but the national service framework does not make it clear where those resources are going to come from or what is required locally to ensure that they are targeted to develop necessary new services. The Government cannot rely too much on the development of intermediate care as a substitute for targeted investment in specialist long-term care to deal with dementia. Having given their all, families should not be expected to struggle with intimate caring duties when specialist care is required, nor should vulnerable elderly people be placed in a home that is not properly funded or staffed to meet their needs.

People with Alzheimer's are among the most vulnerable in our society. Their needs are easily ignored. Of the 850 carers of people with dementia surveyed by the Audit Commission, fewer than half were asked whether they needed any help once the diagnosis had been made. Only one third were told how to care for their relatives or how to cope with dementia. The rest were left uninformed and had to work it out for themselves. From my discussions with Lillian, someone who cares for another person with dementia, I learned that her process of navigation through the system was an appalling experience. Ultimately, it took the involvement of voluntary organisations—for example, a carers centre in my constituency—to help her get the benefits she was entitled to, and gain access to the services and support that she and her partner should have had from the outset.

The findings of the Audit Commission were echoed recently by new research carried out by the Carers National Association in its report "You can take him home now". That was published a couple of weeks ago, during national carers week. The Carers National Association found that, over the past three years, consultation and involvement arrangements have deteriorated in discharge planning from hospital. They have not got better.

The association surveyed the issue in 1998, and found in the present survey that it was asking the same questions again, often of the same carers. The perception is that the implementation of guidance that governs discharge planning has got worse, not better. We need to look at the guidance again and ascertain whether it is being complied with across the board in the NHS. The evidence from the Carers National Association's work is that the guidance is, at best, patchy and not being complied with properly in many cases.

In the course of its research, the Association discovered several cases of carers, looking after someone with dementia, who had been poorly treated. NHS staff did not seem to know either about the diagnosis of dementia or how to communicate with individuals and their carers. Consequently, carers were often ignored and their views were not taken into account. They were not assessed or consulted about the discharge. One carer said that NHS staff had talked only to her mother, who had told them that everything was fine at home. They did not talk to the carer at all. As a result, none of the information about the care package or the day of discharge was passed on to the carer. That caused the carer immense difficulties in trying to deal with the situation.

People with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia can benefit from social and health care support. Early diagnosis and assessment is crucial, as it enables people and their carers to receive the services, information and treatments that they need at the right time.

Although general practitioners are often the first port of call for those concerned about dementia, only 52 per cent. of GPs surveyed by the Audit Commission felt that an early diagnosis was beneficial. Fewer than half felt that they had received sufficient training to help them diagnose and manage dementia. However, early intervention can reduce stress for both the person with dementia and his or her carer, reduce crisis intervention and prevent or delay institutionalisation. Many health professionals previously dismissed dementia as old age, and people were all too frequently told that nothing could be done.

Support for GPs from local mental health professions is vital, as the Audit Commission has emphasised, so why is the national service framework not pressing for that? Why is the framework not expanded, with targets set out?

The Audit Commission correctly identified the fact that many people strongly preferred to be supported in their homes. Home-based assessments and a greater emphasis by commissioners on community-based care were identified as critical factors to tailor services to meet the complex physical and mental health needs that result from dementia. The Audit Commission recommends that the mix of staff deployed should be reviewed locally and re-balanced where necessary. Again, why is the national service framework not driving that forward?

The Minister would be surprised if I did not say that Liberal Democrats remain concerned about the Government's proposals to pay for the nursing care of people in long-term care. That will not fully reflect the health needs of people with dementia. It is essential that people with dementia have their mental and physical health needs met by the NHS and that personal care is free.

Research indicates that the prevalence rates of dementia vary little between residential and nursing home care. The personal social services research unit found that 54 per cent. of individuals admitted to residential beds had mild impairment and that 25 per cent. had severe impairment. Of those admitted to nursing beds, 38 per cent. had mild impairment and 46 per cent. had severe impairment. That means that those people with dementia in a residential home may have exactly the same, or possibly even greater, nursing needs than those in a nursing home. However, they will be confronted with a charging regime for the care that they will receive that is entirely different from the regime facing the person in the nursing home. Where is the sense in that? Where is the justice?

I hope that the Minister can confirm that no cash limits will be set on the funds available to cover the costs of nursing care provided under the Health and Social Care Act 2001. There appears to be some doubt about that, on the basis of written answers that I received from the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), in the previous Parliament. The figure that he gave was £100 a week. Clarification is needed on whether that was simply a basis for estimating costs and not a cash limit. The sooner that is clarified, the better.

Pages 98 and 99 of the national service framework appear to contain contradictory statements concerning the use of neuroleptics or anti-psychotic drugs. I am sure that the Minister will appreciate people's concern that those drugs are inappropriately prescribed and overprescribed to people with dementia. They have undesirable side effects, which may worsen the symptoms. Their effect is dramatic. Many carers report that, within days of taking the drugs, their relatives are turned into zombies; unable to speak, eat, walk or go to the toilet without assistance. Recent research suggests that older people living in nursing homes receive four times as many prescription drugs as those living at home.

Page 98 states that treatment of dementia will always involve

"prescribing antipsychotic drugs for more serious problems, such as delusions and hallucinations, serious distress or danger from behaviour disturbance.".

As I read that list last night, it occurred to me that that might apply to some hon. Members. That was a flippant comment, but there is cause for concern. Page 99 of the national service framework states that anti-psychotic drugs

"may hasten cognitive decline and may cause increased deaths.".

Is page 98 or page 99 correct? One says that prescribing anti-psychotic drugs is "always involved", and the other says that they may cause increased deaths. That is at best ambiguous and needs clearing up; at worst, it is completely confusing.

Dementia has been regarded as taboo for a long time; too long. The needs of dementia sufferers and their carers are met more by chance and personal perseverance than by any systematic planned response by the responsible agencies; something borne out by the Audit Commission and by my personal survey. In many cases, services do not exist in the depth that is required to meet the need. The national service framework is an important step in the right direction. Strides, not steps are needed now, however. I hope that the Minister can indicate how the goals set out in the national service framework can be expanded so that they are delivered sooner rather than later.

9.51 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) for his assiduous pursuit—not

[Dr. Evan Harris]

only today and for the past few weeks, but in the previous Parliament—of the issue of dementia and care of the elderly in general. He spoke about the happy coincidence of the debate taking place in Alzheimer's awareness week. Coincidence cannot be relied upon, however. One has to be persistent and continually raise these issues. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his hard work and persistence in making sure that this issue is always on the agenda for parliamentarians.

It is disappointing to note that no Government or Conservative Back Benchers seek to speak today. In all of our constituencies, there will be not only many people who suffer from Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, but many people caring for those patients, or who have relatives who are being cared for. All the issues raised by my hon. Friend will apply in every constituency to some degree. More people than those present will look to the Minister for specific reassurance on the Government's aims and aspirations and, just as important, how funding and human resources will be allocated to these areas.

My hon. Friend concentrated on care issues. While I agree with everything that he said on that subject, I intend to look at other issues as well. There are questions concerning diagnosis of dementia. We need to ensure that there is early and accurate diagnosis, and that other—more treatable—conditions are identified. We also need to ensure that co-existing conditions that are treatable are accurately and appropriately identified so that treatment can be given and that diagnosis of dementia, in its various kinds, is not just a write-off diagnosis for patients for whom there may be even more active treatments than are available for dementia. It is important that we ensure accurate diagnosis, not only of dementia but of co-existing morbidity.

I want to discuss treatment, both acute and long-term, to say a word or two about long-term care—reinforcing what my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has said—and then to ask the Government a key question about their intentions as regards protecting current and future patients with dementia from the threat of being uninsurable. I have given the Minister advance warning of that question. Many people will be asking what the Government's intentions are; not least those who care for people with dementia and for their interests.

In terms of diagnosis, it is perhaps appropriate that we are holding this debate the day after the British Medical Association annual representative meeting discussed how much time GPs can spend in consultations with patients. The current average consultation time of about four minutes is inadequate for almost any interaction of quality between a patient and his GP. That is true from the patient's perspective of needing to get across what he has to say and, not least, from the point of view of the doctor, who has to take a history, do an examination, make a treatment plan and discuss it with the patients and/or their carers.

The Government's intention to extend the amount of time for consultations is welcome and will be endorsed by patients groups and doctors groups. However, it raises severe questions about whether the targets will distort clinical priorities when taken together with the demand that all general practice patients be seen within 48 hours where the resources are not available. I am talking not only about funding—although that is important—but, in particular, about staffing resources. Tales were told yesterday of patients who needed time taken with them, and in particular of older people and those with mental illness and their relatives. They have been squeezed out by the huge workload in general practice.

The Government must be clear and honest about whether their aims are deliverable, given the work force issues that we face. There are still inadequate numbers of GPs, despite the increase in the number of medical students being trained for general practice. Inadequate numbers of medical students and junior doctors choose general practice, and a large number of general practitioners are retiring. The elderly and, in particular, those with mental illness and dementia bear the brunt of truncated consultation times and the inadequate opportunity that GPs have to think, take histories, examine, plan treatment and explain all aspects of the care plan to patients and their relatives.

As regards the treatment of the elderly and the mentally ill, it is important that we consider what is happening with the new drugs for dementia. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has ruled that they are effective, and one can assume that they are effective, at least in clinical trials, from the fact that they have been cleared by the relevant regulatory committees. NICE has ruled that they are cost-effective, although it will be interesting to see what it decides is the unit of cost-effectiveness and the threshold below which it will continue to recommend drugs. It has also ruled that the new drugs are affordable.

It is hard for NICE to decide what is affordable, because it does not necessarily know the Government's full funding plans. It does not know the whole amount, or what the Government plan to earmark for specific treatments. The worry, which my health authority chief executive has expressed to me, is that spending required on the list of must-dos from NICE, which includes the greater prescribing of new drugs for dementia, exceeds the total growth money being given to health authorities. That is true, at least in my health authority.

In most health authorities, spending required on the list of must-dos exceeds the residual growth money that is left after health authorities take account of the other must-dos on which the Government have instructed them to spend. The result is that the extra prescription of cost-effective and apparently affordable medication is funded from within the existing envelope of resources; a euphemism that has replaced the word "budget". Effectively, treatments are being funded from existing budgets. That means that funding is taken from other treatment areas within the envelope of resource for a specific condition to implement the must-dos from NICE, which carry the imprimatur of national guidance.

There is a threat of potential legal action or a sanction from the Government or the Commission for Health Improvement if the guidelines are not followed. Patients wait longer waiting to see consultants, as the planned expansion in specialists able to diagnose and treat the condition is reduced to allocate more funding to the drugs budget. Clearly, not everything will be affordable within the NHS, but it is important that the Government do two things. First, they must be honest

about that. They would be praised, not criticised, for admitting that rationing exists and that some treatments and management plans from which doctors believe their patients would benefit are not available at the moment within existing resources. Secondly, over and above that, the Government must avoid too much central guidance without adequate resourcing because that will skew clinical priorities.

If sufficient funding is not available to implement those "must-dos", some people might argue that it would be better not to have the guidance because clinical priorities will be distorted and patients who cannot benefit from the new drugs will find that the services available to them are being reduced to fund those new drugs.

The figures that are emerging on the likely cost of full implementation of the NICE guidance—I accept that they come from industry sources—are between £70 million and £120 million. But that funding is not identified and, when other "must-dos" have been paid for, it probably does not exist within the growth money. The problem is difficult, and the Government's intention to put the drugs into the NICE process is well meaning, but what is their answer to the dilemma for an individual health authority that knows that the drugs bill increase will be greater than the amount of growth money that can be afforded for that disease area? Do the Government accept that an increase in prescribing cannot be funded as quickly as they wish or that they should do that even if it means cutting down on other care for patients with dementia?

Another area in which the Government must be clearer and reconsider their position is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam said, the funding of long-term care. Can it be right that if two patients with almost identical needs are receiving identical care, one may be means-tested and the other may not simply because of the nature and qualifications of the person providing the care? A registered nurse providing care for someone with dementia will be able to provide that care for free because it will be paid for by the NHS. If the care is provided by someone else who is also competent and able to provide that care, the funding will be based on a means test.

The Home Secretary said in the House on Monday that royal commissions should not be a substitute for Government decision making. However, on long-term care, the Labour Government, with our support, went for a royal commission and then overruled a critical aspect of its recommendations. They said that personal care—even when the need for that care stemmed from a recognised illness, such as dementia—would not be funded by the NHS and that only nursing care would be funded. That poverty of ambition and treatment discriminates against older people and may be one reason why the Government have been reluctant to ensure adequate regulation to cover discrimination against older people. My hon. Friends and I have tried to introduce into health legislation a duty not to discriminate; the Government's opposition to that may have stemmed from their decision to discriminate.

On insurance, a report from the Human Genetics Advisory Committee urged the Government to ensure that insurance companies do not carry out genetic tests unless they are approved, but that was ignored by the Government. The Association of British Insurers has admitted that tests are carried out. There is no effective moratorium, unless the relevant Government committee rules that the test is not a valid one. The House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, which examined dementia, recognised that that is a problem and called on the Government to ensure that insurers do not use genetic tests before deciding whether insurance is appropriate.

I want to stress the importance of this matter for patients with dementia or those who feel that they may be at risk of suffering from it in future. There are some risk factors associated with the onset of dementia. It is a multi-factorial disease, so even the carriage of a certain genetic factor is not a good predictor of whether or when one will succumb to Alzheimer's disease; for example, through having a specific apoprotein gene. Nevertheless, long-term care represents a huge market for insurers, especially as there has to be a means test for personal care for people with dementia. Now that the Government have said that such means tests will continue—in a most un-cradle to grave-like way—insurers have recognised that there is a market for insurance in this area. Some companies want to ensure that they gain a competitive advantage over those that are not seeking such genetic tests.

The Select Committee on Science recognised the danger that, consequently, some people might be uninsurable or have to pay over the odds for insurance even when it is possible that they will not develop the illness, and that others may be encouraged to take tests to get a negative result when it is not necessarily to their advantage, from a clinical perspective, to do so. The Committee called on the Government to ensure that there is a moratorium on any testing until the matter can be debated further, and we have not yet had the necessary parliamentary, let alone public, debate.

The Government's response to the report was to ask the Human Genetics Commission to examine the issue, including a public consultation. Having considered dementia, cancer and other conditions, it concluded that the Government must ensure that there is a moratorium on the use of genetic tests. Both the Science and Technology Committee and the Government's own creation, the Human Genetics Commission, have called for a moratorium. All hon. Members present—and, more widely, the public—want to know how the Government intend to implement the recommendations of those reports.

Dementia has an impact on huge areas of Government policy, not only on health care. One of the problems in ensuring that adequate resources are put into the treatment of such illnesses is that cost-effectiveness analyses are looked at too narrowly, which misses the wider picture in terms of the effect on carers and social services budgets. This is such a prevalent condition—and its effects on patients and their carers, family members, friends and society are so profound—that, despite the admirable aims of the national service framework's plan for dementia, the Government must do more work not only on funding but on policy changes in long-term care, on honesty about what can be afforded in the NICE process and on wider issues, such as genetic testing.

[Dr. Evan Harris]

We seek answers to those questions from the new Government, even at this early stage, and I hope that the Minister will provide them.

10.8 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Before turning to the subject of the debate, I should like to take this opportunity to express to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the hope that all goes well with the birth of her baby. I am sure that other hon. Members join me in wishing her a safe and happy delivery.

I declare an interest in the debate that will help hon. Members to understand my viewpoint: my mother died of Alzheimer's disease, so I have close personal knowledge of its impact. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on obtaining the debate in the week that the Alzheimer's Disease Society seeks to raise awareness of the impact of the disease. He says that the timing is a coincidence, but I am sure that he exercised foresight and planning.

Those reading the record of this debate and who take an interest in Alzheimer's will note the comments made about the absence of Back Benchers; I, too, regret their absence. For the wider audience of *Hansard* and in defence of new Members, I should like to point out that it can take a while to find Westminster Hall at 9.30 am during one's second week in Parliament. As experienced Members recognise, Parliament is to some extent in limbo, but the outside world may not realise that. Absence is not a mark of disrespect to the subject matter.

I congratulate the Alzheimer's Disease Society on its campaign to raise awareness of the disease. I feel passionate about the subject. Alzheimer's is the Cinderella among the major causes of disease and death that afflict us. I urge the Government to accord it the same importance as other diseases in their strategies and to find language that will draw the public's attention to the significance of the disease. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam had his soundbite when he said that we need to make "strides not steps". My soundbite is, please make Alzheimer's a sexy subject. There are cancer tsars and drug tsars, so I urge the Government to find a similar way of raising awareness of Alzheimer's.

Immediately after my mother died, I remember my father doing what many bereaved spouses do: he asked "Why?" A friend of mine was rather direct in her reply: she said that the disease was one of the three most common causes of death, which were cancer, cardiac disease and dementia. That was an abrupt way to put it, but it helped my father to understand that my mother's death was not the huge surprise that it seemed to him. The public is largely unaware of how many people are affected by dementia: previously, we heard the statistic that one in five is affected. One reason why the disease is becoming more prevalent is that we are living longer and the disease is largely one of older age. That is all the more reason to make it a sexy subject. I appeal to the Minister to see what she can do.

Others have spoken about drugs that treat Alzheimer's disease—an important aspect of the subject. Regrettably, nothing has so far been found that cures the disease, but there are drugs that arrest its progression. The decision made by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in January this year on the clinical effectiveness of such drugs was helpful, but we Members of Parliament know that it is taking a long time for the effects of that decision to filter through to those suffering from Alzheimer's so that people can get hold of the drugs that arrest the disease.

From various surgery cases, I have recorded a number of excuses for not prescribing such drugs: for example, because of waiting lists, consultants have been allowed to prescribe to only a limited number of people. Most constituents consider it unfair if someone else gets the drugs that they cannot obtain. The development of memory clinics is also being used as a reason not to prescribe the drugs at present; and GPs are being blamed for not referring patients to consultants at a sufficiently early stage. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) offered a highly plausible explanation of why GPs are finding it difficult to cope. I was appalled to learn that the average consultation time had been reduced to four minutes, especially in view of the fact that it is quite difficult to diagnose the early onset of Alzheimer's. I doubt that four minutes of conversation would make it easy for a GP to spot the onset.

One reason why I appeal to the Minister to look again at improving access to Alzheimer's drugs is that there is a strong public savings argument involved: if an Alzheimer's drug can arrest the progression of the disease, the pace at which the state has to provide additional support and care services to the patient can be slowed. If the Government's concern is the cost of the bill for Alzheimer's drugs, a full cost-benefit analysis covering the benefit of arresting the disease's progression must be carried out. I urge the Minister to do that.

In a local case, a problem in the west midlands caused great concern to my constituents, especially those who suffer or whose relatives suffer from Alzheimer's disease. A drugs trial was carried out under the title "Europe 2000", ostensibly to examine the clinical effectiveness of Alzheimer's drugs; patients could not have access to any of those drugs unless they were prepared to take part in the trial, but those who participated did not know whether they were getting the placebo or the drug. That occurred at a time when the effectiveness of the Alzheimer's drugs involved was fairly well known internationally. Some doctors, caught between patients wanting the drugs and an awareness that they must go on the trial, felt that it was profoundly unfair to experiment with patients in that way. The trial made those of us in the west midlands feel discriminated against.

I want to do something that is, I think, only possible in the early days of a new Government. I appeal to the Minister to consider an idea that might help the Government to find a way out of the postcode lottery of the prescription of drugs such as the Alzheimer's drugs. During the previous Parliament and as part of its manifesto, the Conservative party proposed an exceptional medicines fund, which would involve top-slicing the health budget and setting aside a portion of money for more expensive drugs and treatments, so that NICE's decisions about clinical effectiveness could be implemented with a budget attached. Such a solution

would also help to solve the problems that multiple sclerosis sufferers have in obtaining beta interferon. One of the Opposition's tasks is to introduce ideas that challenge the Government, and the Government have not minded accepting one or two of the Opposition's ideas. I commend our idea to her as a practical way around the problem of the postcode lottery that afflicts the prescription of Alzheimer's drugs.

As other hon. Members have said, the problem of Alzheimer's is inextricably linked with long-term care provision. It is a sad fact for sufferers of Alzheimer's and other forms of long-term dementia and for the relatives caught up in the progression of their disease that there is a long road to go down. The patient will invariably need much help and residential care, but because Alzheimer's is a degenerative disease, it takes time before that happens—time in which the prospect can become a source of real worry to relatives helping a dementia sufferer. Spouses in particular worry about whether they can afford long-term provision and whether their home might have to be sold to pay for it. Those are the real worries that grip people's minds when a doctor diagnoses the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

I was concerned to read, in the first set of weekend newspapers after the general election, that the Government have changed their mind about nursing care as a component of long-term care. Will the Minister clearly state whether the Government are rowing back from their pre-election announcement about paying for nursing care? In a written reply, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), said that the Government had no plans to change their mind, but I have been around here long enough to know that the little phrase "the Government have no plans" is not a cast iron-guarantee that the Government are not going to change their mind. We need to hear that the Government are going to implement their provisions for nursing care within long-term care provision. Alzheimer's sufferers and those who have to help to look after them are anxious to hear about that.

Several helpful pieces of research have been undertaken by the Alzheimer's Disease Society, of which I am sure the Minister is aware. However, since the debate is about care services and provision for sufferers of dementia, I should like to draw her attention to a report produced by the society called "Food for Thought"—a survey of Alzheimer's sufferers that examines the experience of care provision for those who must go into residential care or who are already in hospital. It is shocking to learn that 52 per cent. of respondents were concerned about the quality of food for dementia patients in hospital, 49 per cent. did not think that those with dementia were given enough to drink and 58 per cent. did not feel that enough assistance was provided.

I have already declared my interest in this matter and I shall recount my painful personal experience, which sheds light on the current shortcomings in provision in residential and hospital settings. Because of their mental impairment, patients who have Alzheimer's disease cannot assert their desire for the things that they need. My mother was not eating enough in a residential care setting—I must state straight away that I do not necessarily blame the care home. When Alzheimer's disease is advanced the situation becomes very difficult and requires specialist care. It was thought that if I, as a relative, came in to feed my mother, it would help her nutritionally. It is a distressing experience to have to feed one's parent in the way in which one might feed a baby or a toddler. It suddenly occurred to me as I was feeding my mother that the problem was not that the food was unpleasant—it was very nice—but that she clearly did not have an appetite. Then I caught a glimpse of a sore on her mouth and it occurred to me that the problem might be with her teeth. In fact, she had incredible gum disease and decay and was in huge pain, which was why she did not want to eat.

I recount that experience because I fear that it may not be unusual. My mother had reached the point where she could no longer express the pain that she was in. I suspect that the inability of patients suffering Alzheimer's disease to state what they need is often overlooked—one needs to assert oneself in a care setting. This is a plea to the Minister to read "Food for Thought", which is especially relevant in Alzheimer's awareness week. She must encourage those who care for patients with dementia to think about the wider aspects of their patients' well-being such as nutrition and oral hygiene. We all accept that there is currently a crisis in the care homes sector and many of them are going out of business. It is difficult for them to make ends meet and to secure care home assistants. There is competition to employ care home staff, so to ask them to give more training and to spend more is to ask a great deal at a difficult time. However, training is an important aspect of the care that we give to patients suffering dementia.

I also commend to the Minister the report "Dignity on the Ward" by Help the Aged, which also flags up the difficulty that dementia patients experience in hospital. Sometimes it is not until their relatives come in that anyone spots anything amiss. Extra training for the care of patients with dementia is important.

Dr. Evan Harris: Does the hon. Lady accept that when nurses are overloaded and overworked, those who lose out are those who are least able to speak out for themselves and to push for the attention of overworked and overstretched nurses? The Government accept that a heavy workload falls on nurses. It is perhaps as a result of that that cases have arisen of elderly people in hospital, particularly those with mental illness, not receiving adequate nutrition.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I would underline it by saying that the vacancy rate for nurses is aggravating that situation. On a geriatric ward where there are four vacancies, it is difficult for the remaining staff who are, in effect, each doing the work of two people to determine that if patients are not eating, it is not because they do not want to eat, but because of a reason or reasons that they have been unable to articulate. The crisis in nursing vacancies means that the nurses who are present are—through no fault of their own—not able to give the level of care that they would like to provide. We should not underestimate the stress that that causes nursing staff: it is not satisfying to go home at the end of the day knowing that things could have been better if only the ward had been properly staffed.

I should like to reinforce the point about carers. We depend very heavily on the good will of those who care for dementia sufferers. Many of them do it well beyond

[Mrs. Spelman]

the call of duty because they love the Alzheimer's sufferer. They may well carry on caring beyond the point at which it is medically wise either for the patient or for their own health. It may be that the spouse caring for the Alzheimer's sufferer is even older than the patient. In my constituency case load, I have seen many instances in which it would have been wise for residential care to have been provided earlier. Many people go on well past the point at which they should get more help.

The money that the Government have made available to help carers is not necessarily getting through. Will the Minister look at the fact that funds allocated to local authorities to improve provision for carers, in particular respite care, are sometimes arrested at source because local authorities see the money as a way of offsetting the costs of care that they are already providing? Carers on the ground have not experienced a huge improvement in respite care provision. Sometimes those moneys are allocated to the provision of help in the home. In the eyes of the local authority, that is a form of respite care, but I am not so sure. The Alzheimer's Disease Society's report shows that 40 per cent. of carers have less than one hour to themselves each day: help for carers is not getting through properly.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Lady is making a series of important points about carers. One other that she might take up is the fact that an overwhelming predominance of carers, particularly those caring for their parents, are women who take themselves out of the work force to do such caring work either for reasons of tradition, or because they are healthier than the males in the family. The amount of support that is given to carers reflects how society treats women, on whom that burden falls.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman makes a generous point towards the fair sex. Many women find themselves in the caring role because that is what they are brought up to do, and they do it well, but as the number of working women increases, the position becomes more difficult. I am sure that he and other Members know of cases in their constituencies of significant income being lost as the woman retreats from the workplace to meet the demands of close members of her family for whom she feels she has a duty to care. The Government should recognise that duty. It is, in the last analysis, an act of extreme good will, but it does save the state a lot of money. That is why I said earlier that a proper cost-benefit analysis of such provision should take into account the factor of good will. That is very important.

Finally, I emphasise the social exclusion aspect. It begins at an early stage of the onset of Alzheimer's disease: the sufferer may undergo quite a change of personality, with the result that the sufferer and his or her relatives find themselves retreating from their normal social activities. At that stage, quite apart from considering the medical aspects of the disease, it is important to support the relatives of the sufferer through the period of retreat and to help the carer to keep going. Will the Minister look at that?

I concur with the views of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon on genetics and insurance. If one has an Alzheimer's sufferer in the family, the genetic link is a cause for concern. I was deeply relieved to hear him say that the illness is multifactorial and that a predisposition does not necessarily assert itself. One of the main reasons why insurers are so wary of an indicator of Alzheimer's in a family is the long-term care implications. That brings us back to addressing long-term care provision for those who have a degenerative disease that will, almost invariably, lead to the high costs of residential care.

In closing, I should like to draw the Minister's attention to something of which I am sure she is aware: John Bayley's book about his wife, Iris Murdoch. If anyone has been successful in recent times in making Alzheimer's more of a sexy subject, it must be John Bayley, to whom I pay tribute. Through his book, he has raised awareness of the disease, and has enabled everyone to imagine what it is like if someone in the family is struck by it. He says:

"Alzheimer's sufferers are not always gentle: I know that, but Iris remains her old self in many ways..."

That is a description that many who have experienced the disease will recognise. One of the challenges to us as politicians is to reach out through the compassion and sense of duty that somebody like John Bayley feels towards his wife, and to make sure that he does not feel alone with his problem, unheeded and unsupported. I hope that this debate has given the Government some ideas that they can use to ensure that we provide better support for the John Bayleys of this world.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister to reply to this important debate, which it has been fascinating for me to listen to, I should like to wish her well with her pregnancy and hope that she has a safe and happy delivery. Having chaired the Select Committee that undertook a lengthy inquiry into maternity services, I remain interested in the subject even today.

10.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. I thank you, the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and others for their kind remarks. An hour and a half spent in the cool conditions of Westminster Hall has been even more pleasurable than it would normally be.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on securing this debate, and on his interest in the subject. It is a subject that he has pursued over a considerable time and he has raised these issues in great detail. In Alzheimer's awareness week, I must also pay tribute to the Alzheimer's Society for all the work that it has done to raise awareness of the condition.

The hon. Member for Meriden referred to the importance of raising awareness, or of making Alzheimer's dementia sexy, as she put it. That is a challenge, and it is a tribute to the work of organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society that awareness is growing; more attention is paid to the condition, which affects many people across the country.

Hon. Members have spoken about their experiences, either of family or of constituents. I join the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam in paying tribute to his constituents Joyce and Lillian and to carers throughout

the country, who put so much time and energy into looking after loved ones and relatives who suffer from such a difficult condition. None of us should underestimate the dedication and effort of carers; these are difficult to imagine for someone who has not faced such circumstances.

Everyone will agree that we need to do more to support carers in the work and support that they give, often out of love or a sense of duty. They have to bear emotional as well as financial and time pressures. Many suffer from loneliness or guilt and, as a society, we should do more to support them.

As the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, the Government have introduced a national carers strategy, and we have increased the amount allocated to support carers in England through the carers grant from £50 million last year to £70 million this year. That needs to increase, and it will; to £85 million in 2002-03 and to £100 million the following year. That is an important step towards ensuring that up to 75,000 more carers receive a break from their caring responsibilities. However, it is not simply a question of additional resources. We must also ensure that carers are properly involved from the very beginning in the development of services and support for those who are suffering from dementia, as the national service framework made clear.

The national service framework for older people should not relate simply to older people who suffer from particular conditions or diseases. It must relate also to carers, their families and those who support them, whether by involving them in decisions about care or in discussions with NHS or social care staff. At every stage, we need a seamless and integrated service that considers the needs and wishes of carers as well as those who suffer from the condition.

I shall deal with hon. Members' points in turn. We must recognise that we need to raise standards and investment in care for dementia. That process has already begun, but we recognise that wide variations remain throughout the country that we need to tackle over time.

The national service framework for older people that was published in March sets out for the first time national standards and service models of care for health and social services for all older people, whether they live at home or in residential care or are being cared for in hospital. To respond to the point made by the hon. Member for Meriden about cancer and heart directors, we have introduced a national director for older people's services, Prof. Ian Philp, who has already begun work to raise awareness and improve services for older people.

The national service framework has eight standards for four areas: respecting the individual; intermediate care; providing evidence-based specialist care; and promoting an active, healthy life. Standard seven specifically relates to mental health in older people, but many key themes of the NSF are relevant to all older people, including those with dementia.

It is a fundamental principle that ageism should play no part in decisions about treatment and care and that people should never be unfairly discriminated against in accessing NHS or social care services as a result of their age. The second important principle is that people should be treated as individuals and be able to make choices about their care. Older people and their carers should receive services that deal with their needs.

The aims of the mental health standard are to promote good mental health in older people, to treat and support those who suffer from dementia and depression and to ensure that older people have access to a fully integrated mental health service that provides effective diagnosis, treatment and support for them and their carers. That means agencies and professions breaking down barriers and working together in the interests of the people whom they serve.

Mrs. Spelman: The Minister's comments about mental health apply across the spectrum for mental health sufferers. Might her comments be an early sign that a Bill on mental health might shortly be introduced?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Lady will know that matters relating to the timing of Bills are announced by the Leader of the House, and that there are always pressures on parliamentary time.

Improving the prevention, care and treatment of mental problems in old age involves early recognition and diagnosis of the problem, as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) said. Accurate and early diagnosis can enable people with dementia and their carers to plan for the future and to make crucial decisions about where and how they want to live and about what sort of care would best suit their needs. The NSF has as a priority the establishment of protocols in primary care for early detection, diagnosis and treatment. A great deal of development work will need to be undertaken with the new primary care trusts, where responsibility will lie.

Systems need to be in place to ensure that health and social care agencies can communicate with each other and agree how and when to refer people with dementia to the appropriate services. To achieve that, we are promoting specialist mental health teams, including social workers and health professionals. Agreed protocols between health and social care will need to be implemented. Those care pathways are set out in the NSF.

Mr. Burstow: Much of my speech rested on that point. Apart from mental health, almost every other standard in the national service framework has milestones before 2004. The Minister rightly identified the need to develop protocols. Will there be earlier milestones or earlier points at which progress will be monitored and reported on?

Yvette Cooper: I intended to deal with the hon. Gentleman's points on the pace of implementation, which is important. I recognise his desire for change to be implemented as fast as possible. The fact that so many milestones will not be monitored until 2004 does not mean that change will not begin before then. It clearly needs to do so. We are urging those involved in health and social care to form local implementation teams to begin planning and developing. In the case of primary care, a lot of development work will need to be done before those milestones are reached.

We carefully considered and consulted on the timing. We must recognise that capacity issues are involved and that, to be effective, the process of reform can take time.

[Yvette Cooper]

We need to judge the balance between the right pace of reform, or measuring reform, to ensure that everyone can meet it effectively and has the resources in place, and ensuring that milestones are in place to drive change forward.

Such issues are always difficult. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon discussed the problems of constraints on capacity in the NHS and social care and the need to expand that capacity. He said that we must be realistic about what we can deliver and at what pace. A balance must always be struck. The NSF made the right judgment on the basis of considerable consultation about when to start monitoring milestones to ensure that they are implemented and to be realistic about the progress that we believe that the NHS and social care can make over time.

Some other milestones in other areas affect people with dementia. For example, the single assessment process, which is key to delivering person-centred care, was identified as an early priority for delivery and will be introduced by April 2002. That will have a knock-on impact on mental health and dementia, as well as on other areas.

Mr. Burstow: There will be a single gateway and assessment, but not the necessary protocols for the specialist services. Will that not make the establishment of the single assessment worthless for people with dementia? The Minister and her officials should reflect that the milestone says that the plan should be in place by 2004. That is not even talking about the services being reconfigured or about any of the other issues that are dealt with by the Audit Commission.

Yvette Cooper: I do not accept that the implementation of the standard by 2002 will be worthless for people with dementia, because the single assessment is a critical step forward. It will make a big difference to many families who are not experiencing co-ordinated assessment as they should and will improve the care that they receive. Changes must be made across the pathway of care, but we must be realistic about the capacity of the national health service and social care to deliver changes instantly.

Hon. Members cannot have it both ways. They cannot warn on the one hand about demanding more of the NHS than it is able to achieve, given the need to expand capacity but, on the other hand, demand that all the changes, which we agree to be necessary, are implemented instantly. We need to see clear progress, but we must be realistic about the time that that progress will take. Changes are already being made and will be made during the next year to make the single assessment process work effectively, which will benefit those suffering from dementia.

The hon. Member for Meriden mentioned a specific concern about dental services. Dental and oral care will be part of the single assessment process, so I would expect to see dental assessment as part of individual care plans. I am happy to correspond further with her on that if she has more questions. I mentioned already that carers may often need practical support and have physical and mental needs of their own, which must be recognised by the specialist mental health teams. An active community health team will find itself addressing the needs of the carer as much as of the patient.

The NSF process means that people will have an individual care plan, shared by all agencies managing their care and treatment, and the assessment of an individual with dementia will take into account the complexity of his or her needs and require frequent review. The assessment will result in care packages that help older people with dementia to live safely at home if possible and may include personal care, care of the home, finance and support for carers. The care packages may also include appropriate technology, such as cooker or door alarms, and we must increasingly look to technology to support people.

Many older people with dementia will need access to specialist mental health services, which means providing a range of services from diagnosis, including the treatment of more complex problems and community and in-patient services for those with clinical need. Again, the emphasis must be on promoting independence of older people with dementia and on supporting them and their carers in the community, whenever that is possible and practical. We are looking to all key stakeholders, including the network of dementia services development centres, to help implement the NSF at the local level.

Hon. Members raised concerns about treatment and, in particular, access to drugs for those suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia. We were pleased to accept the recommendations of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence that Aricept, Exelon and Reminyl should be available on the NHS as one component of management for people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. All health authorities must adhere to that guidance, and we will monitor their performance. In our manifesto, we said that we would ensure that all health authorities would be required to fund the drugs and treatment recommended by NICE.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is worried that health authorities will be unable to afford that, and the hon. Member for Meriden asked why we could not have a dedicated or top-sliced fund. Health authorities are receiving extra money for NICE recommendations. We anticipated the need for extra resources to fund those recommendations and increases in the drugs budget, and we have acted.

When we announced the extra resources that were going to health authorities throughout the country, we made it clear that the extra money being invested in the NHS had increased from an average of 3 per cent. to 6 per cent. a year in real terms. Some of the extra resources and growth money will go towards funding NICE recommendations.

My problem with a top-sliced fund is that, in the end, the hon. Member for Meriden is talking not about putting more money into the system but about carving the money up differently. It is important that, where we can, we preserve the principle of giving health authorities the flexibility to be able to respond to local need, and they are receiving additional resources to do so.

Mrs. Spelman: Only 50 per cent. of health authorities currently fund Alzheimer's drugs, so there is quite a long way to go. The difficulty is the same as that with the provision of funds to local authorities for carers; implementation can be patchy around the country. Sufferers of Alzheimer's under a national health service find the postcode disparity difficult to understand.

Yvette Cooper: That is why I agree that the postcode lottery must be addressed, which is what NICE is all about. Health authorities need to fund NICE's recommendations. They do not have the discretion to decide which recommendations they like or dislike; the recommendations need to be implemented. We said that we would take further action to put that beyond doubt and we shall have discussions about how best to take the matter forward. We expect authorities to respond to NICE recommendations, because its very purpose is to tackle the postcode lottery.

Dr. Harris: The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry forecasts that the total NICE bill will be between £78.4 million and £123 million, of which about £42 million will fund the Alzheimer's drugs. If a health authority says that its must-do list exceeds its growth money, is that figure wrong? Does the Minister accept that cost pressures in at least some authorities will exceed the amount of growth money, so that cuts, savings and cost improvements will need to be made in other budgets to fund what she has described as a must-do?

Yvette Cooper: Different estimates have been made of the impact of different NICE recommendations, and we are providing health authorities with additional resources to respond to them. Inevitably, however, they face cost pressures in different areas. We are providing additional resources to the health service across the board so that authorities can respond to the recommendations and we shall continue to do so. We accept the need for extra investment and capacity in the NHS, but we must also ensure that national standards are in place. Some authorities have gone faster than others; that created the postcode lottery in the first place.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam is concerned about the NSF's wording. I am sorry if it is misleading and I will be happy to write to him to clarify it. As I understand his point, the wording suggests that there are occasions when certain drugs may be appropriate, but that does not necessarily mean that every patient should be prescribed a particular set of drugs.

The hon. Members for Sutton and Cheam and for Oxford, West and Abingdon asked about nursing and personal care. Those matters were debated during the progress of the Health and Social Care Act 2001. From this October, for the first time, free nursing care will be introduced for people living in nursing homes. In response to the question put by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, let me make it clear that there are no cash limits on nursing care. In response to the hon. Member for Meriden, I do not know where the speculative stories in the press came from. The plans will be implemented from next October, with free nursing care available then for people in nursing homes. That will obviously impact on those with dementia as well as others in care homes.

The Liberal Democrats have called on us many times to fund personal care as well as nursing care. I remind them that two thirds of people in nursing homes already have part or all of their care provided. Their proposals would not benefit people on low income. Providing free nursing care and making the system of personal care and support fairer will cost an additional £360 million a year. The Liberal Democrat proposals, however, would require considerable extra funding—about £1 billion—and would neither improve care for anyone nor benefit the worst off. Decisions have to be made about priorities. The Government have made it clear that they want to provide additional support for the ill and to invest in improving care.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon mentioned genetic testing and insurance. I have time to deal with it only briefly. I have grave concerns about this matter and believe that we must protect people against unfair discrimination in insurance. We asked the Human Genetics Advisory Commission for its views. In response to its interim advice and following the report of the Select Committee, we have made it clear that there should be a moratorium until the longer-term issues—about testing, implications for insurance, equity and unfairness—are properly examined.

The Human Genetics Advisory Commission continues to reflect on the issues and is examining what form the moratorium should take, how long it should be for and how much additional work should be done in the meantime. The insurance industry has expressed its willingness to extend a moratorium, but we must ensure that it is implemented. We have clarified our intentions and we shall continue to discuss with the Human Genetics Advisory Commission and the insurance industry how best to implement the moratorium. Technology can provide huge benefits, but we must ensure that it does not cause huge social problems and unfairness.

I hope that I have dealt with the specific issues raised by hon. Members. On the general issue of care home capacity, work is under way with the independent care homes sector, as well as with local authorities. For a long time, people in the NHS and the social care and the voluntary sectors have worked hard to draw up proposals for the national service framework. A huge challenge lies ahead to ensure that the NSF is properly implemented in accordance with the intentions of all those who drew it up.

The fact that so many different organisations were engaged in partnership in drawing up the NSF—which has been welcomed by many people, and which we should be able to implement—is a source of optimism for the future. We need that partnership, as well as a process of investment and reform, to secure improvements in the care of those with dementia. That process is under way. I pay tribute to all those involved in caring for those with Alzheimer's disease.

Electoral Law

11 am

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise these matters. I shall focus on events that took place in my constituency and raise wider issues relating to the role of the Electoral Commission, the law as it relates to sitting Members of Parliament before an election is called and the role of the internet and of well-funded extremist groups attempting to unseat Members of Parliament.

First, let me quote from an article from my local newspaper, the *Ilford Recorder*, of 14 June. Under the headline "Police halt poll protest", it states:

"Police were called to a polling station on Thursday"—

that is, polling day—

"after receiving complaints about the behaviour of political activists distributing leaflets outside.

Redbridge Council staff overseeing the voting at the polling station at Christchurch Primary School in Wellesley Road, Ilford, called in police at 8pm after becoming concerned by the behaviour of members of the Association of Ilford Muslims.

The group were handing out leaflets to Asian voters asking them not to vote for Labour candidate in Ilford South, Mike Gapes. Similar events took place at other polling stations in the constituency.

Officers confiscated the leaflets and warned the activists—who are critical of Mr Gapes' support of anti-terrorist legislation, Israel and the Middle East Peace Process—that they were prohibited from demonstrating outside polling stations.

They were told they would be arrested if they returned. Police stayed on the site until the end of voting at 10 pm.

There were also heated exchanges and stand up rows outside the polling station in Eton Road, Ilford, as voters ignored the association's pleas to snub Mr Gapes."

The article goes on to print a statement from the secretary of the Association of Ilford Muslims denying that any intimidation had occurred. I shall say more about the association later.

That was not the first problem that I had encountered in the campaign. The preceding Saturday, 2 June, we had been campaigning in Ilford Lane, one of our main shopping centres. Some of my Labour supporters, who were carrying leaflets and balloons, were harangued and harassed by a group of young men as we walked down the street. It got so difficult that I called the police—I feared that some of the elderly people in our group were in danger of being physically attacked. The police came and the situation was calmed to some extent, but the group continued to follow us up and down the street for two hours, shouting such things as, "Racist", "Murderer", and "How many children have you killed today?"

That evening I received a telephone call from a local business man who runs a restaurant. He had been enthusiastic when he saw us on the street and had given food and water—it was an incredibly hot day—to some of the campaigners. That evening, members of the group that had been involved in the previous incident went into his shop, threatened him saying, "We know where you live," and ripped down the posters that he had put up in support of my candidature.

The following morning, Sunday 3 June, we were out leafleting in Loxford, a ward with a very mixed community. I have in my constituency many different people from many different backgrounds. We live harmoniously. In a typical road in Loxford ward, one finds Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and atheists all living as neighbours. First languages spoken include Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil. A whole variety of people of different backgrounds live as near neighbours without any problems. However, as we were leafleting in Loxford ward, a man arrived with a mobile phone. Within 10 minutes, five other people arrived and followed us down the streets. They chanted "Racist" and "Murderer" as I put leaflets through doors. I ignored it and for more than an hour we continued our leafleting campaign.

When all this began, I resolved not to be intimidated or prevented from carrying out my democratic duty as a candidate and contacting my electors. The incidents came as no great surprise to me. Their origin goes back some months. Toward the end of 2000, with the situation in the middle east becoming tense and the new intifada, I received telephone calls and e-mails from a few individuals who wanted me to "explain my views" to the Muslim community. My views are clear and on the record. I have a website. I have always advocated a two-state solution. I have advocated compromise and peace. I visited Gaza in 1995 and met Arafat. None the less, to those individuals, the fact that I was an officer of the Parliamentary Labour Friends of Israel somehow made me unacceptable.

They began sending questionnaires requiring yes or no answers. Then, they insisted that I should meet them to discuss whether my views were acceptable. An e-mail from Mr. Zulfiqar Bukhari was the first of many. His brother, Mr. Asghar Bukhari, whom I shall mention again later, also started to e-mail me. I said that I would be happy to meet and speak to Muslim constituents at any time. I have always been approachable and accepted such invitations to meet my constituents, so that was not a problem. However, I then tried to make arrangements. I told the general secretary of the mosque that some young people wanted to hold a meeting with me and I started to make the arrangements to have the meeting at the mosque. It was then that the mood of the group changed.

On 14 November, I got an e-mail from Asghar Bukhari that said:

"Due to the mood in the community about the continuing atrocities and elements within the mosque who feel you have done very little on behalf of the Palestinians, we feel it would be both unwise and unfair to expose you to such a crowd.

We have wisely decided to have a meeting with you within the mosque walls 'privately'...If you decide within the meeting that you will actively support our demands in the House of Commons we will read out the results of the meeting before the prayer begins to a crowd of perhaps 1000 of your constituents. Equally, if you decide you cannot agree to our demands we will also read this out.

The results will be delivered to your Muslim constituents whilst you are still within the mosque."

I gave that invitation short shrift. I attended the mosque and was warmly received by the Imam, the general secretary of the mosque and the community as a whole. I made a speech during the main prayers to 1,000 men, then answered questions from those who wanted to pursue matters further at a meeting upstairs. Some of that discussion was quite heated. Nevertheless, I was delighted to receive a good, warm response from the overwhelming majority of my constituents.

The group concerned decided that it did not like the way in which I was appealing directly to my constituents. At the end of January and the beginning of February, I started to receive e-mails from another young man, Mr. Inayat Bunglawala, who originally styled himself "Representative of the Islamic Society of Britain Ilford Branch". He wrote:

"I have compiled attached with this note a list of some of your statements in the House of Commons on various issues that will concern the Muslim population of Ilford. The Islamic Society of Britain Ilford Branch intends to vigorously encourage Ilford's Muslims to participate in upcoming general elections. We want Britain's 2 million Muslims to play a positive role in the affairs of this country, and to be frank we are very unhappy with your statements on these issues."

Mr. Bunglawala had done a scissors-and-paste job on statements that I had made in the House of Commons over a nine-year period, taking one sentence from this half-hour speech, one from that five-line question, and so on. Underneath were paragraphs of interpretation of my views. I asked, "Why be so selective? I have said a lot more of interest to all my constituents. Why do you not print everything I have said?" I sent a comprehensive statement in reply to Mr. Bunglawala's friend, Mr. Bukhari, who in November had sent me an e-mail containing a number of questions. I asked him to publish my views, but his reply was, "Oh, we don't have space to publish your statement."

I refused to go along with the game and as a result, at the end of February, I was informed that a leaflet would be produced. It was duly printed. The first of four leaflets that were put out against me in the period from the beginning of March to the general election, it was headed: "Mike Gapes, No Friend of the Muslims". There was no imprint, just a mobile telephone number printed on the bottom of the leaflet. It was produced not by the organisation that I thought Mr. Bungalawala represented, but under a nom de convenience—a name used for political reasons: the Association of Ilford Muslims. However, I know that it was produced by Mr. Bungalawala because the text was identical to his e-mail to me. It included statements such as,

"Note there are 300,000 Jews in Britain but over 2 million Muslims in Britain. The Jewish community has over 20 declared MPs while the Muslims have only one MP."

The implication was that people should be elected on the basis of religion rather than any other criterion. I believe that these people thought that I was Jewish because I am in the Parliamentary Labour Friends of Israel. I am not, but whether I am or am not Jewish is irrelevant: I have fought anti-Semitism all my life and will continue to do so. It is one of the reasons why those responsible for the leaflets do not like me.

After the selective quotes, the concluding paragraph of the leaflet states:

"Let us in Ilford send a strong message to all that we will not tolerate Islamaphobia and anti-Islamic views in Parliament. Getting rid of Mike Gapes will send a massive shock wave through the pro-Israel lobby."

The leaflet was distributed outside all the mosques and delivered door-to-door in the constituency. I put out press releases stating that I would not be intimidated by the leaflets, that I rejected such politics and that these people were against me because they were rejectionists and extremists who opposed the middle east peace process, which I support. They criticised me because I oppose Saddam Hussein's regime and because I warned of the dangers of a process of regression and reversion to the reactionary policies of Khomeini in Iran. They criticised me because I raise human rights issues involving Arab countries, such as the fact that women do not have the vote in Saudi Arabia and small things of that kind. The group said that I had labelled all Muslims as extremists. What I actually said was that the vast majority of my constituents of all religions and faiths reject such politics, and that the vast majority of Ilford Muslims are politically moderate and reasonable people who have no truck with such politics. The same is true of the vast majority of British Muslims. That was my view then and it is my view now.

Mr. Inayat Bunglawala was quoted as saying that 10,000 leaflets had been distributed by 10 May 2001. He had informed us that a second version was being printed in colour. That first appeared on Friday 13 April and was distributed outside mosques and put on cars in a street near my home. It had almost, but not quite, the same text. It states:

"Mike Gapes MP, A TRUE FRIEND OF ISRAEL, No Friend of the Muslims"

and included a picture of an Israeli tank and a Palestinian boy throwing a stone at it. The wording was almost identical but was changed to toughen it up and stated:

"Getting rid of Mike Gapes will send a massive shock wave through the pro-Israel lobby and make it clear that Muslims are not to be trifled with."

At the same time as that second leaflet was produced, a version of the first leaflet was printed in Urdu; that was the third leaflet. The second and third leaflets had no imprint, but included two mobile telephone numbers. I shall not put those numbers on the record, but one belongs to Mr. Bunglawala and I believe that the other belongs to Mr. Asghar Bukhari. I have their addresses and they will be sent to the Electoral Commission.

A fourth leaflet then started to appear. A scrappy document, it gave the contact name of Asghar and a mobile telephone number. It stated:

"A Vote for Mike Gapes MP Ilford South is a Vote for Israel"

and included pictures of horrific scenes. It continued:

"11,000 Palastines"—

the word was mis-spelt—

have been shot and 400 killed, Mike Gapes continues to be the deputy chairman of the Labour freinds"—

also wrongly spelt—

"of Israel....Why?"

It urged:

"A NO VOTE FOR MIKE GAPES AND THE LABOUR PARTY".

I am not sure how many of those leaflets were distributed, but I expect that it was several thousand. Four leaflets—probably 40,000 copies—were distributed. A question arises about the legitimacy of such campaigning under electoral law.

In addition, most Saturdays for several months the Labour party had had a street stall. My Conservative opponent was also out with his "Save the pound" campaign and petition. The group decided to position themselves next to the Labour stall and handed out its leaflets to people who came to the Labour stall. On one

[Mike Gapes]

occasion, someone took a Labour leaflet and tore it up. Whenever they thought that someone was a Muslim—they were not good at recognising them, because Sikh and Hindu friends of mine were approached—they would go up to them and say, "Do you know that that is Mike Gapes? He is a terrible man, responsible for awful things." I have photographs of some of the slogans, which included:

"MIKE GAPES MP, WHY DON'T YOU SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS?"

and

"VOTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, DON'T VOTE FOR MIKE GAPES "

Those appeared before the election in April and continued to appear into May. Mr. Bunglawala, Mr. Bukhari and others campaigned from that street stall. What was the cost of that campaign? I would guess that it was quite a lot.

When the election had been called, telephone calls started and people rang me to say that they had received a telephone call at home from people saying, "Don't vote for Mike Gapes. He's an Islamophobe. He is anti-Muslim. He is against our religion." I cannot say how many calls were made, but judging by my constituents' reaction, there was a considerable number. Interestingly, the phoning was not very accurate either. A lady with the surname Chaudhry wrote me a very nice letter pointing out that although she was a Christian, it had been assumed that she was a Muslim because of her surname, and her father, who had converted to Christianity, had been somewhat shocked to receive a phone call telling him that, as a good Muslim, he should reject me. I also had calls from Muslims who were upset and offended by the allegations, and I encountered—this is where the poison started—people with genuine concerns who had seen the leaflet but did not know my real position. I spent a lot of time talking to constituents either directly or over the telephone in response to the allegations.

Then, another variation of the campaign started. Earlier this year, a group called VoteSmart set up a website linked to the Muslim Council of Britain. Asking "Will your MP support Muslim issues in the next Parliament?", they gave us ratings of zero to plus five and zero to minus five. Needless to say, I appeared with a minus five rating. Interestingly, the person responsible for the Muslim Council of Britain's website has the e-mail address: inayat—b@hotmail.com—Inayat Bunglawala, who is on the media committee of the Muslim Council of Britain. He is also my constituent and is responsible for the leaflets against me.

That website did not merely list my name with those of other MPs who had been given various ratings. It has a whole special section on "Mike Gapes MP: 'No Friend of the Muslims' ", which reproduces one of the original leaflets. It is accessible through both the Muslim Council of Britain's website and through VoteSmart. I subsequently found out that it was available on websites all over the world. An American website called Islam for Today mentions:

"A campaign by London Muslims to unseat a British member of parliament from the governing Labour party at the 2001 general election."

Again, it contains the phrase "Mike Gapes MP: 'No Friend of the Muslims' ". The website reproduces, in its entirety, Mr. Bunglawala's leaflet. Another website, Middle East News Online, carried the headline "UK Muslims launch campaign against pro-Israel MP" and said:

"The Association of Ilford Muslims, AIM, have distributed thousands of leaflets in English, Urdu and Gujarati to homes, mosques and shopping centres in the constituency."

There follows an interesting remark that contains, I presume, a misprint:

"Secretary of AIM, Inayat Bunglawala, said there had been a fanatics response".

Other material appeared in a free English-language publication called *The Muslim News*. That cannot be bought in bookshops, but is given out in mosques all over the country. The issue of 23 February had a headline: "Muslims urged to 'votesmart' in General Election", under which was written:

"In east London, the initiative is being taken one step further by confronting Labour MP for Ilford, Mike Gapes, about his stance towards Islam and specific Muslim countries ... Mr. Inayat Bunglawala told *The Muslim News*"—

and so on and so forth. For several issues, *The Muslim News* ran stories about the campaign against me, including one headed, "Campaign against Gapes".

I had been demonised and turned into a hate figure because I refused to be intimidated by such stuff. I found the reaction interesting. I received an e-mail from a man called Faisal Bodi who said that he was a freelance journalist and would like to interview me about the campaign that was being run in my constituency. He wrote:

"I'm doing a piece on the threat posed by Muslim voters to sitting Labour MPs at the forthcoming election. I know that Ilford, South has experienced a high-profile campaign and would like to use this as the main example. I'm interviewing somebody from the association of Ilford Muslims this afternoon and would like to do the same with you."

I did not know Mr. Bodi, but I assumed that he was a journalist because he was working for the BBC. I willingly agreed to put my side of the case on the basis that it was a BBC programme. I was happy to engage in the debate.

Mr. Bodi was perfectly pleasant when he interviewed me. He was late, but I rearranged my time and came all the way into Westminster, even though Parliament was in its Easter recess. For about half an hour, we discussed a range of questions, including Muslim schools, unemployment, the Lawrence report, ethnic minority recruitment to the public services and police, discrimination legislation and the situation in Bahrain, where women have recently got the vote. However, my comments about none of those issues appeared in "The World Tonight". What did appear was an unbalanced piece: my opponents were allowed to say, without being challenged, that I am an Islamophobe and, to use Mr. Bodi's phrase, a "proven enemy of Muslims".

I wrote to the BBC to challenge it about the piece being unbalanced. After I did the interview, I discovered that Mr. Bodi is not really a journalist: he is a polemicist for extreme Islamic causes. Although the BBC did not accept that the programme was unbalanced, it admitted in a letter sent by Miss Prue Keely, that

"With regard to Mr. Bodi and his political opinions, he came to us as a freelance journalist recommended as having good access to radical Muslim communities. It is my view that we should have

made a more comprehensive introduction to the piece noting his known support for Islamic causes. We were not aware of his Guardian article on Israel's right to exist. I learnt of it on Wednesday."—

the day after the broadcast on the Tuesday night. She continued:

"I regret we did not check further prior to commissioning the piece and I have told the programme team that these are my views."

The article that Miss Keely mentioned stated that Israel had no right to exist. It is one of several pieces by the prolific Mr. Bodi that I have come across on the internet. Mr. Bodi is a strong supporter of Hamas and an opponent of both the compromise policies pursued for several years by the Palestine Liberation Organisation under Arafat and the anti-terrorist legislation that we put through in the last Parliament. He is also an opponent of the process of compromise and dialogue that we have been trying to pursue and encourage in the middle east.

As the BBC decided for its own reasons that it did not want Mr. Bodi to make programmes of that nature again, he decided to write a two-page attack on the subject which was published in *The Guardian* during the election campaign. My picture was featured in the article, in which I was singled out as the man responsible for Faisal Bodi being banned by the BBC. As I pointed out in a letter printed in *The Guardian* on May 23, there was nothing shadowy about my position, which I made clear on my website. My complaint was that Mr. Bodi had misrepresented me in his unbalanced piece and that the BBC was broadcasting material during the run-up to an election that could be interpreted as encouraging people in my constituency not to vote for me. That is the nub of the electoral law issue. I have provided a lengthy account of the background, but it is important to get such matters on record.

I wrote to the BBC about the programme. The joint editor of the piece wrote back saying:

"As to electoral law, I am advised that—as a news report outside an election campaign—none of this story comes under any electoral law of any sort."

Fair enough. When I asked the Labour party head office for legal advice about the initial leaflet—the one sent out at the beginning of March or April—it contacted the Electoral Commission. The commission replied:

"The Association of Ilford Muslims have been made aware of the provisions of section 75 of the RPA 1983 and that should they continue to publish their newsletters or other local material during the election, they must operate within the £500 ceiling. They have also been informed of the imprint requirements relating to any election material. We are not aware that the leaflet in question has been reissued since the election was called."

That letter was sent on 5 June—conveniently, two days before polling day—and was a response to a statement sent by the Labour party on 5 April. By the time Labour party head office received the commission's reply, nothing could be done about it. The first I knew of the response was after polling day. The Electoral Commission clearly takes the view that material attacking a Member of Parliament is allowed. However, I believe that the material was designed to influence the election; it continued to be distributed throughout the campaign without an imprint and without meeting the conditions laid down by the Electoral Commission.

The other side of the issue relates to electoral expenses. I have some concerns about on whose election expenses return such election material will appear. The people in the Association of Ilford Muslims were not only telling people not to vote for me but telling them to vote for my Conservative opponent, Mr. Suresh Kumar. That was confirmed by Faisal Bodi's articles. Let me quote from a magazine called *Jerusalem File*, May 2001, Vol. III, no. 5. Under a headline, "Voters target pro-Israel MPs", an article stated:

"For the last month the east London constituency has been the scene of a gloves-off battle between Mike Gapes, the local MP—a member of the Labour Friends of Israel—and the Association of Ilford Muslim's (AIM), which wants Muslims to back the Conservative candidate, Suresh Kumar."

It then quotes Mr. Asghar Bukhari, an AIM campaigner, speaking in the radio piece that Mr. Bodi had produced. Mr. Bukhari asks:

"How can this man possibly claim to represent Muslims on Palestine when he has such anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian form and when he is even a friend of Israel?"

Mr. Bodi then writes:

"Gapes has a seemingly safe 14,000 majority but if AIM's hopeful defection of Ilford South's 7,000 Hindus to Kumar materialises, he could be in for a big shock."

Reports in other papers said the same thing.

It is clear that such matters affect election expenses. As a result, my agent decided to raise the matter with the Conservative full-time agent in my borough, Mr. Alan Doran. He wrote asking for clarification on whether the Conservative party's candidate or any of its members had had any associations or discussions with the Association of Ilford Muslims. We received a reply not from the agent but from the Conservative candidate, who was acting as his own agent—which is legal, but unusual. Mr. Kumar made it clear that he had had discussions with the Association of Ilford Muslims, but did not answer any of our questions. I shall go no further than that at the moment, because there are still a few more days before election expenses returns have to be lodged. I am waiting to see the returns lodged in my constituency to determine whether any of the material is included within the expenditure of any of the other candidates, or whether AIM has submitted a statement to the Electoral Commission about its expenditure during the campaign.

I want to raise several points with the Minister. I am sorry that the background has been so detailed, but such matters are complicated. The Association of Ilford Muslims told people to vote Conservative and put out material saying that getting rid of Mike Gapes would be a great thing. I understand that expenses incurred for a candidate before their adoption as a candidate can count as election expenses, but putting out material against a sitting Member of Parliament, implicitly or even directly on behalf of another candidate, does not. I would be grateful for clarification on that point. When one puts out material before an election, if one is running a legitimate campaign, one has a stop point and carefully ensures that none of it is put out after the election is called; otherwise it counts towards one's election expenses. The people campaigning against me carried on beyond that point. They were reprinting the leaflet on 10 May for an election campaign that had been announced before then, with Parliament having been dissolved shortly thereafter. Those are serious matters.

[Mike Gapes]

Another issue is the harassment and intimidation of electors. In addition, under section 75 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the question of expenditure arises if more than £500 was spent on a concerted plan of action against me—and I would argue that it was certainly concerted, planned and involved action. There was no printer's imprint on the material that was produced. A wider issue is that of websites that reproduced the material in its entirety, again without an imprint—with a mobile phone number and nothing else—and carrying the name of the Muslim Council of Britain, which is the legitimate umbrella group for Islamic organisations in this country. Are the people involved aware of the requirements of the 1983 Act?

This is not just a matter for me. I was re-elected on 7 June with a majority of 13,997 on a much lower turnout than in 1997. There was a swing to Labour of 2.75 per cent., when all the neighbouring seats in east London, including that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), had small, in her case, or larger swings against Labour. My constituents rejected the extremists' campaign. Muslim voters rejected the politics of mass hate; they rejected those involved and what they stand for. That is the best message that can go out from Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews in my constituency. We work together, live together and go to school together. We are an harmonious community and we reject the politics of hate and attempts to introduce them into our community.

I have a big majority now, although when I was elected in 1992, it was 402. I could take on the association's campaign with the reasonable assurance that, whether or not it worked, I would still be re-elected. However, colleagues in all parties who have small majorities could be subject to such campaigns orchestrated not only by the AIM but by other groups and on other issues. The magazine *Q News* published a hit list of Members of Parliament who were to be removed because of their views on the middle east. It included Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour and, incidentally, Ulster Unionist Members—I am not sure how many Muslim voters there are in Belfast, South, but the constituency featured in the list none the less. We need to think through the role of third-party campaigning. We need to be clear about election law on such matters.

I appreciate the opportunity that the House has given me to raise these matters. The Government should, at an early stage, examine the operation of election law and take lessons from the most recent election campaign so that the behaviour that I have described is not repeated with near impunity in local government elections next year or in other elections. I will be sending a copy of my speech to the Electoral Commission, which I understand is producing a report on the election; it is already at the printers and is due out soon. Clearly, that will be too early to deal with the question of election expenses: it will be printed before the relevant deadlines and before a lot of information has become available. That is unfortunate. I hope that it will be an interim report and that the commission will produce a comprehensive report based on the experiences of those of us who were involved in the election.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. Quite a few hon. Members have indicated that they want to speak, and other hon. Members should bear that in mind when making their speeches.

11.42 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): My contribution will be brief.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on giving us the opportunity to discuss electoral law. His very full contribution was something of an eye-opener to me. I represent a part of the world that is proud to have a robust tradition of political debate, but what the hon. Gentleman described goes well beyond that. When we hear tales of intimidation and victimisation, alarm bells should ring in the ears of all of us who consider ourselves to be democrats—whether Liberal or not. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take some comfort from his return to Parliament. Whatever tactics some of his constituents might have employed, the vast bulk of them are clearly of a different mindset.

I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on drafting the topic for debate sufficiently widely to allow me to take a completely different tack. I want to bring a brief point to the Minister's attention, although he might already be aware of it because I wrote to his Department on 21 June. A professional lady who has lived and worked in Orkney for a number of years is a constituent of mine and a Dutch national. For some years, she was allowed to vote in elections to the local authority—Orkney Islands council—and to the European Parliament. She has never been allowed to cast her ballot in elections to this House. That has been the case for as long as she has lived here. I would not necessarily agree with that position, but it had a logical consistency in the distinction between a national Parliament and other bodies.

Will the Minister deal with a point that my constituent raised with me—that, since the operation of the Scotland Act 1998, she is now allowed to vote for her Member of the Scottish Parliament? She pays her taxes to Westminster and is able to have a say in how taxes are spent on health, education and other devolved matters, but she cannot have a say in how the remaining 50 per cent. of taxation, which relates to Departments responsible to this House, is determined. Since the Scotland Act 1998, that position is no longer defensible and requires reform.

We are members of the European Union, which is based on the principle of freedom of movement of goods and labour. There is little sense in allowing free movement of labour if people who have moved within the EU are taxed but allowed no say in how their taxation is spent. I realise that the Government have a full legislative timetable for this Parliament, but I hope that the matter might find its way into the category of legislation that, as I recall from my previous career as a lawyer, falls under the title of "Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts". I invite the Minister to clarify the Government's position.

11.46 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I come to this debate from a slightly different direction from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes), but I want to make some serious observations about the 7 June election. I am concerned about the harassment of voters at the entrance to polling stations.

My election agent and I approached the chief returning officer in Bolton, who is also the chief executive of Bolton metropolitan council, several weeks before the election and requested that police be provided at five key polling stations in my constituency. Police used to be present at all polling stations during nearly all elections, especially general elections. We made our request following reports from our party workers about the local elections of May 2000. Our request was not met, and in my constituency on 7 June I saw little evidence of any overt police observation of the electoral process.

Our request was reasonable and the Government should take up these matters with chief returning officers. It is odd that we send our own Members of Parliament to observe electoral processes in many other countries to ensure fair play, yet we do not ensure fair play in our own country.

I knew that our Tory opponent was unlikely to play fair when he started to fabricate letters from his London fax machine to the *Bolton Evening News*. The local and national press took up the issue. I shall not go into all the details, except to say that the contents of those letters led me to make an official complaint to the Commission for Racial Equality. During the campaign, the Tory candidate made a verbal attack on my wife at a public meeting, even though she was not present. There was flyposting, which is illegal in Bolton, and a leaflet was sent out for a meeting at which the principal speaker was Stephen Norris, but it had no imprint and the name of the printer was not mentioned.

Altogether, we made five official complaints to our chief returning officer before polling day about the behaviour of my Tory opponent. At this stage, I should perhaps say that my Tory opponent was a Muslim of Kashmiri heritage and he openly campaigned as the Muslim candidate. I recognise that that is not illegal, but greatly regret the introduction of sectarian politics on to the political scene in my town. That was the first time that I have seen any evidence of that. I have many friends and supporters in all Muslim communities in Bolton, including from the Kashmiri community. They gave me their support as usual, for which I have thanked them. For obvious reasons, rumours were spread among the Muslim communities that my name is Jewish and that I am a strong supporter of Israeli politics. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth; I am treasurer of the Britain-Palestine group.

On polling day, we decided to put Gujarati and Urdu-speaking number-snatchers at our five key polling stations, mainly to observe my Tory opponent's tactics. From early morning, we received reports on the situation from our number-snatchers, so I went out with my agent to see exactly what was going on. Immediately outside each of those five key polling stations, cars or vans carried my Tory opponent's helpers and displayed his posters. From what we saw of their activities, the supporters were obviously there to influence the voters as they approached the polling stations. Right outside the entrance to St. Phillip's church hall polling station was a large van, not only covered in Tory posters but carrying on its back a large blown-up version of the ballot paper, showing people how to vote for the Tory candidate—in box No. 4.

We have photographic evidence of all that I am reporting today. As the day advanced, we saw as many as five number-snatchers inside the polling stations blatantly telling people, usually in Gujarati, whom to vote for.

The worst scenes were observed at the Emmanuel church hall polling station in Derby ward. The entrance to the polling room was to the rear of the hall, and voters had to pass the gable end of the hall down a narrow walkway with a low fence on the other side. All day, a car containing a Tory helper sat at the entrance to the polling station. As the afternoon passed, the Tory candidate's supporters lined the fence, in my view to intimidate and harass Muslim voters. As mid-afternoon approached two Imam priests appeared, and even greater intimidation was apparent. Young boys tried to stick Conservative lapel badges on everyone who approached the polling station. One or two voters who turned up in cars got straight back in and left without voting.

An adjacent former medical centre was plastered in Tory posters, and stands carrying Tory posters were placed along the public footpath leading to the hall. We complained several times during the day to the chief returning officer and his staff and, to try and force the hand of either the police or the chief returning officer or both, my supporters were allowed to join the Tory supporters after 4 pm at the Emmanuel church hall polling station, but it made no difference. Two policemen merely came and went again without removing either my supporters or the Tory supporters, although we had asked them to remove everybody.

It was mayhem. In more than 30 years' campaigning in politics, I have never seen anything like what I saw at the Emmanuel church hall. Rules were blatantly abused, but the chief returning officer told me that he could take no action unless a voter complained. Many have, but only after the day and by letter. I forwarded the letters to the chief returning officer and have arranged to meet him in the next few days to discuss those matters further.

Voters should be allowed to approach and enter a polling station without being harassed by supporters of any political party. The key to that is to ensure a police presence all day—preferably at all polling stations and especially at general elections—to ensure that elections are conducted in as peaceful a manner as possible. The polling clerks are just too busy to be aware of what goes on outside their polling stations or even in the entrances. A code of conduct should be given to the candidates as well as the agents, so that they are all aware of which procedures are illegal and which are not. There is a grey area of the law to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South referred.

I hope that the Minister will ask his staff or the Electoral Commission to look at tightening the law, especially on harassment and intimidation of voters who are trying to get into a polling station. I realise that it is difficult. How can a householder be prevented from putting up a political party's posters in a window

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

immediately opposite a polling station? That is impossible. However, people can be kept away from the entrance to the polling station. Fortunately, I have a large majority and I was never in any danger of losing my seat. Imagine what would have happened had it been a marginal.

11.55 am

Norman Baker (Lewes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing the debate. In the immediate aftermath of the election it is right to review the conduct of that election in a constructive and non-partisan way. Like my colleagues I deplore the intimidation and harassment of voters wherever it occurs. As the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) rightly pointed out, we should also deplore any drift towards sectarianism in this country. Like other hon. Members I have been to Northern Ireland. We do not want the sort of system wherein people vote according to their religion, rather than according to the policies advocated by the candidates.

Compared with Bolton, South-East and Ilford, South, although perhaps not Orkney and Shetland, the campaign in Lewes was genteel and well behaved. I cannot produce reams of complaints about how candidates undertook the campaign. However, I should like to raise two issues arising from my constituency. The first—a pale shadow of the one in Ilford, South—is the campaign initiated by the Democracy Movement. That campaign was not unique to my constituency, but it was a strong campaign to denigrate my views on the pound and the euro. Surprising as it may be, my views were misrepresented; more to the point, they were misrepresented by means of a tabloid newspaper and other leaflets that were distributed during the election in a free newspaper. It was a high-quality insert and I have no doubt that the cost of producing and distributing that leaflet by means of piggybacking an existing newspaper will have been well in excess of £500.

The newspaper's objective was to help the Conservative candidate, although I do not think that the Conservatives had anything to do with it, or that the Conservative candidate knew about it or approved of it. Nevertheless, the objective was to return a Conservative rather than a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament. Mine was a marginal seat, but I am happy to say that my majority has significantly increased. However, had the issue of the euro taken off, that leaflet, which was reproduced in constituencies—especially ones represented by Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament—across the country could have been used to swing the results. Indeed, that was the intention.

We must look carefully at the rules that allow people outside political parties to produce literature that is designed to affect the result of an election. Political parties, by and large, stick to the rules on election expenses and everything else. People outside political parties, however, take a far more cavalier approach to such matters. The Government need to address that issue in the aftermath of the election.

The second issue is a minor one. My Conservative opponent and his agent tended to plaster county council verges with large Conservative posters. Occasionally, they put up posters without the permission of the householder, but that is another matter. I do not blame the Conservatives for trying it on. However, when people complained, East Sussex county council took the view that it did not want to get involved and that it was a matter for the political parties—it was quite happy for its verges to be covered by political posters. In the end the problem became so absurd that it had to get involved and one day it cleared them all away. That was completely the wrong tack for the council to adopt. It should have insisted from day one that any posters erected on its property be removed; instead, the posters were allowed to fester for weeks before action was taken.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) raised some important points, in the exceedingly quick time of only four minutes. He left no room for anything other than a clear interpretation of his remarks and I hope that we get an answer to the vital issue that he raised.

I turn to the important issue of postal voting, which has not so far been mentioned. I welcome the Government's introduction of sensible measures to encourage people to vote by making it easier to do so by post. It was particularly sensible and useful to reduce the deadline to only six days before polling day, from the absurdly long period that had applied before. However, I am concerned that unless preventive measures measures are adopted, the new rules will allow exploitation and, dare I say, fraud of the electoral system. It is legitimate to ask, after the election, how robust and secure our electoral system is.

I was concerned by a report on the "Today" programme during the election campaign, which hon. Members may have heard. The reporter Andrew Gilligan undertook a project in Torbay, which at the 1997 election was carried with a Liberal Democrat majority of 12 votes. He looked up the names of deceased voters in the back issues of the Torbay local paper, the *Herald Express* and, using an internet site, checked whether their names were still on the electoral roll. He made applications for votes to be delivered to the addresses of various "Today" programme staff around the country—an application for a postal vote need not be sent to the address where a voter is registered. By Monday, he had received seven ballot papers, which would have been enough to have changed the 1997 result had all those voters voted for the Conservative candidate. The same logic obviously applies to other seats and other parties.

I also draw the Minister's attention to an article in *The Guardian* written by Nick Davies, who happens to be a constituent of mine—some erudite people live in Lewes. The article drew attention to the issue of ghost voters and commented that there were no ghostbusters to deal with them. Nick Davies said that he had evidence that those who wanted to rig elections could find a derelict building, add a couple of extra houses to a street or use the addresses of a hostel or anyone else with a transitory population, adding false names and creating false votes.

The Minister should know about an incident that took place in Cornwall, in the constituency held by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). A Conservative supporter—on that occasion—helped 17 elderly electors fill in a form to apply for postal votes and then collected the forms to take to the council. That was

fine on the face of it, but without their knowledge the 17 elderly voters ended up applying for proxy votes, naming various people who were to vote on their behalf, all of whom turned out to be Conservative party workers. Some of those workers expressed astonishment when they were told the story; they had been in ignorance of the activity. That shows that the system of proxy voting is also open to abuse.

In marginal constituencies, such abuses can swing the result. The opportunity exists for Britain to get the reputation that America temporarily acquired after the presidential count in Florida. There should be a clamp-down on the use of proxy votes—indeed, now that we have better access to postal votes, I question whether proxy votes are necessary. We also need to ensure that postal votes are sent to the address where the voter is registered and not to any address that someone happens to pick out. We need checks to ensure that the register is accurate and does not contain ghosts, so that when people die they are removed from the register as soon as possible. Someone should be given the task of doing that to ensure that dead people's names cannot be used by someone else to vote. Much more has to be done in that respect.

I am also concerned about the arrangements at polling stations—not those to which the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East referred, although I accept that there is also a problem in that respect. I accept that it is possible—indeed, it happens frequently—for a person to give his name and address at a polling station, say that he has forgotten his polling card and to be given a vote none the less. The elector may or may not be known to the polling clerk; a person may have identified someone who never votes—a Jehovah's Witness, for example—and used that person's name and address to cast a vote unbeknownst to the person whose name and addressed has been used. We must clamp down on such practices: people who cannot produce their polling card at the polling station should be required, as they are not required at present, to show some other form of identification to verify their entitlement to vote under the name and address given. We in this country are in danger of becoming complacent about our system being free from exploitation and fraud. It is not.

On the matter of postal votes, I refer to a letter from constituents in Seaford who applied for a postal vote. The ballot was sent by the deputy returning officer in Lewes by first-class post on 25 May, but, according to a neighbour, it did not arrive until two days after my constituents went on holiday on 29 May, with the result that they lost their vote. How an election envelope that has to travel only nine miles by first-class post can take more than seven days to arrive is a matter for the Post Office to investigate.

There were postal strikes in some parts of the country and people who followed the procedures, who could reasonably expect to have voted, were disfranchised by the action or inaction of Post Office employees. It should be illegal to withhold postal ballot forms; if these are sent by post, it should be an absolute requirement on the Post Office to deliver them in a manner that is equivalent to recorded delivery to ensure that they arrive on time. If we encourage postal voting, it must not depend on the efficiency or inefficiency of a sorting office or a postman. The matter must be sorted out. People who apply for postal votes are entitled to expect them to arrive in good time to be able to vote, but that was not what happened last month.

The robust and secure nature of our electoral system is in question. We can be confident that it works better than most in the world, but there are opportunities for fraud, exploitation and abuse. I hope that the Government will consider, on a non-partisan basis, hon. Members' suggestions about how the system can be improved.

12.7 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing the debate. He expressed a great deal of frustration, which we can all understand. A leaflet that did not bear an imprint and that dealt with my views on hunting was distributed in my constituency. It is frustrating that legitimate candidates have limits on their expenditure and we are paranoid about breaking those limits: when people attack candidates or misrepresent their views, the first response is to produce a leaflet to refute what has been said, or to make telephone calls to that effect. However, if candidates are near to their expenditure limit, they cannot do that.

Another frustration is that if someone breaks the law, or comes close to doing so, there is precious little that can be done until the votes have been cast and the election is over. The most frustrating thing is that returning officers do not have much power and, as evidence cited in the debate shows, the Electoral Commission appears to be rather slow to respond. All parties should think about how such problems can be rectified far more quickly, because in a highly marginal seat they make a difference. It could even affect which party governs the country, although not at present, given the Government's majority. We are waiting for the Electoral Commission's report, when we shall no doubt have a fuller debate.

We were all disappointed with the turnout, but that is a political rather than a mechanical problem. There have been a number of experiments with local government, Sunday voting, postal votes for all and voting in supermarkets, but none has been a tremendous success. It is up to political parties to enthuse people to go to the polls. If we have more postal voting or proceed with voting by e-mail, the risk of fraud will be greater. I have always believed that it is good that people have to take the time to go to a polling station to cast their vote.

In general, I welcome the relaxation of the rules on postal voting, which seemed rather tightly drawn, given that the moment the election campaign started, people could not apply for votes. People can now apply towards the end of a campaign, and they generally received their postal ballot before election day, although there was concern about whether some received their ballots in time. The returning officer in Poole sent out a number of postal votes. Those who had registered early received their ballots early, and later applications were processed accordingly, which meant endless telephone calls from people saying that they were about to go away but had not received their ballot and asking when it would arrive. A provision in electoral law allows people to go back to a returning officer within four days of polling day and have

[Mr. Robert Syms]

a ballot re-issued, but if people are not sure what is going on and things are somewhat chaotic, that is bound to cause difficulty.

I agree with the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) that there is considerable scope for fraud. Inevitably, the system must be based on trust, but if BBC journalists go to Torbay looking for a story, they will probably find one. We probably cannot afford a copper-bottomed system whereby every postal vote is investigated. Nevertheless, as a nation, perhaps we should invest more in our democratic services and give local authorities a little more money to ensure that registers are up to date and the names of people who have died are removed from them as soon as possible.

There are several problems with a rolling register. It is fine as a concept, although it creates much more work for political parties in updating their registers and computers. Some local authorities are very quick to remove people from the register. During the campaign, we heard about people who were taken off the register immediately after they had written to their authority to say that they were moving and no longer paying council tax in the area, but before they were registered at their new address. Such people missed out at both ends, whereas under the former system the register was current and based on being in place in October. If people were not on the register for their new address, they could return to their former address and vote there, so some people are missing out with a rolling register.

I also want to mention the telephone preference service. In the previous Parliament, the Government tightened up on telephone canvassing, mainly because of people becoming annoyed with double-glazing salesmen. The Conservative party assures me that we stuck to the TPS rules and telephoned no one, although some of my colleagues said that they were not sure whether the Labour party followed suit. Perhaps the Minister will ensure that, if there are TPS rules—the Electoral Commission may have a view on that—they are rigidly enforced and all parties do the same thing.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South referred to the internet, which is fairly important. There are problems with controlling the internet, and the trading of votes is another issue. As we all know, an election agent must authorise expenditure. If some expenditure is not authorised and unfairness is involved, we will have to consider that. We should carry out a general review. We need to take another look at postal voting, because there is concern about possible fraud. In particular, we need to ensure that, if there is a later deadline, the Post Office has the resources to get the votes out and people are able to cast their vote. We are still learning with the rolling register, and a little more money may need to be invested to ensure its accuracy.

The hon. Gentleman made another very relevant point: third-party campaigns started because of animal rights or because people have taken a dislike to a Member of Parliament may be more of a feature in future. That is not a party political point: all parties and all MPs may at some point face that problem. The hon. Member for Ilford, South has done the House a service by raising the issue. It must be investigated seriously to ensure that attempts to skew election results by unfair means are not allowed. Our democracy must operate on the basis of fair and understandable rules so that we as political parties know what we are doing. The activities of third parties, particularly if they have a vendetta against an individual, must be nipped in the bud. We need a means of dealing with them when they are happening, not after an hon. Member has lost his constituency. Once the vote is counted and an hon. Member is returned it is far too late. We need some means of taking more immediate action or holding people responsible. It may mean having rather more draconian fines or perhaps disqualifying those who break the rules from voting.

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) on securing the debate. He made an intelligent and helpful speech. All contributions this morning were positive and assisted mature consideration of the lessons that we can learn from the election to ensure that our democracy works well. My hon. Friend clearly had particular reasons for raising the debate and he set them out forcefully. I would like to draw the debate to a close by referring to some wider issues, a number of which have been discussed this morning.

All who, like us, submit themselves periodically to the electoral process have an interest in the way in which that process operates. All hon. Members probably have stories of the electoral trail and the problems that have arisen. It is important for the health of democracy that we keep matters under review and resolve any problems. As hon. Members have said it is important to get things right before elections take place, rather than having to look at a result that has sadly gone awry. Each general election gives us an opportunity to examine its workings and to come up with ideas for improvement. Today's debate is a useful contribution to that process.

United Kingdom elections are generally pretty free and fair. That has not always been the case. I am reminded of the Sandwich election of 1881, when the two parties taking part sequestered no fewer than 160 public houses as committee rooms and the beer flowed freely throughout. Indeed, an enterprising early Thatcherite who was a bill poster in the town managed to obtain work for both parties: he put up posters up for one party during the day, tore them down at night and put up posters for the other party the following day and so on throughout the election. I am also reminded of the Southampton election in 1895, when the Conservative candidate, Sir Tankerville Chamberlayne, delighted electors by proceeding from the bottom of town to Southampton common in a cart drawn by six sturdy townsmen, throwing sovereigns out as he went.

We have advanced a little from such practices, but I do not want make light of what my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford, South and for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) have told us this morning. I am concerned by what I have heard of the campaign in Ilford, South and the incidents in Bolton, South-East. I condemn any dirty tricks in election campaigns. If hon. Members have been subjected to intimidation or unfair practices in the election, it is not acceptable.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South will forgive me if I do not go into the details of his allegations. First, I do not know enough about it to do so

sensibly. Secondly, the appropriate way to pursue allegations of illegal and possibly criminal practices is through the law. I note that he intends to continue his investigation and to pursue those responsible. In such circumstances, it would not be right of me to comment further at this stage, but I would be interested to learn of any conclusion to those inquiries. As he emphasised, whatever went on in the campaign in Ilford, South, it had no effect on the outcome—indeed, he was returned with a swing towards him that was greater than that in my constituency, where I did not have to face the tactics that he faced. One could say that his result demonstrates the backfiring of those tactics. People should draw a moral from that.

In broadening the debate, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) made a specific and succinct point about the status of voters who are European Union citizens but cannot vote in UK elections. The fact that the voter whom he mentioned may vote in Scottish parliamentary elections underlines his point, but the Scottish Parliament is not a national parliament in the same way as those represented in the EU. There is a reciprocal agreement among EU member that states who may vote in national elections: citizens of each country may vote in their own but not other countries' national elections. A change to that agreement would be required for that position to be altered and, as far as I understand, there are no plans to make such a change. Any change would have to apply throughout the EU.

Perhaps the most important recent change on elections was the establishment last November of the Electoral Commission. I should make it clear that the commission cannot mount prosecutions for illegal actions; those are a matter for the police. Local police also decide staffing levels at polling stations, and hon. Members will know that in several parts of the country the police take an active interest in ensuring that the polling stations are free and accessible to all citizens. It is a fundamental prerequisite of our election system that people should be able to go to the polling station and cast their vote without harassment.

The commission has several duties relating to electoral practices, party funding and the conduct of any future referendums. It is also responsible for keeping electoral law under review and promoting understanding of electoral and political matters. Internet campaigning and voting, and postal voting are topics that the commission might consider in the future. It is able to produce reports at the request of the Secretary of State. One of the commission's main duties is to prepare reports on elections and its report on this year's general election is being prepared, as hon. Members have mentioned. I understand that the report will be published in late July, and I am sure that we all look forward to seeing it. It is for the commission to decide what goes into its report, but I am sure that it will want to examine how recent election legislation has operated. Its recommendations remain to be seen, but I assure hon. Members that we will consider them carefully. We will also try to ensure that hon. Members have every opportunity to contribute their views once the report has been published.

Until the report is published, data that could inform the debate remain unavailable, but we can draw a few wider conclusions on how recent changes to electoral law have operated. More changes have been made to the law in the past year than have been made for decades, with two major pieces of electoral legislation going through the House recently: the Representation of the People Act 2000 and the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The former introduced a number of changes, including rolling registration, provisions to help people who are unable to register to vote—for example, the homeless and those without a fixed address—postal voting on demand and provisions to help disabled voters. The latter focused more on party funding, but it established the Electoral Commission whose report we await.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) made a number of specific points on how those changes in electoral law work and whether there is cause for concern about rolling registration, the widening scope of postal voting and the security of the voting system as a whole. I concur with the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) who said that the British electoral system works on the basis of trust and that people who are determined to get round the system will occasionally be able to do so. However, there is no overwhelming evidence of systematic breaches of electoral law although occasional lurid radio and television programmes have suggested that there is.

Considerable safeguards for rolling registration are in place. Accusations have been made that the new system makes it too easy to register and that people can be registered twice. However, electoral registration officers have the power to check applications carefully and to require more information if they have any suspicions before adding someone's name to the register. The application form asks for information about voters' previous addresses so that they can be removed from the register there. Voters can be registered in two places at once, particularly if there is a delay in passing information back to the electoral registrtion officer, but it remains an offence to vote twice and voters cannot be certain that they have not been removed from the old register.

In the run-up to the election, there was much publicity about postal voting and the potential for fraud. Much of that publicity was unhelpful, but it is important to consider our reaction to concerns, given that the increase in postal voting was one of the minor successes of the recent election. Many people took the opportunity of having a postal vote without having to provide a reason, and that helped them to cast their votes.

Mr. Syms: Is there likely to be any assessment of the number of postal votes that arrived after polling day? That would be useful information.

Dr. Whitehead: I am not sure whether the data upon which such an investigation could be mounted are available, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and let him known whether such data are available and, if so, what conclusions might be drawn.

In some areas, 30 per cent. of the electorate applied for a postal vote, and there were increases of between 5 and 10 per cent. in the number of people with a postal vote in several constituencies. That shows that we are giving the electorate what is wanted. Postal voting is popular and suits modern life styles. I am not sure that we could easily place too many additional safeguards on postal voting in the way described by the hon. Member for Lewes without

[Dr. Whitehead]

undermining a number of the gains that have resulted from postal voting. For example, it is difficult to require that postal votes must go to a specific named address or the home address of postal voters because part of the reason for people wanting postal votes is that they are away from home. Allowance must be made for the nomination of an address when the postal vote is sent out.

However, there are considerable safeguards surrounding postal votes, which have been available for a long time. Postal votes are not new; the current issue is that the number of postal votes is increasing. Voters cannot obtain postal votes unless they are registered to vote in the area in which they apply. They can return to a polling station in the constituency if they wish, but cannot, having been sent a postal vote, obtain another postal vote and so vote twice. It is always possible for someone to pretend to be a deceased person and obtain a vote. That has always been an incipient problem with the postal voting system, but there is no evidence that that is a widespread fraud. Of course, it is always important to be vigilant.

All Members of Parliament who are concerned about the operation of electoral law and the smooth running of elections should ensure that we are vigilant about how the system works. We have seen enormous changes in that system in the last few months and it is time for us to pause for a moment to take stock. We can do that with the advice of the Electoral Commission when its report is published.

Footpaths (North Yorkshire)

12.30 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am absolutely delighted to have secured this debate, but I speak with sorrow tinged with anger. I would like to express to the House the fear and anguish of the farming community in North Yorkshire and particularly in the Vale of York.

I accept that it is in everyone's interests to have accessible footpaths, especially when there is no foot and mouth disease. That has always been a priority for councils such as North Yorkshire county council, which happens to be Conservative-controlled. Nationally, 83 per cent. of all Conservative-controlled councils have accessible footpaths.

Since Easter, 800 footpaths or rights of way in North Yorkshire have been reopened. I accept that there is, as yet, no direct case of foot and mouth in the Vale of York, but it is poised all around us. We have had three contiguous culls and one suspect cull, the most recent from the outbreak at Danby Wiske. We see with horror that direct outbreaks in the whole county have now risen to 92, and they are pressing on all the frontiers of North Yorkshire's national parks. There are also outbreaks continuing at Settle and Hawes.

We are still, therefore, in the midst of a foot and mouth crisis. The Government's priority must be to eradicate the disease, and the Opposition will support them in that. Only when foot and mouth has been completely eradicated will visitors and walkers return to our rights of way and footpaths in comfort, and at the animals' safety.

The Government have recognised that. I have a letter from the Under-Secretary of State at the old Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which reached me on the day of the election. It says:

> "In the light of the revised veterinary risk assessment, we are recommending that local authorities for counties where there has never been a confirmed case of foot and mouth disease, or where a previous Infected Area has been lifted, should proceed rapidly to reopen all rights of way."

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): It might be helpful if I point out that the hon. Lady received a letter from me last week setting out the current position on the opening of footpaths.

Miss McIntosh: I am sure that the Minister will wish to respond to my remarks at length, but my point is this: it seems crazy that at the start of the crisis, when the disease was nowhere near North Yorkshire, all footpaths were closed, but now, when it is lapping at our doorsteps, the Government are planning to reopen them. That is what the National Farmers' Union has said, and it also pointed out that, while most footpaths will be reopened on 20 July, it has until Friday to apply for exemptions, which means that not all will be reopened. That is the crux of my argument.

Against that background, and at a time when not only parliamentary candidates but the same county councillors who had been asked to take a decision at the end of May to come into effect at the beginning of June were up for election, the rural taskforce—albeit under a different Department—put pressure on counties such as

North Yorkshire to reopen footpaths. The timing was appalling. I put it to the Minister that the Government behaved in an utterly irresponsible and inappropriate manner by putting unwarranted pressure on counties such as North Yorkshire in circumstances in which it was difficult for them to take a political decision.

I commend the cautious approach of North Yorkshire county council. I have a copy of the order that it issued, which the chief executive has explained to me. The council has made only one exemption. In a letter to me, the chief executive states:

"The order that has been made...means that all public rights of way in the designated area are now open with the exception of those that pass through outdoor pig units where the pigs are not protected by any physical barrier, such as a fence...The power to close public rights of way outside an infected area now lies with the Government and not with Local Authorities."

Thus it is timely that I have the opportunity to request two exceptions against the background that I have described. It is especially appropriate for the Government to reconsider their decision because cases of foot and mouth in North Yorkshire are increasing. As of yesterday, the number stood at 92. The Government's own criteria, which the then Under-Secretary set out in a letter that reached me only on 7 June, are being breached. As I said, it has been difficult to take a political decision.

The first case that I want to raise concerns a footpath in Tockwith. Tockwith parish council was consulted by North Yorkshire county council at the end of May and said categorically that it did not want the right of way to reopen. It wrote to the Prime Minister on 29 June in very strong terms, stating:

"The disease is now a very real threat to North Yorkshire and at the same time we are being ordered"—

I stress the word "ordered"—

"to reopen all footpaths.

The Council contends that the situation 'on the ground' is not what you think or have been led to believe.

The edict to reopen footpaths is seen as totally out of order, especially as the outbreaks get ever nearer by the day... The Parish Council urges you to give immediate thought to the plight of farmers and country people generally and adopt a cautionary principle in the reopening of footpaths throughout the County."

In her letter, the clerk to the council also notes:

"The Council considers that it is very short sighted to insist on reopening footpaths immediately when the County acted quickly"—

she means at the start of the outbreak—

"to close them for very good reasons."

I also have a letter from a practitioner. There are 45 veterinary practices in North Yorkshire, but not one was asked to validate the Government's advice. What has happened is a source of great anguish, stress, worry and concern for farmers and those who advise them.

The footpath in Tockwith passes within three miles of an infected area, with livestock—cattle and sheep, albeit not pigs—roaming freely. I requested one farmer whose land is involved to provide a map for today's debate. The pink line shows a bridleway and the blue ones show footpaths and rights of way, which are the subject of the order to reopen, with which the rural taskforce has insisted that North Yorkshire county council comply. The fields involved are immediately adjacent to those footpaths or bridleways, and cattle and sheep are loose and exposed to walkers.

Alun Michael: I intervene at this point—although I will explain the matter later—because people might be misled by the hon. Lady's statement. My understanding is that the nearest infected area is 12 miles away, to the west of Harrogate. I think that the hon. Lady is referring to the area of restrictions on the movement of animals, which is not the same thing.

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. Perhaps, the hon. Lady should not refer to maps or diagrams; it will make things extremely difficult for the *Hansard* reporters.

Miss McIntosh: I appreciate that, Mr. Cummings, which is why I have tried to explain that the fields are adjacent to either rights of way or bridleways. I accept what the Minister said, but the concern is that when the footpaths were closed, there was not one outbreak in North Yorkshire. Now that rights of way have been reopened, we have reached 92 cases and that figure is rising. I have no further diagrams to produce.

In the Secretary of State's opening statement to the House on foot and mouth two weeks ago, she said that animals and humans should not be in contact, to prevent any potential spread of disease.

I have a letter from a veterinary practice that serves one particular farm concerned about the situation. Having not been consulted, it took the opportunity to write to North Yorkshire county council in the following strong terms:

"It is with regret and disappointment that I learn that you may be opening footpaths through agricultural land that will now be heavily stocked with both cattle and sheep. Many of our clients (supported by 10 vets) are near financial collapse as a consequence of Foot and Mouth and they are 'the countryside.' Without them there will be no tourist industry."

He concludes:

"Do not allow a decision that will increase the risk of spread of this disease into otherwise clean areas."

I also have a letter from the Yorkshire Veterinary Society, which represents 115 vets in the county. It says:

"North Yorkshire with large areas of high animal density and an unpredictable pattern of FMD outbreaks has such a high risk of disease and potential for virus transmission that retaining the blanket ban on footpath closures is justified."

It concludes:

"For these reasons I ask that you actively oppose the removal of the closure of the rights of way which directly cross agricultural land or deer parks in North Yorkshire in order that all sectors of the rural community can concentrate on the aim of containing and eliminating the FMD virus which has been responsible for so much economic loss and emotional turmoil to all sectors of the countryside."

Another farm is at Crayke and I am happy to discuss with the Minister where that is found in relation to the nearest infected area. One farmer—whose name I shall not reveal because I do not have his permission—wrote to me saying:

"I am a farmer at the above address. My land goes from the farm onto Stillington-Easingwold Road. We have a right of way Public Footpath running from Stillington Road up our fields and through our farmyard going towards Crayke. With foot and

[Miss McIntosh]

mouth ever present the footpath was closed. They have now reopened the footpath but we have 50 cows on the grassfield grazing.

In the farmstead the walkers pass another 30 Heifers which are 6 metres away and also 40 metres away from 300 pigs. We are very worried about this, and we should have been consulted about its reopening. We do not think it should be reopened. We are writing to ask for your help in anyway to try and get it closed again."

That is the purpose of this morning's debate.

I believe that the Government are prepared to listen and, if my understanding of North Yorkshire county council is correct, we are in time to apply for a number of exemptions—in particular for the two footpaths at Tockwith and Crayke. I urge the Government to be sensible. Our priority must be to eradicate the disease and to help businesses that have suffered, whether they are in farming or in tourism. I make an emotional yet practical plea to the Minister to keep those footpaths closed and to make exemptions to the lifting of the blanket closures where appropriate. I specify that they should exclude not just footpaths that pass pigs, but ones that pass cattle and sheep. Let us put all possible Government resources into the eradication of the disease and keep walkers, with or without dogs, away from livestock until the disease is over. Then the walkers will return in comfort and safety, posing no further threat to livestock.

12.44 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I thank the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) for giving me the opportunity to punch home some very important messages on a very important issue. I recognise that she has genuinely held concerns about opening paths in her area, but I believe that those concerns are misplaced and hope that she will be reassured by what I have to say.

The hon. Lady rightly described the anguish of farmers, but she should also be aware of the anguish of many others whose businesses have been devastated and whose problems continue. Indeed, Conservative Members made that case during a debate in this Chamber yesterday, and I believe that the hon. Lady was present for at least part of that debate. They made the point strongly and were right to do so.

I should make it clear that powers were given to local authorities to impose blanket closures initially as a precautionary measure. My colleagues who were taking the decisions at that time moved fast to give local authorities a power which it was hoped and intended they would use effectively and responsibly, and the vast majority have done so.

As the hon. Lady referred to the views of the National Farmers Union and sought to paint the rural task force as some kind of ogre, I should point out that the NFU is represented on the taskforce.

Miss McIntosh: I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that not every farmer in North Yorkshire, or the country, is a member either of the NFU or the Country Landowners Association. The issue that is causing most concern is why the criteria have changed from the letter that I received on 7 June.

Alun Michael: Of course, it is no more true that every farmer is a member of the NFU than it is of any other representative organisation. However, the hon. Lady quoted the NFU in support of her position and I am making the point that the NFU is represented on the rural taskforce. Indeed, our meeting last week was an excellent run-through of the various issues that are affecting the countryside.

For the hon. Lady to suggest that any risk is involved is irresponsible unless she, or those who have written to her, can produce evidence. We are going on the available evidence, and we have given local authorities the opportunity to show cause, on the basis of their particular circumstances, for the blanket ban to remain. It must be for a reason, not for no reason at all.

Let me make it absolutely clear what the Government are not doing or proposing to do. We are not putting pressure on any local authorities—including North Yorkshire county council—to lift restrictions on paths where they are needed as a precautionary measure. I repeat those words: where they are needed as a precautionary measure. I assure the hon. Lady that we have no intention of taking action that would increase the risk of spread of disease. For instance, there is no question of our wanting to lift restrictions around disease hotspots or other areas where there have been recent outbreaks. However, that does not mean that footpaths and other public rights of way that are well away from those areas should remain closed.

Farmers are being issued with a video on biosecurity, which we have been publicising today. I have a copy here, which the hon. Lady may wish to view. We are not giving separate messages; we are conveying two very clear messages. On the one hand, we have to maintain tight biosecurity; on the other hand, we need to get visitors back to the countryside. I make it clear again that our top priority is to beat the disease. To that end, biosecurity is essential, especially on the part of farmers and others who work in close contact with animals, because the vets tell us that that is the main way in which the disease is spread. Farmers need to take stringent precautions because they are far more likely than most people to have been in contact with foot and mouth disease without knowing it.

However, we urgently need to get visitors back to the countryside if many small country hotels, shops and many other businesses are not to go out of business. That means allowing people to walk where it is safe to do so, given that the vets' advice is that the risk that walkers will spread the disease is very small.

In that context, I shall underline the advice that is being given. If one has handled cattle, sheep, goats or pigs in the past seven days, please stay off all other farmland. Do not go near and never touch, handle or feed livestock. If walkers unexpectedly come across livestock, they are advised to move away slowly and, if necessary, retrace their routes. Keep dogs on short leads where there are livestock, do not leave waste or litter, stay on the path, leave all gates as one finds them, use disinfectant where provided and start one's walk or ride with clean equipment, footwear and clothing. If people are walking in the countryside, they should clean their boots in particular and other clothing before they undertake another walk. That is a straightforward piece of advice, which I, as a walker, certainly obey.

Government guidance to local authorities is clear and the latest veterinary evidence supports it. With the exception of paths on infected premises and on land within a 3 km radius of them, there is generally no reason for keeping paths shut—provided that people follow the sensible precautions that I have just underlined. The veterinary advice makes it clear that the risk of users of rights of way spreading disease is minimal while the continued closure of footpaths is devastating to the rural economy.

In North Yorkshire, 20 per cent. of the path network has been reopened to public access as at 29 June. That is reviewed every week, and we shall have the latest figures on Thursday. When I receive them I shall write to the hon. Lady to tell her what they show. Due to the concentration of foot and mouth disease cases, the figures for reopened footpaths in the Yorkshire dales and North Yorkshire Moors national park are significantly lower, being 1 per cent. and 8 per cent. respectively. She referred to the specific case of a footpath near Tockwith being reopened when it is within three miles of an infected area. My information is that the nearest infected area to Tockwith is some 12 miles, or 19 km, away, to the west of Harrogate. The nearest infected premises are more than 20 miles, or 30 km, away.

The hon. Lady may have in mind the Settle movement control area, the eastern edge of which runs along the A1 not far from Tockwith. However, that is concerned with restrictions on the movement of animals, rather than people. Controls on livestock movements are of necessity much stricter than for users of footpaths, as the risk of disease transmission through animals is much higher and they cover wider areas.

Some people ask why the Government are so keen to reopen footpaths. The answer is simple: closed paths have been taken as a signal that the countryside as a whole is closed to visitors and the much-needed custom that they bring to local rural businesses. People feel uncertain about visiting an area if they are told that the footpaths are closed. Equally, if they do visit, they are likely to feel uneasy if they see hundreds of closed signs. We need to ensure that, wherever it is safe to do so, paths are open and that people know that.

Simple communication with the public about what is open is absolutely crucial. That is why I announced on 21 June that I am considering whether all or most of the remaining blanket closures imposed by local authorities at the start of the outbreak can now be lifted. That does not mean that authorities will no longer be able to close footpaths. They will still have powers to close paths on a selective basis where that is justified. That will apply particularly to paths within 3 km of infected premises. That is again a precautionary measure that covers a larger area than is required by the evidence because, as the hon. Lady encouraged us to do, we are taking a precautionary approach.

Miss McIntosh: What concerns me greatly is this letter which came out in the name of the former Under-Secretary of State, but was signed by his private secretary. It stated that footpaths should not be opened where there is a confirmed case of foot and mouth or where a previous infected area has been lifted. Only where there has been no case or where it has been lifted should a footpath be reopened. Is the Minister telling us today that that was never Government policy and that the private secretary went off on a frolic of his own, or is he telling us that the policy has changed and where there are rising cases of foot and mouth they are happy to reopen rights of way?

Alun Michael: I am telling the hon. Lady that she is a bit muddled. She has been talking about an infected area that was not an infected area. The advice about what to do in relation to a case or an infected area is clear, and I have just detailed the powers that are available to local authorities.

Perhaps I should underline the fact that we have written to the chief executives of all local authorities and national park authorities in England, explaining the proposal to revoke remaining blanket closures, because we recognise that for those authorities worst hit by foot and mouth disease, revoking blanket closures could pose serious logistical problems; in some cases it might mean having to close and re-sign some hundreds of footpaths. We have, therefore, invited local authorities to make representations if they wish to retain the blanket closure for some or all of an area. I assure the hon. Lady that I shall consider such requests carefully, and aim to make decisions by 13 July with revocation a week later. The summer holiday period, which will be rushing towards us at that point, is a very important time for tourism and for rural businesses generally.

I am pleased to say that a number of local authorities have already voluntarily revoked their own blanket closures. By 29 June, 68 per cent. of all paths across country areas were open. Lifting the remaining blanket closures, wherever possible, will help to clarify which paths are open and which closed. It is important that people using the footpaths in the countryside know what precautions they should take in order to reduce even further any chance of spreading foot and mouth disease.

I hope that the hon. Lady and other colleagues will send out the clear message that the countryside is open and that walkers should be responsible in the way in which they use they countryside. That is a matter of responsibility and co-operation. I draw to the hon. Lady's attention the fact that the Ramblers Association has been strongly critical of the county councils' statutory duty work on rights of way. Those are local matters, but I am sure that the hon. Lady will examine that particular one with interest.

Our priority is to eradicate the disease. At the same time we must bear in mind the legitimate interests and concerns of the many rural businesses that depend on visitors to the countryside. We must continue to encourage people to enjoy the countryside in all the areas where that can be done with little or no risk of the spread of disease. We endorse the need to keep paths open where the risks justify it. There is no reason why the majority of the countryside should not be well and truly open by the summer holidays.

There is a danger of muddling people, and the hon. Lady might have contributed to the muddle. The position is clear, and it is based on veterinary advice. I hope that she will go from here reassured and a great deal clearer about the twin objectives of ensuring that everything is done to eradicate and defeat foot and mouth disease, and of giving hope and opportunity to rural businesses so that they can re-establish themselves, and their economy can recover.

[Alun Michael]

There is a risk of giving out the wrong messages, and there is still a great deal of risk to rural businesses, which can be affected by the opening of footpaths. One example is that of a hotel that retained a lot of bookings, despite foot and mouth, because people were going to that area in the knowledge that they would not be able to walk. However, as the opportunity to walk in other areas increased, that already-damaged business experienced cancellations because people were going to places where footpaths were open. We must bear in mind the great difficulties being experienced by many businesses. Some of them are farmers, or involved in agriculture as part of their activity, but some of them are entirely dependent on tourism for their livelihood.

I very much hope that the hon. Lady will join me in getting a balanced message across to everybody concerned, and reassuring farmers about the Government's balanced and responsible approach.

Independent Insurance Company

1 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I remind the Chamber that I am an associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute and I am a chartered insurance practitioner. As such, although I no longer make my living in the financial services industry, I declare an interest in the subject of this debate.

On 14 June this year, Independent Insurance Company Ltd., the main subsidiary of Independent Insurance Group plc, a listed insurer on the London stock exchange, ceased writing new business. Four days later, PricewaterhouseCoopers was appointed as provisional liquidator, and approximately 600,000 policyholders found that their insurer, their line of last resort, had gone belly up.

My hon. Friend the Minister will undoubtedly want to assure the House that the Policyholders Protection Board will provide compensation up to 90 per cent. of the value of their proven claim of those private individuals who insured with Independent. She should point out that PricewaterhouseCoopers, as the provisional liquidator, concluded a deal with Royal and SunAlliance on 23 June, whereby that company would take over the policies of more than 250,000 Independent clients, the overwhelming preponderance of whom are private individuals from Independent's councils and tenants book of business.

Those clients transferred to Royal and SunAlliance will receive 100 per cent. of their proven claims and Royal and SunAlliance will claim that back from the Policyholders Protection Board. Those personal policyholders will continue to make their claims from Independent in the normal way as the liquidators have retained many claims staff. In my discussions yesterday with Mr. Dan Schwarzman of PricewaterhouseCoopers, he assured me that he was looking for other insurance carriers that would take over the policies not covered by the Royal and SunAlliance deal. The Policyholders Protection Board will also pay 100 per cent. of claims by companies where insurance is compulsory; hence third party motor insurance and employers' liability claims will be met in full.

I have sought to establish the above not only because it is of considerable interest to those companies and individuals affected, but as a way of ground clearing. I have long since discovered that the best way of getting a Minister to focus on the points that one wants answered in an Adjournment debate is to mention all those important, but perhaps distracting, issues that civil servants would otherwise use to pad out the Minister's reply. No self-respecting Minister would want to parrot back even the worthiest of points and I trust that, with those issues out of the way, we can move to the critical questions that the industry must have answered about the regulations in the case.

I suggest a note of caution about the Royal and SunAlliance deal concluded by the liquidators and any others that may be in the pipeline. In an interview on the BBC's "Money Box" programme, Blythe Morris, a director of Royal and SunAlliance, claimed:

"We did not pay anything for this business."

If that were the case, we must question why the liquidators, whose sole function is to liquidate the assets of Independent, agreed to the transfer of the policies.

I raised that point with PricewaterhouseCoopers yesterday, only to be told that, although it was bound by commercial confidence, it was confident that the arrangement was mutually beneficial to Independent's creditors and Royal and SunAlliance.

I come to my questions. First, the Minister will be aware that a provisional liquidator is answerable to the court rather than to a board of creditors. Will she press the liquidator, and Royal and SunAlliance, to agree to complete transparency about the deal so that all creditors may be assured that it is in their interest? Secondly, if the deal entails the transfer of more than 250,000 policies to Royal and SunAlliance, and if part of the benefit to creditors is that the administration and notification of policyholders is effected and paid for by Royal and SunAlliance, will she ensure that no policyholder details are transferred to Royal and SunAlliance in a manner that would breach the Data Protection Act 1998? My intention is not to prevent the Royal and SunAlliance deal from taking effect; I believe that it probably is in the creditors' interest. My point is to ensure that the Treasury highlights such cases to Department of Trade and Industry Ministers to see where the current data protection legislation may act against the public interest.

Since 1 January 1999, the Treasury's regulatory functions under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 have been contracted to the Financial Services Authority. It falls to the Minister to determine the exact date of N2, as it is known, when the full powers under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 devolve to the FSA. However, her predecessor stated on the record that that would be no later than November. Although this is clearly a time of transition in the regulation of the market, I know my hon. Friend too well and trust her integrity too much to think that she would seek to hide behind the cloak of that changing relationship with the FSA.

If the FSA failed in its regulatory function as a result of internal incompetence, the Treasury has a responsibility to discipline—and perhaps also to replace—those responsible for that incompetence. If the FSA failed through structural incapacity, the Treasury, as the author of that structure, must accept its responsibility to examine how best it might change that structure to ensure that regulatory failings do not happen again.

It will not have escaped the Minister's attention that that argument is based on a condition. If the FSA failed, it did so either through incompetence or through structural weakness. That leads to my third question: does the Minister consider that the FSA failed in the exercise of its regulatory function in relation to Independent? If she answers yes, my fourth question is: what corrective measures does she propose to take? If she does not know, my fifth question becomes clear: will she agree to establish an investigation to ascertain whether the Financial Services Authority failed in its regulatory function in that respect? I must warn the Treasury that it will not do to say that it cannot undertake such an investigation for fear of prejudicing the investigations conducted by the Serious Fraud Office or the FSA. It is clear that the Treasury would not undertake such an investigation into the Independent Insurance Company. I, on the other hand, urge the Minister to consider an investigation into the FSA itself.

The Minister could answer no and proclaim her satisfaction with the way in which the FSA discharged its regulatory role in relation to Independent. If she did so, she would find herself in the company of Peter Casey, John Whitlock and John Tiner—the new managing director—from the Financial Services Authority, with whom I spent two hours in dialogue over coffee on Monday. They agreed to meet me at short notice, and I am grateful to them for their courtesy and patience in answering what must have seemed a barrage of irksome and unwelcome questions. They were keen to impress on me that the FSA was not beset by any structural incapacity. Mr. Tiner confirmed:

"We broadly do have the powers we need to regulate the market properly."

He may not have realised that that only propelled me more surely to the first alternative conclusion—there must have been internal incompetence in the FSA. Mr. Tiner and his colleagues explained that they were contracted by the Treasury to

"monitor solvency"

and to make an

"assessment of fit and proper persons".

I asked the FSA people how they monitored solvency. The answer was staggering. Mr. Casey told me:

"We rely on information provided by management regarding solvency."

At that point, I asked him to speak slowly, so that I could be sure not to misunderstand or misrepresent him. I wrote down his words:

"We have relied on auditors as far as the veracity of underlying data is concerned."

Do we really pay £232 million each year to run the Financial Services Authority, so that it can rely on auditors appointed and paid by the company that the FSA is supposed to be monitoring? The Minister should note that that was not my sixth question, but a purely rhetorical question designed to express my frustration at the FSA's complacency. Clearly the cautionary words, "When in a hole, stop digging", were unfamiliar to Mr. Casey, as he continued to answer my specific inquiries by confirming that the FSA relied on the auditors on matters such as

"that claims are properly booked and that the directors have appropriately reserved both for booked and as yet unquantified claims.".

At that point, I wanted to ask Mr. Casey whether he had ever heard of a company called Independent Insurance at which £62 million of claims had not been booked and at which the comfort level reported by external actuaries had declined markedly over three years. I refrained. I felt that irony might not be Mr. Casey's strongest suit.

I hope that the Minister will join me in welcoming the decision by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales to undertake its own investigation into the involvement of its members in the demise of Independent Insurance. Will she undertake to examine the results of that investigation carefully with a view to ending the over-close relationships that certain accountancy firms enjoy with the companies that they audit?

An audit does not usually go into sufficient detail to uncover mismanagement. Materiality considerations lead to audits missing anything but the biggest gaping

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

holes. Problems are explained away or seen as an opportunity to sell a consultancy project. Auditors do not usually see themselves as individuals whose role is to maintain a statutory regulatory framework set down by law. In reality, auditors face a huge conflict of interest. Audit is a loss-making business, and in order to earn money from a client, auditors need to sell consulting work. Highlighting accounting problems does not ingratiate an auditor to management, and that is an obvious conflict of interest.

Auditors uphold the law and are required to be independent. Solutions may involve the building of legally required Chinese walls and restrictions on internal communication, as with investment banks. When the ICAEW report is eventually produced, will the Minister consider putting in place a framework that ensures that there is a far less cosy relationship between auditors and their clients?

The Minister will be aware that KPMG is reported to have received £1,567,000 from Independent Insurance for its auditing and consultancy work this year. In March, it reported that the company had

"adequate resources to continue its operations for the foreseeable future."

By June, Independent had no foreseeable future. It was in liquidation. The Minister may share my view that the first call on that £1,567,000 might be for KPMG to get its corporate eyes tested. The Minister will also be aware that the last set of audited accounts showed that the group had £1.4 billion of gross liabilities against assets of £1.7 billion. Within two months of that assessment, the external actuaries, Watson Wyatt, had discovered that the company faced unquantifiable losses and the total scale of its gross liabilities could not be quantified.

My seventh question to the Minister is: will she join me in calling on the Institute of Actuaries to conduct its own investigation into the role of its members in the collapse of Independent Insurance?

I have been sidetracked from the FSA. Monitoring solvency is only one of the two functions of the regulator. We need to look at the FSA's role in the assessment of fit and proper persons. Schedule 2A to the Insurance Companies Act 1982 lays out the criteria that the regulator must use to ensure than an insurance company is managed in a sound and prudent manner. The criteria include that each manager and director

"is a fit and proper person"

and that there are

"a sufficient number of persons who are fit and proper persons"

to manage the company. How does the FSA decide whether someone is a fit and proper person? At this point in my questioning of the trinity from the FSA, I made a cardinal mistake—I tried humour. I joked that, at least in assessing whether someone was a fit and proper person, it was not possible to rely only on the information provided by the management. Deadpan, Mr. Casey replied:

"We would normally only procure external information if we already had some reason to doubt the fitness or properness of a person."

When a person has a guard dog, it is good to know that it has teeth. However, it is equally important to establish whether it has a sense of smell, some eyes and some ears. The FSA claims to have the power and controls that it requires. However, if it is totally incapable of undertaking a proactive inquiry, the wonder is not that the Independent Insurance Company collapsed, but that we do not have many more such failures on our hands.

I pressed the FSA further on that, as I seemed to be mining an extremely productive vein. I asked what might constitute a reason to doubt the fitness or properness of a person, which triggers the decision to procure external information. I was told that an example might be if the person had previously been associated with a failing company. I asked how the FSA might know if a person had previously been associated with such a company. I was told—without a hint of embarrassment—that the FSA would know that if the person had filled in its form correctly.

I am sure, Mr. Cummings, that you will find it as comforting as I do to know that the regulatory body for the insurance industry will procure external information if a director has been associated with a failed company in the past and that such information would determine the fitness and properness of that person. The FSA would primarily establish that by looking at its form, which the person filled in, assuming that he or she had filled it in correctly.

The argument is not just circuitous, but circular. I asked Mr. Casey whether he had heard of Lombard Continental Insurance Company, which was once run by Mr. Michael Bright, Independent's chief executive. I asked him whether he was aware of the insurance solvency international report, which found that Lombard was non-viable because of under-resourcing. He responded by saying that the ISI report was published after the flotation of Independent. I pointed out to him that the report was undertaken in 1983, some 10 years previously, and had been shared with the chairman and one other director of Independent as early as 1985. Mr. Casey did not know that.

Section 45(1) of the 1982 Act gives the FSA powers to limit premium income, to address poor internal controls and, primarily, to obtain information about such matters as internal controls. I asked Mr. Casey whether he had ever exercised those powers in full, on the grounds that it would appear that the criteria of sound and proper management of a company had not been observed. He replied that he did not know, and that he would do that only if other powers proved inappropriate.

The FSA made it clear that it did not feel that that was appropriate. I believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant. Only by ensuring that it is common knowledge that such powers are exercised—some of them regularly—can the market draw conclusions on whether their use is a routine matter or whether it betokens something more serious. Mr. Casey told me that, if such instances were publicised, market confidence would be undermined. It would be undermined a good deal less than it was by the collapse of the Independent Insurance Company.

1.20 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on securing the debate. The

Government understand the concerns that he has raised. We appreciate the anxiety of former employees of Independent who have lost their jobs and of policyholders who are waiting for claims to be paid.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Some of my constituents were clients of the Independent Insurance Company. They suffered a severe fire in their home and were assured that, up to and including 15 June, claims for the restitution of their home would be met in full and their hotel accommodation costs would be paid. They then discovered that, because their policy was classed as commercial, they were at the bottom of the pay-out hierarchy.

Those who look out for policyholders in that situation could not offer them any joy. PricewaterhouseCoopers has said that it can do nothing. Since such commercial policies were the core business of Independent—they sold block pensions to residents of private blocks of flats, which are mainly conversions—some pressure should be put on them to bring my constituents' claims higher up the hierarchical list.

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I will investigate the issue and write to her on that subject.

I would like to set out some background. Independent Insurance Company Ltd. was formed from a buy-out of Allstate Insurance Company Ltd. from its previous owners in 1987. It is the main subsidiary of Independent Insurance Group plc, a listed insurer on the London stock exchange. Independent wrote general insurance and re-insurance business, mainly covering liability, property, motor and other insurance for the commercial and personal lines sector.

On 8 February this year, Independent Insurance Group warned that last year's profits would be about £20 million below the market expectations of about £70 million. The main reasons cited were poor results in the French operation and a need to increase further re-insurance cover on the London market and provincial liability accounts. That news caused Independent's share price to fall 23 per cent. As a result, it was announced at the annual general meeting in April that Michael Bright had resigned as chief executive.

The group company's shares were suspended on 11 June. A subsequent announcement stated that a planned rights issue had been abandoned, and the shares remained suspended. Following further work, on 17 June, the directors of the company took the advice to appoint provisional liquidators.

The Serious Fraud Office announced that it would investigate events at the company, following a referral by the FSA on 18 June. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the affairs of Independent while there is an investigation in progress. I believe that it is important to protect both the investigation and those who are being investigated. We cannot prejudge the outcome, and it would be unfair to do so.

The Financial Services Authority, which regulates insurance companies, had been in close touch with the company during the period leading up to the announcement in June. The FSA is now keeping in close touch with the provisional liquidator, the Serious Fraud Office and the Policyholders Protection Board and is monitoring the situation carefully. The FSA is considering, with the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, whether any further investigations are necessary.

I shall attempt to cover some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North. In particular, he raised the issue of the transfer of policies to Royal and SunAlliance. No payment was involved in the transfer and Royal and SunAlliance will take responsibility for the paying and administering of reporting outstanding claims. As I understand it, the proposal will mean that the policyholders who are transferred to RSA will have seamless cover. All claims will be paid in full, even when the Policyholders Protection Board will provide compensation only to 90 per cent. Clearly, that is a good outcome for policyholders. Given that there was no payment involved, my hon. Friend asked in particular about the confidentiality of arrangements between Royal and SunAlliance and the provisional liquidator. Unfortunately, I must tell him that I am not in a position to press for further transparency on the details of the claim, as it is up to the courts to determine whether to provide that information. The provisional liquidator takes his authority from the court, and not from the FSA, and is entitled to keep the details of the arrangements confidential.

My hon. Friend is also concerned about the confidentiality of personal details relating to policyholders and whether the transfer might breach the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. As I understand it, when policyholders give their consent for the deal to take place, they are also giving their consent for their policy details to be transferred. No breach of the Data Protection Act would occur under those circumstances.

My hon. Friend questioned the reliance of the FSA on auditors for basic facts. Without a major increase in resources, which would allow the FSA to duplicate the efforts of auditors who are currently in place, it would be impossible for it to take on that work.

Mr. Gardiner: I am aware that it would be impossible for the FSA to duplicate the function of auditors. However, my hon. Friend will be aware that other regulatory systems, such as those in America, give the regulator the capacity to send in teams of auditors when it feels that such external independent work is needed. Will she consider incorporating that in the powers of the FSA?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. However, the United States has 10,000 insurance regulators, and is therefore in a different position from that of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend also raised the point about asking the Institute of Actuaries to investigate the actuaries involved in the case. That is a matter for the professional body itself. The actuaries received specific confirmation from the independent management that they were given full and accurate data.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): More generally, when this matter occurred, the director of enforcement of the FSA had recently moved to another job and no one was even in charge of the unit

[Mr. Howard Flight]

that is supposed to monitor potential collapse and fraud. Does the Economic Secretary agree that the FSA might usefully increase its focus on and prioritisation of this territory?

Ruth Kelly: Clearly, the FSA will be considering its response to this area. However, the current priority is the Serious Fraud Office investigation. That must be got right before we determine what other reviews may be necessary.

My hon. Friend asked me to consider whether the FSA had failed in regulating the Independent Insurance Company. I re-emphasise the fact that we must ensure that the fraud investigation is conducted first. We shall keep in close contact with the FSA to ascertain what else needs to be done.

I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate and I am grateful for the opportunity to answer at least some of the points that he raised.

Secondary Education (Bradley Stoke)

1.30 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It is tempting to begin by observing that a debate on secondary education in Bradley Stoke might set a world record for brevity among Adjournment debates, because there is no secondary education in Bradley Stoke. That will be the thrust of my argument today.

Bradley Stoke is one of the largest—some say the largest—housing estate in Europe. It has 9,000 houses and more are still being built, as anyone driving through the estate will see. A lay person viewing the development would wonder how it was possible that, after 10 years, such an area could have not only no secondary school, but no prospect of securing one for several years to come. As we move through the inevitable technicalities, I hope that we shall not lose sight of the lack of common sense involved in building so many houses with no sign of a secondary school.

Bradley Stoke crosses parliamentary boundaries; it is represented by me and the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith), who will be trying to catch your eye to make a brief contribution, Mr. Cummings. I am grateful to South Gloucestershire council for the brief supplied to us and to the Minister. I congratulate the Minister on his appointment and wish him well in his new job.

I shall start by answering my own question about how a huge housing development could have been built without a secondary school. The dreadful term "surplus places" lurks over much of the period. In crude terms, local authorities are not permitted to build new schools while empty places are available in existing schools. The real position is slightly more complicated, but that is the gist of the problem. Although it has been painfully apparent for many years that Bradley Stoke would need a secondary school, surplus places in other secondary schools prevented the local authority from proceeding with the construction of a new one.

Those surplus places have now gone. For 2002, the local authority predicts a shortfall of 283 places, and for 2003, a shortfall of 459. Thus the argument about surplus places no longer applies. In any case, the notion of surplus places is problematic. It has always been apparent that Bradley Stoke would need a secondary school. The fact that places were available in schools outside the immediate area—I stress that I make no criticism of such schools—could not disguise the obvious need for a new secondary school. It would have been better if work had started on the new school some years ago; it might then have been up and running when places were needed. Instead, there is a lag and a crisis. We realise that there is a problem, and only then do we set about redressing it. I hope that the rules about surplus places can be changed, perhaps for other fast-growing areas, so that these problems do not arise again.

What are the problems in South Gloucestershire and Bradley Stoke as we look ahead to providing a secondary school in the area? The first is that the authority faces a huge backlog in school maintenance and repair. The authority estimates the figure to be £94 million. The figures are inevitably speculative, but the backlog is huge.

South Gloucestershire came into being in 1995 and started to set about tackling the backlog, but it is an uphill struggle and trade-offs have to be faced. A large capital investment in one big new secondary school could pre-empt much-needed spending on the maintenance of other secondary and primary schools and, indeed, spending on the authority's other capital projects. South Gloucestershire could raise capital and blow it all on a school for Bradley Stoke; many of us would like to see that, but it would pre-empt many of the authority's other urgent capital needs.

The second problem is the lack of capital from developers. The developers made lots of money from building all the houses, so why do they have no cash to put towards the school? The answer is that the predecessor local authority that gave permission for the houses secured sites in the area for schools but no capital contributions for them. In recent years, South Gloucestershire council has been far more effective at obtaining capital contributions, and some money has been found. However, it inherited a legacy of not receiving capital from developers, which is a genuine problem.

The third key problem is that, on revenue, South Gloucestershire council is grossly underfunded. People might wonder about the connection between revenue underfunding and capital expenditure, but it is intimate. I often hear debates in this Chamber in which hon. Members say that their authority is the worst funded. They usually mean the worst-funded county council. South Gloucestershire is the worst-funded local education authority.

As I have said previously, someone has to be at the bottom of the pile. I am not suggesting that we should be at the top of the pile, but the relative ranking of authorities must be fair, and the discrepancy between the amount that South Gloucestershire council receives and the amount that many other authorities receive is huge and unjustifiable. It is made much worse by the population growth that the area has faced. As the Minister may be aware, the statistics used to calculate school numbers are terribly out of date by, on average, about 18 months. I have challenged Ministers on the matter previously, and they have said how difficult it is to acquire up-to-date information. I have offered to type the numbers in myself if it would help the process. In the age of the internet and technology, it should not be difficult to count the number of children in schools at present rather than use out-of-date data. As a result, the authority not only receives less per head per child but does not even receive money for every child in the school. In south Gloucestershire, the difference between the number of children in our schools and the number that the Government use for funding is the equivalent of an entire primary school, whom we educate not for below average but for nil. We receive no money for those children, because the figures are so out of date and the population is rising rapidly. That system must be changed.

Why does it matter that we have a secondary school? There are currently 129 year 6 children in Bradley Stoke's five primary schools, with a sixth primary school coming on stream. This autumn, those 129 children will all go to schools outside their community. There are 140 year 5 children for 2002. As there is no chance of a school by then, they will all have to go out of the area. There are 174 children in year 4 for 2003. Almost certainly, all will have to go outside the area.

Bradley Stoke is already a car community, with huge dependence on the private car and a great deal of traffic and congestion. For that reason alone, a secondary school in Bradley Stoke would improve quality of life, reduce congestion and slightly reduce dependence on the car. Far more than that, a secondary school would give much more of a sense of community to Bradley Stoke. Bradley Stoke is trying to build a sense of community, but it has limited facilities that have taken a long time to come, and a secondary school could cement the community like nothing else.

Will we get one? How could we pay for a secondary school in Bradley Stoke? The Government could allow the council to borrow the money, but they would allow it to borrow only about half the cost of a secondary school. The council estimates that it would be allowed to borrow about £6 million towards the cost of about £12 million of a new secondary school. The balance would have to be found from capital resources, which would have to come from wiping out all other capital expenditure in the authority in terms of using capital receipts. It is difficult to envisage how that could be achieved. I endorse one of the authority's pleas: I ask the Government not to give the council money, but merely to allow it to borrow a realistic amount towards the cost of building a school.

People will say, "Well, perhaps they thought that the Government gave the council money to build the school. Well, all right, they can borrow it, but why not let the council borrow a realistic amount, rather than merely half the cost of the school, especially when capital is so tight because of the failure of previous councils to get capital contributions from developers?" A decent amount of borrowed money and, perhaps, some additional capital expenditure by the council could mean that a school could be built relatively quickly, but at the moment that does not seem realistic.

The only other obvious route is the private finance initiative, which would probably involve not only Bradley Stoke but all secondary schools in the authority's area, and possibly some primary schools, too. It means tendering across the European Union and yet more delay.

The critical point about the private finance initiative is that the amount that the Government will let the authority pay the private contractor may not be what the private contractor will charge the council; there may be a shortfall. A well-funded authority could cover some of that shortfall from a generous standard spending assessment settlement, but one that was already spending way above the SSA—it may be crippled by having the worst SSA settlement in the country—could not countenance going into a long-term commitment in which it had to make up a shortfall year in, year out. That is where revenue funding and capital funding come together.

Bradley Stoke has urgently needed a secondary school for some years. We could all see the problem coming, yet for various reasons—rules about surplus places and about capital funding—it will be years before we get that school. During the general election, the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West and I were approached

[Mr. Steve Webb]

by parents in Bradley Stoke who said, "I have a 10-year-old. Surely he and my nine-year-old will have a school in our community." I had to say, "If you are lucky, your eight-year-old might, but by then your 11-year-old will have been sent out of the community to school, so you will be taking your children to two different schools." I did not feel comfortable giving that answer. That is why I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue early in the new Parliament.

I look forward to a constructive response from the Minister. I hope that he will appreciate the common-sense problem. Parents are likely to have to send their children to school out of the area for years to come, largely because arcane rules made under this and previous Governments have resulted in an extraordinary situation.

I hope that the Minister will be willing to receive a delegation led by the two local Members of Parliament, including local councillors and representatives of the local education authority, to express anxieties about the area in more detail. I hope that we shall be able to work together to achieve something that is long overdue and that will benefit everyone in Bradley Stoke: a good secondary school and a sense of community.

1.41 pm

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North-West): I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on securing this timely and appropriate debate and my gratitude to him for allowing me to contribute to it. I support the hon. Gentleman's request to the Government to treat the issue of a new secondary school for Bradley Stoke as a special case.

Bradley Stoke is a large, private housing development that has grown remarkably in recent years, and continues to grow. Unfortunately, as the hon. Gentleman said, some planning decisions taken by South Gloucestershire's predecessor local authorities, Northavon and Avon county councils, were less than inspired. More and more houses have been built in the area, but the provision of essential services has lagged behind. It is relevant to the debate that, when agreements were reached with developers, the former Avon local education authority secured sites for schools but no capital contribution towards building costs.

There is a clear case now for building a secondary school in Bradley Stoke. Projections show that it will be needed in the next two or three years. The only matter that troubles me, apart from securing finance to build it, is its possible effect on surrounding schools, especially on Filton high school, which has high standards and has recently been the recipient of capital investment. It is important to build on and protect that investment and I know that South Gloucestershire council will phase in the new school sensitively.

I make no comment on the general use of PFI, but in this instance it is clear that developing a satisfactory PFI scheme to include the Bradley Stoke school will take far too long. I look forward to hearing any advice that my hon. Friend the Minister has to offer, while somewhat belatedly congratulating him on his recent appointment.

1.44 pm

The Minister for Schools (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on securing the debate and on his result in the general election, which no doubt reflects his diligence in promoting the interests of the residents of Bradley Stoke and other parts of his constituency. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) for taking the trouble to raise his concerns with me.

Let me set out some of our ambitions for secondary education in Bradley Stoke and throughout the country. We are committed to raising the standard of secondary education for all pupils. In South Gloucestershire, as elsewhere, we are taking action to drive up standards and support initiatives that will achieve that. The hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend referred to the need for additional school places in Bradley Stoke. We have substantially increased capital investment in schools and put in place a new capital strategy based on the development of asset management plans, which will help effective local decision making. I shall outline how that will work in a moment.

We have made a clear commitment to raising standards. The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 gave us a framework within which we could accelerate our drive to raise standards. Since then, we have been taking consistent and effective action at all stages of the education system. We need to ensure that all children, wherever they live, have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We now want to build on what has already been achieved.

The education Bill to be published in the autumn will be a key step towards achieving our ambition of raising standards throughout the system, particularly by facilitating the creation of a more diverse secondary education system, in which every school has a distinct ethos and character and every pupil can take pride in his or her school.

We are supporting unprecedented levels of investment in schools. Over the next three years, we shall allocate about £8.5 billion. That capital investment is needed to create the right environment for children to learn and to ensure that high-quality education is available to all. Capital investment has risen from £683 million in the financial year to 1997 and will reach an annual rate of £3.5 billion by 2003-04—a more than fivefold increase. That reflects our great commitment to improving education. Since 1997, South Gloucestershire district council has received total capital allocations of £43.9 million for investment in its schools. That covers the period from 1997-98 to 2000-01. The allocation for the current year is more than £9 million.

Hon. Members have made important points about the availability of school places in Bradley Stoke, and I am aware that concerns have been raised about whether there are sufficient places to meet demand, given the scale of development in the area. To meet the need, the local education authority plans to build a community secondary school in Bradley Stoke, providing, I think, about 900 places for children aged 11 to 16. LEAs have a duty to provide a sufficient number of school places for their area. Decisions about the organisation and supply of places are best taken locally by the main partners in education provision.

The 1998 Act introduced a new framework for local decision making in school-place planning. LEAs must prepare a school organisation plan covering a five-year rolling period that sets out how they propose to deal with surpluses and deficits of school provision and what provision they intend to make for pupils with special educational needs. The plan sets the context for proposals to change school organisation in the area, including, for example, proposals to enlarge existing schools or establish new ones.

Parents have the right to express a preference for the school at which they wish their child to be educated, but of course we cannot guarantee every parent a place for their child in the school at the top of their list. If a school has more applications than places, it cannot admit every applicant. In such circumstances, places must be allocated to applicants according to published criteria.

A school organisation committee—SOC—has been established for each local education authority area. The role of SOCs is to consider the plan and to take decisions about statutory proposals affecting the local organisation of school places. SOCs are independent statutory bodies answerable to their local communities. If the SOC cannot reach a unanimous decision on the plan or any statutory proposals, they are passed to independent schools adjudicators for decision. The SOC will of course need to be assured that funding is available to enable the implementation of a proposal. Should an authority be able to demonstrate an overall projected deficit in actual, compared with forecast, numbers of school places—looking about three years ahead—it can apply for funding under the category of basic need in the annual capital round, just as South Gloucestershire has done, with conspicuous success.

Where there is a basic need for extra school places, allocations are made with reference to a comparison of the projected demand with the assessed capacity of all schools within a growing area, normally within a radius of three miles for secondary schools. Where an authority demonstrates that it has basic need, the Government provide funding for the required number of school places. Since 1998, we have made available a total allocation of more than £9.7 million to provide additional school places in South Gloucestershire as a whole, including 854 secondary places in the Bradley Stoke area.

Basic need cost factors are based on the averaged cost, taking account of conditions in the area concerned, of providing a school place in a new school or of extending or adapting an existing one. The values are used as the basis for calculating the basic need element of each LEA's annual capital guidelines. We have made an unprecedented overall increase in the level of capital funding for schools, and LEAs will need to consider how best to fund schemes from the various funding sources available to them—including, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West said, capital receipts and contributions from developers, as well as Government funding sources.

I know that South Gloucestershire is considering proposals to provide a new school in Bradley Stoke through a partnership with the private sector. Officials from my Department have met the LEA to discuss the potential for a PFI scheme to build a new secondary school. Guidance to all authorities will be issued shortly in which it is proposed to invite bids by LEAs for the funding of PFI schemes. Bids are expected to be received during September. The total capital investment in PFI schemes nationally includes more than 800 new or refurbished schools that are operational or have been given the green light to proceed using PFI. Those projects, valued at over £2 billion, will have the additional benefit of fully maintained buildings as part of the contract and high standard services for the lifetime of the contract. It is important not to discount the significant advantages of the PFI route for such developments, although it is not the only route available.

Mr. Webb: I am sure that many Bradley Stoke parents will read the record of our debate. I am sure that the parents of an eight-year-old or a nine-year-old in Bradley Stoke would want me to say that much of what the Minister said is true. Of course the Government have spent money on education for children in Bradley Stoke: they have to, because there is no school there. They have to find places for them somewhere else. That is not a source of particular credit. The Minister said that there were 854 places in the Bradley Stoke area, but none of them is in Bradley Stoke; that means that 854 more children are sent out of the area. I am not sure that the Minister has said anything that will make parents in Bradley Stoke feel that he has understood that we are still years away from having the secondary school that that community badly needs. Will he say anything that will encourage them to believe that they do not face years of negotiations, contracts and tendering? Must we wait for three more years?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman will need to await the conclusion of my remarks to find out exactly what I am going to say. I think that he has slightly misunderstood the issue. The 854 secondary places for which an allocation has been provided are specifically for children in Bradley Stoke. It is for the local authority to decide how it uses the funding allocation and where it chooses to provide the places. However, the allocation has been made to the local authority specifically to meet the secondary school needs of the population of Bradley Stoke.

I want to set out the system in full so that hon. Members can understand the context in which our discussion is taking place. We have introduced a new strategy for capital investment in schools, which is based on the development of asset management plans. Those form the basis for the allocation of capital funding to tackle identified needs and provide a transparent local framework within which schools and local education authorities can develop schemes to utilise the capital funds that are made available by the Government and other sources. Under asset management plans, a large proportion of funding will be allocated to LEAs and directly to schools under formulae that are based on relative need. LEAs and schools will be helped by three-year certainty about the allocation of the bulk of the funding.

A key part of the capital strategy is that authorities and schools should identify their priorities using clear criteria. They should address a wide range of needs from within their overall capital budgets and join up separate sources of funding locally to modernise a school's estate. As part of that process, we have committed a substantial

[Mr. Timms]

amount of capital funding on a three-year basis, which gives LEAs greater certainty for their planning purposes. South Gloucestershire has already been given an allocation of £13 million for its schools over three years, including new deal for schools condition support and new deal for schools devolved formula capital. In December, we shall announce allocations to all LEAs, and South Gloucestershire will again feature. There will be more than £500 million of new deal for schools modernisation funding for 2002-03 and 2003-04.

As part of the implementation of effective asset management plans, we recently issued guidance on the sufficiency of school buildings and gave details of a new measure of overall capacity in schools. Detailed guidance on that capacity method is expected to be published later this year. To ease the burden on authorities and to ensure that new capacity is measured in time for assessments to be completed by June 2002, independent surveyors who work directly with the Department will collate a schedule of accommodation for all maintained schools. The new measure is intended to be used to inform policy development on the way in which funding for extra places can be made available.

South Gloucestershire is considering options for the best way forward in meetings its needs in terms of both the sufficiency of places in Bradley Stoke and the condition and suitability of the rest of its building stock—a point to which the hon. Member for Northavon drew attention. In taking forward its plans, the authority will need to consider how schemes can best be delivered with the resources that are available.

South Gloucestershire has been well supported through capital allocations, which recognise the projected deficit of school places in three years' time.

Dr. Naysmith: Will the Minister receive a delegation including myself, the hon. Member for Northavon and the local authority?

Mr. Timms: I shall come to that in a moment, if I may.

The authority has been well supported. Capital allocations recognise the projected deficit of school places, which will be about 500 places in three years' time. In addition, the authority has its own capital receipts and can explore the scope for using PFI. I recognise that there are calls on the council's resources elsewhere in its estate. However, given the information that I have received and which has been presented in this debate, I see no reason why the authority cannot draw on the variety of resources available to it to meet both those demands and that for new secondary provision.

If there is a difficulty that has not yet become apparent, I shall be happy, in the first instance, to ask officials from the Department to meet representatives of South Gloucestershire to consider the LEA's options and plans for meeting its needs. If that is not satisfactory, I shall meet the hon. Members concerned to discuss whether additional action needs to be taken.

Given those measures and others that we are taking, I hope that we have laid the foundations for improvements in secondary education for the residents of Bradley Stoke. We are, of course, committed to transforming secondary education across the country.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 5 July 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Department for Work and Pensions

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Education and Employment Committee in the last Parliament on 1st May 2001, DfEE Funding: Departmental Report 2001, HC 451-I and Minutes of Evidence taken before the Social Security Committee in the last Parliament on 2nd May 2001, DSS Departmental Report, HC457-i.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Dan Norris.*]

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I welcome this opportunity to open the debate on the new Department for Work and Pensions and to explain how it will be central in taking forward our welfare reform agenda. I note from the monitor that hon. Members are also discussing social security on the Floor of the House. There is some compatibility between the two debates, but I think that ours is the more important.

We are reforming the welfare state, to make it fit for this century. Through those reforms we want to make opportunity a reality for all. Our reforms are designed to meet our overall welfare objectives of eradicating poverty in childhood and combating poverty in old age, and of ensuring that there is work for those who can work, and greater security for those who cannot. We are overhauling the way in which we deliver services so that, for the first time, welfare services will meet the different needs of our client groups—pensioners, people of working age and children. We are putting in the investment needed for more streamlined services that will be focused on the individual needs of our customers, make greater use of technology and reduce the amount of fraud and error in the system.

We are modernising the way in which services are delivered. We are creating the Pension Service, dedicated to the needs of today's and tomorrow's pensioners, and jobcentre plus, bringing together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency dealing with people of working age. In the next three years we shall build new information technology systems to provide a modern, streamlined service to pensioners and those of working age. From 2003, automated credit transfer will be the normal method of payment for benefits. We shall introduce the integrated child credit from 2003 as the next step in the programme to tackle child poverty and make work pay.

We are introducing radical reforms to the pensions system, helping more people to save. Stakeholder pensions were introduced in April. Other changes are the reform of the state earnings-related pension through the introduction of the state second pension in April 2002 and the rewarding of those who have saved with the new pension credit in April 2003.

We are on target to reduce the amount of fraud and error in the system by 10 per cent. in 2002 and to halve it by 2006. The new Department will provide a single approach to the development of employment, disability and benefit policies for people of working age and for pensioners needing information and support. It will aim to be a joined-up, efficient, modern organisation and to respond to our customers' needs and the changing ways in which they want to gain access to our services.

The Department for Work and Pensions is a more precise reflection of the Government's labour market and social priorities of helping people to help themselves to become more independent. We are giving people new rights in return for accepting greater responsibility. The Department deals with a big business—a big public service. Every day we make 3.5 million benefit payments and every month we place 100,000 unemployed people in jobs. This year alone 8 million households have benefited from the winter fuel payment. People depend on us for their security, especially at the most vulnerable times in their lives—unemployment, bereavement, sickness and old age. It is therefore vital that the service that we provide is efficient, joined-up and geared to the needs of our customers. The creation of the new Department makes common and business sense, reflecting the changing way in which we organise ourselves to deliver services.

Over the past four years, we have laid the foundations for a major change in the social security system. We are moving away from a system designed to pay benefits in a passive way—which does not help people to become self-sufficient and takes little interest in them—to one providing people with greater opportunity for work and enabling those who cannot work to access the support that they deserve and need.

Major milestones were reached during the Government's previous term. We saw the successful reform of the new deal, underpinned by a strong economy, making work possible and making sure that it pays through the introduction of the working families tax credit, which guarantees that families with a member in full-time work will have a guaranteed minimum income of at least £225 per week by October 2001. We also saw the introduction of the disabled persons tax credit and the minimum wage. The minimum wage has been a great success, benefiting thousands of our constituents, despite the dire and absurd warnings that we heard from those on the crowded Opposition Benches.

All that has allowed us to spend more on tackling poverty and raising family support, through increases in child benefit. In the last Budget, child benefit increased to £15.50 a week for the first child and £10.35 a week for subsequent children—an increase of 26 per cent. for the first child over the life of the previous Parliament. In addition, we introduced the child tax credit, worth up to £10 a week. We have also reformed the child support system to make it less complex. Over 1 million children will gain as a result.

We have implemented our agenda to help senior members of society by introducing the minimum income guarantee, to ensure that all pensioners have a decent income in retirement, by increasing the basic pension by £5 a week for single pensioners, by making winter fuel payments and by providing free television licences. All pensioner households will be, on average,

[Malcolm Wicks]

over £11 a week—£580 a year—better off than they were in 1997. To help tomorrow's pensioners plan and save for their retirement, we have introduced stakeholder pensions, a new low-cost flexible option for those on moderate incomes who do not have access to a good occupational scheme.

All those changes have achieved results. Unemployment is at its lowest level for over 25 years and employment rates are at the highest level ever. There is always a danger of thinking of such facts as dry arithmetic or mere statistics, but when we compare the unemployment of just a few years ago with the job opportunities now, we can all put faces to the figures for our constituencies: we know some of the families behind the statistics.

The new deal for young people has placed more than 250,000 young people in jobs, but what about the second term? We still have a long way to go. There are still substantial pockets of unemployment. Although fewer than 1 million people are unemployed, a further 4 million are without jobs—people who have not traditionally been defined as unemployed. We have started to extend opportunities for those who have missed out in the past. The new deal for lone parents offers a package of choices—more help with child care and training and help to make work pay—and it is working. Some 222,000 lone parents have joined, and more than one in three participants—more than 90,000 people—have found work, even though participation is voluntary. After all, work is the best route out of poverty.

I now come to yesterday's announcement on the proposal to award incapacity benefit for fixed periods of three years. There has been much misconception and some scaremongering in the media and elsewhere. I want to say loudly and clearly that what we propose is not a crackdown on the disabled; it is about giving support and help to those who are able to work. We are not forcing disabled people into work. Those who are still eligible for incapacity benefit will get it. We will treat people as individuals—if they can return to work or undertake retraining then we should help them to do so, not leave them on benefits.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Will my hon. Friend confirm what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said during business questions today, which is that the new proposals would apply only to new claimants for incapacity benefit?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, I can confirm that the proposals will apply to new claimants only.

If there is a scandal, it is that of people with handicaps or serious disabilities who have been laid to rest in the social security system, with no one taking an interest in them. Many of those people want the opportunity to work. I can think of a young woman in my constituency, whom I will call Sarah for the purposes of this story. This is a true story. She is a young woman with Down's syndrome. She went to special schools, and afterwards spent some years in a day centre. She did not feel challenged there, and one day she spoke up, saying, "I want a job, like other people." It happened that in the borough of Croydon, a voluntary body called Status Employment was in the business of supported work. Sarah was helped by that organisation, and she became a bed chambermaid in a leading hotel. The supported employment project worked with her to teach her that job, and provided support afterwards.

Not so long ago, many people would have said that Sarah could never work—that she had a great disability and was a million miles away from employment. Sarah has now been working in that hotel for four years and is the longest serving employee there. The scandal is that, in the past, the Sarahs of this world have been dismissed as not being eligible for training and work. We need to address that, and we must not be put off by scaremongering in our endeavour to give those people the opportunities of work and citizenship. I give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security—as was.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Minister might be tempting providence with that welcome. I should like to reciprocate by saying that I find it reassuring that he has taken a new position and an important role in the new Department, because I know of his interest in the subject.

The Minister's story is poignant and apposite. There has been much scaremongering about the recent announcement on incapacity benefit. The Government could have avoided that if they had undertaken a more coherent period of consultation before making the announcement. However, does he accept that simply moving people off incapacity benefit on to the jobseeker's allowance may, by itself, save money, but will not make those people any more job-ready in today's labour market? Support systems need to be available for those people before he can even begin to contemplate this change with any kind of confidence that it will work.

Malcolm Wicks: I will do my best to address that important point.

We accept that there are some individuals and groups for whom it is right to make some exemptions. I should like to make it clear—this is pure common sense and I hope that hon. Members would have expected it anyway—that we will listen to views on the matter in the immediate future. We will listen to the views of hon. Members from all parts of the House today and during the passage of the Bill on welfare reform.

We want to keep people in touch with the workplace through measures such as rehabilitation and skills retraining and by working with employers. That addresses the hon. Gentleman's point. Of course, nothing is to be gained for those individuals who, whatever their physical capacity, are simply put on another benefit.

We must become much more sophisticated in our approach—I will say more about the jobcentre plus concept and organisation later—to those with disabilities or to other groups facing barriers to employment. We must look at people in the round, consider the multiple disadvantages that some of them may face and then address their needs, whether that includes reskilling, retraining or confidence building. I concur with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's point.

We all know the background. The numbers on incapacity benefit increased by almost three times between 1979 and 1997, against a background of an increasingly healthy nation. The long-term rate is claimed by 1.3 million people at a cost of £5.3 billion a year. The number now is slightly lower than in 1997.

Fixed period awards are better for two reasons.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister and I have had many exchanges and I know that he is a fair-minded man. I do not think that he intended to make a partisan point. In a serious analysis of incapacity benefit, will he accept the fact that, now and over recent years, there have been more new claimants for incapacity benefit than the number of people who have fallen out of long-term unemployment? Surely that disturbing trend lies precisely behind the Government's new initiative to try to tackle new claimants.

Malcolm Wicks: I do not see that as the reason. I was not trying to mislead. The numbers on incapacity benefit are slightly—1 per cent.—lower than in 1997, but they have increased in the past year or so. We could debate the reasons for that, although not today. They are often complex and partly demographic. More people in our society are now over 50 than was the case even a few years ago, and they are obviously more likely to be at risk of incapacity. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees on the key point, which is that we all need to work harder and more positively for those people, to give them the job opportunities that many of them are crying out for and deserve.

I was making the point that fixed-period awards are better for two reasons. First, they will help people realise that they are not being written off for life when they claim incapacity benefit. Secondly, we will be able to review their claims so that we can ensure that they receive the help that they need. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) made a point about that. I was going to call him my hon. Friend; I think of him that way because we served together on the Select Committee on Social Security, of which he is the former Chairman. We need to consider the help that people need. Nothing can be gained by shunting someone from one benefit category to another. I hope that he understands our commitment on that.

There are 2 million men and women—two thirds of them are men—in receipt of incapacity benefit, many of whom want to work and could do so given the right help. They want to enjoy the benefits that work brings, such as social contacts and increased financial independence. Through work-focused interviews and jobcentre plus, we aim to make that possible.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I thank my hon. Friend and welcome him to his new position, one that is especially appropriate for him. Would there not be an even stronger case for the changes if they were tied into the possible introduction of age discrimination legislation? The main reason why people cannot find work when they are older is plain discrimination in the workplace.

Malcolm Wicks: I certainly recognise the importance of my hon. Friend's point. We are committed to such an approach but are not naive about it; we need to consult and tackle the issues carefully. I am sure that we all see the absurdity of ageism adversely affecting many of our fellow citizens, given the facts that people in our society live longer and that there are skill shortages in many constituencies. That is not only a sociological absurdity but an economic one.

Mr. Brady: My understanding is that responsibility for dealing with anti-discrimination legislation lies with the Department of Trade and Industry rather than the Department for Work and Pensions. Will the Minister confirm that? Is that not regrettable, given the fact that anti-discrimination should surely be tied in with promoting work, encouraging people back into the labour market and maximising the use of their skills?

Malcolm Wicks: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's point fully in my winding-up speech. The responsibility for different aspects of discrimination now lies in Whitehall, and I hope that that is acceptable to him.

This month sees the introduction of the first job brokers under the new deal for disabled people, enabling disabled people to access specialist help and the support to which I have already referred. After all, disabled people are seven times as likely as non-disabled people to be out of work and claiming benefits. Surveys show that 1 million of them would like to work. We want people with disabilities to have similar opportunities to others to find out about moving into work. We want to help them to become and remain more independent. I am pleased to say that, by the end of April 2001, that approach had helped more than 7,900 people back into work.

As announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget 2000 speech, the Government will also introduce a new generation of tax credits. That is the next stage in the series of reforms aimed at relieving child poverty and encouraging people into work by making work pay. The new credits will provide separate elements to deal with each of those aspects. I shall go into more detail about the integrated child credit. First, we shall draw together the various existing strands of support for families with children, including the child elements of income support, jobseeker's allowance, working families and disabled person's tax credits, and the new children's tax credit to create a seamless mechanism for channelling support to children. The new credit will provide a more transparent system of support and will be portable, spanning both welfare and work. It will build on the foundation of universal child benefit and will be paid to the main carer—which is important—in line with child benefit.

Secondly, we shall support those in low-paid work through an employment tax credit, building on the adult elements of existing tax credits and the new deal 50-plus. The new credit will help to increase work incentives for low-paid workers and to relieve in-work poverty in working households. The Government will be consulting on the detailed proposals of both credits later this summer, with a view to introducing a Bill later in the Session.

From 2003, the new pension credit will help pensioners with modest savings or occupational pensions and make sure that there are no disincentives

[Malcolm Wicks]

to saving. The pension credit will have two effects: first, it will provide a basic guaranteed level of income of £100 a week, below which no pensioner should fall. Secondly, the credit will ensure that people are rewarded for their thrift. It will benefit about half of all pensioner households in the country. Like the provision of stakeholder pension schemes for moderate and higher earners, our aim is to ensure that everyone can look forward to a secure retirement. We all meet regularly, not least during a general election campaign, pensioners who feel hard done by—and properly so. Because they have modest savings and a modest pension, they are barred from certain benefits in old age. We want to address that unfairness.

The Department for Work and Pensions carries out most of the functions of the former Department of Social Security and incorporates the employment, disability and international relations elements of what was my old Department, the Department for Education and Employment, including the entire Employment Service. That is a joined-up approach to benefits and employment issues. We are retaining close links, however, with the new Department for Education and Skills as basic skills and lifelong learning are crucial to our work.

Over the next few years, the Department has a formidable agenda. We are committed to creating the jobcentre plus organisation to provide an integrated work-focused service for all employers and people of working age. We shall establish the pension service, which will provide information and support for today's and tomorrow's pensioners. We are committed to delivering the pension credit—so that people are rewarded and not penalised for their savings—and a radically improved system of child support, through the continued implementation of child support reforms.

We will be working closely with the Inland Revenue to deliver new tax credits such as the integrated child credit. It is important to ensure that we are organised in a way suitable to deliver an efficient and modern service and it is vital that our staff have the technology to do their jobs, which is a matter of concern to hon. Members. We must bring our front-line IT systems up to the 21st century. A public service that is in contact with 70 per cent. of the population at any one time needs the proper tools and technology to do the job. As the Select Committee has documented, much of our IT is now 20 years out of date. The Chancellor has given us the money, so we shall be installing new computers in offices from July.

In the new Department, we are building two new operational arms: one for people of working age and one for those of pensionable age. Both will be operational from next year. The first of those is jobcentre plus—our new agency for people of working age. Jobcentre plus will bring together the Employment Service and much of the Benefits Agency to form a single gateway to the system. Everyone of working age—whether or not they regard themselves as looking for work—will go through the same gateway.

Jobcentre plus will bring real benefits to the Department's customers, and to its staff, whom we must treat properly and not take for granted. It will allow us to provide the more active and individualised help, which has worked so well in the new deal. We will set up a service with greater flexibility, more use of personal advisers and a focus on tailoring our services to meet the needs of individuals and employers. We will move quickly to set up the first 50 pathfinder offices.

We are offering new help and new rights in return for greater responsibilities. In work-focused interviews, those who are able to work now or in the future will get the chance to hear about the help that is on offer.

At this time of record vacancies, we are also keen to work more closely with employers, matching people and skills to the jobs employers want to fill, and putting the right training and support in place. We will be working closely with the new Department for Education and Skills and the new employer-led learning and skills councils to understand the needs and demands of local economies and the needs of employers and individuals.

For those who have reached retirement or are planning pension provision, the Pension Service will deliver a more focused and streamlined service. It will provide a new and radically better service for today's pensioners, so that they will have an easily accessible point of contact for all their social security benefits and we will make full use of the opportunities provided by new technology, including the internet.

The Pension Service will deal with everything from policy development to front-line service delivery. We want to improve the face-to-face service to pensioners, so that they can receive the information and help that they want—not only on pensions and benefits but on other local services. That means adopting a partnership approach—learning from the "Better Government for Older People" pilots and Care Direct—to join up our services with local authorities and the voluntary sector.

As well as meeting public service agreement targets, the pension sector will have two aims: to provide a unified, modern service for today's pensioners, however they choose to deal with us; and to give a better service to tomorrow's pensioners by designing appropriate pension products and providing accurate information to help them to make decisions about future pension provision.

Crucial to the new service is clear information—from leaflets to forecasts of pension value. To implement that, we will work in partnership with employers and pension providers to introduce new pension forecasts giving both state and private pension details.

The present Disability and Carers Directorate will become a distinct unit within the Department providing an end-to-end service to people on key disability and carer benefits, such as disability living allowance, attendance allowance and invalid care allowance. The directorate will have close links with both jobcentre plus and the Pension Service, but will be managed separately.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the new Department is intended to build on the work that the Government started four years ago. We have made a good start, but we have a massive programme of further changes to deliver in our second term. We have the integrated child credit, and we will soon have the pension credit. We also have the Child Support Agency reforms and, crucially, the replacement of our entire IT system to enable us to offer a better and more accurate service to the public. The way in which we deliver our

service is of the utmost importance, and we want to make it our priority. That is why we are establishing jobcentre plus and the Pension Service.

I apologise for delivering such a long speech. I could have written a shorter one, but the work of the new Department covers a range of issues, some of which are controversial, and the debate provides an early opportunity to discuss an important part of our modern machinery of government.

3 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am pleased to follow the Minister. Both of us are present at the debate as—so to speak—refugees from other shores. However, although he is now fully assimilated, in due course I might be returned to the shadow brief whence I came.

Malcolm Wicks: You may have leave to remain.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to the Minister for that comment; it typifies his generosity of spirit.

The Opposition do not take an entrenched view against the reorganisation, even though it reverses an important reorganisation that was effected by the previous Conservative Government. The idea of bringing education and employment together within government had many friends, and the Minister himself was one of them, as a little research reveals. I admire him so much that I rushed out to buy a copy of his book, "A Future for All", which was published in 1987, and in which he perceptively commented:

"Increasingly, we will need to relate as part of a total package, questions of employment, education and training".

Although we do not oppose the reorganisation, we have important questions and concerns. The gains that were achieved by bringing together the Education and Employment Departments must not be lost as a consequence of the reorganisation.

I cannot resist sharing a story that was told to me, I think, by the former right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands, as it is germane to the subject of Government reorganisation. I apologise if the story is familiar to the Minister, but if it is not, it should be. It concerns a new Minister. When he arrives in his Department, he is handed three envelopes that have been left to him by his predecessor. He is told that, if he runs into difficulties, he must open the first envelope; if things get worse, he should open the second one; and if there is a crisis, he must open the third envelope, which will contain instructions telling him what to do.

The new Minister locks the three envelopes in the drawer of his desk, and he thinks that such problems will never arise, but, very soon, they do arise. The Minister reaches into his draw and takes out the first envelope. He opens it, and on a small slip of card inside it are written the words "Blame your predecessor". The present Government have spent four years doing that. On the second occasion when the Minister finds himself in apparently insuperable difficulties, he reaches into the drawer and takes out the second envelope. He opens it, and finds a small card with the words "Reorganise your Department" written on it. He subsequently does that, and it carries him through for a short while longer. However, such initiatives never carry Governments through if they fail to deliver in the longer term, and, consequently, the Minister soon finds himself having to reach for the third envelope. Inside it is a card on which is written the message, "Write out three envelopes for your successor".

The Government's reorganisation will be judged on whether it helps them to achieve an improvement in its record on delivery—rather than on its usefulness in helping them to disguise failures with regard to that. There have been failures of delivery. I think that the Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, would accept that, and I know that the Minister would—although I will not ask him to accept it now.

The Government have failed to deliver on some of their most important targets. We need to see real delivery with regard to stakeholder pensions, as their introduction has caused problems. Action needs to be taken to improve employment opportunities, especially in stubborn job blackspots, to which the Minister alluded in his opening comments. We need the children's tax credit to unfold as an improvement on a grossly inadequate current provision, which discriminates against families who should not suffer such discrimination. Far-reaching reform of the new deal is also needed. In all those areas, and more, real delivery is essential.

As I said, many people have expressed concerns about the possible reorganisation of the Departments, especially the splitting of the Department for Education and Employment. When Sir Michael Bichard appeared before the Education and Employment Committee in May, he made it clear that he was concerned. He said that, although the impact of splitting the two Departments would be less if officials were more mobile than tended to be the case in the past, serious difficulties might arise. It was made clear before the general election that the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) had reservations about the proposed reorganisation, even though he knew at an early stage that he might not be directly involved in dealing with the consequences. If the former permanent secretary at the Department for Education and Employment wanted to see more mobility between Departments for officials, will the Minister say how many officials have moved? What has been the degree of mobility between the old Department and the new reorganised Department? At what grades and functions has that mobility become a reality?

Considerable concern has also been expressed about the possible loss of synergy in the previous combination of the education and employment functions. As the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said at the Select Committee hearing,

"If some DfEE functions are hived off to a separate agency, is it possible to continue the welcome synergies which you"—

the permanent secretary—

"and the Secretary of State, have referred to?"

First, the permanent secretary said:

"The machinery of government is a matter for the Prime Minister".

Possibly as a mark of a senior civil servant who expects to move on fairly soon, he also said:

"Personally, I am someone who is quite reluctant to change structures...Some people spend a lot of time trying to carry on behaving in exactly the same way in the new structure and you have a couple of years of disruption."

[Mr. Brady]

Does that bode ill for delivery in the next four or five years, and can the Minister assure hon. Members that two years of disruption will not be the price?

On the benefits and social security side, there is an obvious concern about what the merger may mean. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—who, as the Minister knows, can bring to bear in such matters as much cerebral firepower as the Minister and I combined—was concerned about screens. As he put it, the Benefits Agency operates behind screens, whereas the jobcentre has always been a welcoming environment. Will the integrated function take place behind screens? I am sure that the initial intention will be to have a warm, open, friendly environment, without screens, whether one is seeking employment or payment of benefits. However, can the Minister be confident that that will continue? Is there a danger that, as the process moves forward, instead of losing the screens from the benefits function, the employment function will be carried on behind screens?

The Minister rightly raised the question of incapacity benefit. Certainly, the information that emerged recently about proposed changes in the screening process for incapacity benefit has caused concern. As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said, much of that could have been avoided had the Government engaged in more consultation with interested groups beforehand. Will the Minister assure us that the Government will learn from that? Can he assure us that that consultation will now progress as it should have done previously?

What is the timetable for the implementation of changes to incapacity benefit? When the changes are put in place, what criteria does the Minister anticipate using to decide which recipients will be exempt from triennial screening and which will be included? Given that the Minister has confirmed that the change will apply only to new claimants—I think that I welcome that—what estimate has the Department made of the effect of the change over time on reducing the number of claimants of incapacity benefit?

The Government should be conscious of a wider concern about the treatment of disability issues in the reorganisation. The lead Minister for disability issues is no longer within the Department for Education and Employment, but is in the Department for Work and Pensions. That may send some people the wrong message. I accept the Minister saying that when disabled people are able to work, or may be able to work with sufficient help and support, they should be given every encouragement. However, is it the right message to give a disabled person who is neither retired nor able to work that the lead Minister is located within the Department for Work and Pensions, but is also the Minister in the role of gatekeeper for the benefits system? That sends potentially worrying messages to disabled people, and is a matter that the Government should treat with sensitivity.

Mr. Levitt: Throughout the years of the Conservative Government when there was a Minister for disabled people, that Minister was in the Department of Social Security and, therefore, the same criticisms that the hon. Gentleman is now levelling could have been levelled at that Government. Under this Government, since the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission and other cross-departmental measures, where the Minister is based is less important than what the Minister is doing.

Mr. Brady: My point was not so much that it matters where the Minister is based as the signal that may be sent out. The name of the Department may—perhaps in the Government's preferred jargon—seem to exclude those who are not able to work or who are not in receipt of pensions. However, there is the more significant concern of the lead Minister for disability issues being connected with the gatekeeper function for benefits.

The priority in the matter must be that when people are, or may be, capable of work, the assessment must be carried out as quickly as possible and when there is the possibility of a person getting work, all reasonable help must be extended to that person as quickly as possible. Early signs showed that the Government have proceeded without the sensitivity required, but one hopes that that will improve now that one or two warning shots have been fired. The matter is obviously one of deep concern to the Prime Minister if he is moved to appear on a voluntary basis in the House of Commons, not merely when he is here to answer questions on a Wednesday. I gather that he made an appearance on the Terrace last night—clearly he was somewhat shaken.

I draw the Minister's attention to some of the deficiencies of the Government's reporting strategy. The most recent departmental annual report contains gaps where, in the previous year, there was information. Clearly that must be addressed. That is not just for the benefit of Her Majesty's Opposition, because a Government who claim to believe in open government must wish to provide the maximum useful information to all who are interested. However, in between last year's and this year's annual report, some important information has disappeared. The tables that showed the total and real-terms level of expenditure on benefits over a number of years—which were tables 1 and 2 in the previous year's annual report—have gone, as has the table that showed the number of recipients of the main benefits, which was table 10 in last year's annual report. The forecasts of future spending and take-up of specific benefits were contained in all tables in the previous year's report, but largely disappeared from this year's report. We would also welcome more detail of future plans for the Department, especially regarding the year 2003, which is largely missing from the report. Will the Minister give an assurance that next year's annual report will contain this important information, and in the meantime promise to write to me with this missing information, in order to improve the openness of the Government's reporting procedures?

The Minister knows that I have taken a close interest, as a member of the Employment Sub-Committee and in my position in the shadow Cabinet, in the opacity of the Government's new deal figures. It is difficult to discover from those figures the truth of what is happening, especially when one wishes to establish how many jobs are sustained or unsustained and how many paid or unpaid. The figures might be presented in an infinitely

more readable and understandable way; that would be an important development, which I hope that we shall see.

The Minister talked about the future development of the new deal, which is of enormous importance. The new deal has done some good, as I have always accepted.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I am pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman say that the new deal has some good features. Does that mean that the policy that his party took into the general election has been ditched? I understand that his party intended to get rid of the new deal.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Lady has made the mistake of believing what she has been told by Millbank, which she must understand is not a good idea. The Conservative party's policy to replace the new deal with "Britain Works" still stands, I am pleased to say. That policy would improve the new deal and not remove everything that it has created.—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. Hon Members should not heckle. They may make their own speeches.

Mr. Brady: Thank you, Mr. McWilliam. I think that the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) wanted to draw in the Liberal Democrat Members by his latest sedentary intervention, but I would not want to become involved in that.

The new deal has done some good, but at huge cost. The cost of a positive outcome on a cost-per-job basis is unacceptable. That is held to be the case by not only Her Majesty's Opposition but many of those involved in the independent evaluation of the new deal; those people have raised concerns about the cost.

The new deal has had an impact on the payment count and the distribution of the payment count between the long and short-term unemployed. There is a flow of people from long-term unemployment, when they become eligible for entry to the new deal, into new deal options, and out of those options into short-term unemployment. There has been a churning of people from long-term unemployment through new deal options, so that if they return to unemployment they have the status of short-term unemployed.

Phil Hope (Corby): I want to draw a minor fact to the hon. Gentleman's attention. In Corby, youth unemployment fell by 70 per cent. whereas long-term unemployment fell by 84 per cent. as a direct result of the economic success of the Chancellor's handling of the economy and the impact of the new deal. It has given those young people and those long-term unemployed people chances that they did not have before. Is he now saying that those opportunities and successes will be ignored?

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman could almost persuade me against my better instincts to become a fan of the more consensual approach, which is supposed to be characteristic of Westminster Hall.

The situation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and across the country—as he knows—was that unemployment was falling strongly before the Labour Government came to office and has continued to fall strongly since. A difficulty that serious commentators accept—those with knowledge of the subject who study the performance of the new deal in detail—is that the most difficult thing to decide is what element of the fall has been connected to the new deal, and what has been entirely unconnected.

When the National Institute of Economic and Social Research conducted an evaluation in December 2000, its conclusion stated that the new deal had raised youth short-term unemployment. That was clearly not the intention of the new deal, but an unintended side effect. By moving people from long-term to short-term unemployment, the distribution of the figures was changed, particularly through young claimants returning from an unwaged new deal option.

When examining how to improve the new deal, I hope that the Government will allow new thinking to be introduced. I hope that the fact that the employment function has moved to another Department will allow for a more open-minded attitude to be taken in the review of the scheme. It is important that we continue to see development, particularly in relation to areas of high unemployment—I think that the Minister has implicitly acknowledged the underperformance of the new deal in that respect. That has always been a difficulty for any scheme intended to tackle unemployment. We need a more flexible scheme and a less bureaucratic approach, and the new deal must be more results-oriented, as was foreshadowed in the "Britain Works" proposals, which the Conservative party brought forward. A key aspect of those proposals was a real focus on real jobs.

I will briefly quote from the Trades Union Congress's labour market briefing in June. It is perhaps not the obvious source to endorse the "Britain Works" proposal, and I am sure that the TUC would say that that was not its intention. However, the briefing states:

> "The TUC believes that the clear message from this and related research is that there must be an increased focus on new initiatives designed to assist New Deal participants into 'real jobs' and that the unwaged option should be viewed as a platform for achieving this end. Otherwise there is a danger that the most disadvantaged New Deal participants and also unemployed claimants living in areas with very high levels of joblessness may be churned through New Deal unwaged options."

That is a real concern and it must be tackled by focusing on getting people into jobs, not merely into the new deal unwaged options.

When conducting the review of the new deal, and considering how it can be improved in future, I would like to know what preparation the Department has made for the possibility of an economic downturn. Most people who are familiar with the performance of employment generation schemes are familiar with the fact that they tend to work better at times of economic growth and do not work well at times of economic stagnation or contraction. The way in which the new deal had been put together in its first form failed to take account of that possibility. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister what changes he and his Department have in mind to tackle that.

A few loose ends remain which I hope that the Minister will help us with. What will be the final fate of the Employment Service? Will jobcentres and jobcentre

[Mr. Brady]

plus continue to be run by the Employment Service in its present form, and will they continue to be run by an entirely public sector organisation? Will jobcentres be subject to contracting out? Will we see more private sector involvement from private sector partners in the delivery of the jobcentre plus function?

How many jobs does the Minister expect to be created as a result of the new interview requirements with personal advisers? The evidence of the new deal for lone parents is that the intervention of personal advisers is not always effective in increasing the likelihood of people going into employment.

The movement of child benefit is now in the hands of the Inland Revenue. Can the Minister give an assurance that that is not a precursor to the taxation of child benefit, which would lead to the diminution of the benefit for many families?

Finally, can the Minister give some information and estimates on what will happen under the reorganisation—first, to the departmental overhead figures and, secondly, to the overall establishment figures? In the process of moving functions from the Department for Education and Employment to the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Trade and Industry, and perhaps to other areas of government, will the total cost of delivering those functions remain no higher than it has been? Will the total number of officials involved in their delivery remain no higher than it has been? In that context, will we see a corresponding reduction in the establishment of the Department of Education and Skills as we presumably see an increase in the establishment of the Department for Work and Pensions?

3.26 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): It is a great pleasure to welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his new post in his new Department. He has a long track record in dealing with matters concerning older people, and I am sure that he will bring that experience to bear. Our paths first crossed in Church house, Westminster back in 1976, when he had prepared a document about tackling hypothermia to contribute towards something called the manifesto on the place of the retired and elderly in modern society. At that time, I had recently graduated and was working for the Scottish Old People's Welfare Council, which became Age Concern.

In those days, we knew that many more people were going to live long and fruitful lives in retirement, and that preparations needed to be made for appropriate pension provision so that they could have fulfilling retirements. Sadly, too many of the years that intervened were wasted in terms of preparing for that, as was the case with the other important part of my hon. Friend's departmental responsibilities relating to work. I remember attending meetings with the Scottish Council for Social Services,where predictions were made that if the Government did not develop active policies, we would face unemployment levels as high as 3 million to 4 million people.

My constituency, Plymouth, Sutton, has faced some of the greatest challenges with regard to tackling poverty. The Minister mentioned the focus of the work of his Department in continuing to bear down on that issue. I am pleased to say that during the first four years of the previous Labour Government we saw some remarkable changes, and it is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) to say that the new deal has not had a significant impact on unemployment. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) mentioned the 70 per cent. drop in youth unemployment. Some of the most remarkable falls in unemployment have been in my constituency, including a 90 per cent. drop in youth unemployment. I know from the stories of many young people from families such as those that the Minister mentioned that their lives have been transformed. I well recollect going round to people's houses before the 1997 general election, when behind almost every door that I knocked on there were people asking what the new Labour Government were going to do for them, because someone in the household was either unemployed or knew of someone who was. This time, the problems that I encountered on the doorstep included far fewer to do with unemployment. I will touch on some of those problems in a moment.

Mr. Brady: I certainly do not claim that unemployment has not fallen, but the hon. Lady must understand that such an employment generation scheme involves the phenomenon of deadweight. Ministers in her Government accept that at least 60 per cent. of new deal participants who get jobs would probably have got jobs without the new deal's assistance. Some evaluations put that figure even higher. Not every job that has been created has been created by the new deal.

Linda Gilroy: There is much more to the new deal than introducing people to work and work experience. One of its important features has been to ensure that the accompanying training is mainstream, leading to NVQs, and that it begins to introduce people who might have fallen out of the training world to the idea that we are now living in a world of lifelong learning. That has helped to raise our employment market in Plymouth to greater skill levels. We have great challenges yet to face in that area, and I will discuss it further.

I was referring to the wasted 20 years for pensions and work. We knew that there would be significant challenges and problems in both areas, which were not tackled during that time. During the past four years, some of the building blocks have been put into place to change that.

I shall deal with two main topics—first, pensions, which are very important to all our constituencies. In Plymouth, a city of 250,000 people which includes two and a half constituencies, there are some 50,000 people of retirement age. I never understood why a great deal more anger was not generated among us at the start of the previous Parliament by the scandal that 17,000 to 20,000 people of retirement age in the city of Plymouth were trying to live on incomes of less than £90 per week for a single person and £135 per week for couples. The Select Committee on Social Security worked on that. I was not able to serve on the Committee, but from the video of its inquiry, I listened to the evidence taken. The

Age Concern representatives put forward cogent arguments that there was a low but adequate basic income on which people could manage, without having to rob Peter to pay Paul.

The provisions for the minimum income guarantee will, to a large extent, address those problems. However, there are outstanding problems concerning the huge differences between households. Some properties are well insulated and have good modern equipment, whereas others are draughty, exposed and poorly equipped, and people in those households must spend much more of their income on heating. Of course, the fuel poverty strategy goes side by side with the minimum income guarantee to address the income requirements of such people. There are far too many of them, including a huge proportion of my constituents.

I greatly welcome the move to address the concerns of pensioners who, although they have every sympathy with their poorer neighbours, feel that they are being rewarded very little for having saved throughout their lives. It is important that we should address that, in fairness to them and to ensure that in future people think that it is wise to save. Far too many older people to whom I have spoken are beginning to say to their children and grandchildren, "Look, it didn't do me any good to save for retirement. You'll get taken care of to a certain level anyway." An important part of introducing the pension credit is rewarding the thrift of those people who have saved towards pensions or put away savings for a rainy day.

I warmly welcome the new pensions agency and hope that the Minister will confirm that it will tackle several issues. I welcome his remarks about offering a choice to people who inquire about their pensions. There were rightly many references in the previous Parliament—and a few in this Parliament—to the very long document, which contains several inappropriate questions, for people applying for the minimum income guarantee. My understanding is that the new Department intends to streamline that document, and that it will offer a range of choices for people to access information and make an application for a pension.

The publicity from the Department says that people will be able to choose whether to make their inquiries by telephone, internet, post or face to face. I would be glad if the Minister could say more about face-to-face contact. In the previous Parliament there was much discussion about the role of post offices. I hope that they will continue to have a role in offering practical advice, particularly in those areas—of which I have too many—of our constituencies where there are low levels of literacy and basic skills. Such people need somebody's help on a week-by-week basis not only to make sense of their pension income but with some of the challenges, which they will continue to face, of making ends meet on modest incomes.

I hope that we are right to look towards the new pensions agency to give a much better service to our constituents. I also hope that it will be able to do so in a timely way, which is often important. A constituent who recently wrote to me is obviously one of those people who like to be prepared. He wrote some two years in advance of his retirement to get a forecast of the pension income for which he would be eligible. Some 18 months, later he approached me in desperation to help him get that forecast ,so that he could make important decisions with regard to his forthcoming retirement. It was some time after his retirement before he was able to get at least part of the information that he wanted.

I hope that the Minister's faith in the new information system will prove to be justified, and that it will live up to our expectations and deliver timely and accurate information. I also hope that the software that is being designed will be of high quality. That has been a problem across many Departments, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will be taking a keen interest in ensuring that we do not have future debates on the system's failure to live up to our expectations.

It has been my experience in Plymouth that a well-designed programme, in this case bringing together information from the Benefits Agency and from the Employment Service lone parent new deal advisers, can transform the ability of both staff and constituents to benefit from a service. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General and I visited an organisation in my constituency called Routeways, where we saw laptop computers going through complex calculations to work out whether lone parents would be better off in employment. That is a model of how such information and advice should work. I hope that we can progress to a similar quality of service being available for our constituents who inquire about their pensions.

Many of the young generation are conscious of the need to make provision for their future, but it is difficult to do so in a vacuum. The regular forecasts that will become available through the Department will be invaluable in increasing general awareness that people who save at a specific rate can expect a specific income, and that putting by a little more each month and each year, if they can afford to do so, will have an impact over the years to retirement. That will encourage people to save, and the Government's general approach will ensure that as many people as possible receive pensions and a decent income in retirement. People will be able to see the benefit of saving.

I turn to the work side of the Department for Work and Pensions, which is of great importance in my constituency. We can never underestimate the effect on unemployed people of getting a job, which gives them dignity and self-respect. When young people are asked what they want to be, they rarely respond by saying that they want to be good parents or good neighbours, and that may be regrettable. They usually define their future in terms of the job that they want. Long-term unemployment is a form of social exclusion, as I learned when campaigning during the 1997 election from those who had studied hard and got qualifications, but still could not get on to even the bottom rung of the employment ladder.

My hon. Friend the Minister spoke movingly of the need to end the scandal concerning those who have disabilities which make it even more difficult for them to enter the job market. He referred to a large number of people with disabilities who are unemployed and want to work. I believe that the figure was as high as 1 million.

Malcolm Wicks *indicated assent.*

Linda Gilroy: My hon. Friend may not be surprised to learn that, as I travelled around during the recent election, I met a number of constituents in that position.

[Linda Gilroy]

I shall take a moment to share with my hon. Friend the stories of three of those constituents because they illustrate, as did my hon. Friend's constituent, the scope that exists for a Department which can offer a service sufficiently sophisticated to enable people to achieve their potential and find work.

I have met one of those constituents over a number of years and came across him again during the recent election. I have not asked permission to mention his name so I shall use a pseudonym. Peter is a young man who is determined to be independent, despite a significant disability arising from a severe form of cerebral palsy. It makes him reliant on a wheelchair, but his mind is acute and he is a whizz on the internet. He has developed his skills over a number of years and examined the possibility of working, perhaps in some form of public relations, where he could use his internet skills and his ability with words. He has travelled independently to other parts of the world, including Africa and India, and is a remarkable, acute and very bright young man. He has made representations to and through me to the Minister with responsibility for disability in the previous Parliament. No doubt we will exchange correspondence with new colleagues in the Department that now has responsibility for that.

Peter tells me that one of the downsides to our great success in reducing unemployment is that he now finds it very difficult to recruit a carer. He has a full-time carer who lives independently in his home. We should perhaps consider some aspects of that with regard to forthcoming new deal developments and initiatives. We should consider whether there is scope for working with people in such situations.

My constituent's case raises other issues relating to inflexibility for people on benefits. If he wishes to move into work, the period that is allowed for him to experience that work before deciding whether it is a viable option for him to maintain an independent income and life—

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. I have no power to limit the length of speeches, but if every hon. Member takes as long as the hon. Lady, not everyone will be called.

Linda Gilroy: I shall move on to describe the other two constituents. We shall call one of them Paul. He suffered a sports injury and needed information and support to retrain. He did not know about the new deal programme, and that illustrates the need for us to ensure that people are periodically given the opportunity to discuss their needs. The job broker will be able to help people in such circumstances.

A third constituent is partially sighted, the first person with such a disability to gain a recognised qualification in photography. He has made representations to me, which I will pass on to the new Department, about how helpful it would be if he had greater flexibility and support with regard to travel. He refers to a local arrangement in London called a freedom pass.

The cases of my constituents show that there is a need for flexibility—the Minister referred to being sophisticated—in meeting those challenges. It would be of great benefit to us if we could help people with such severe disabilities by being flexible and sophisticated in our responses to them. They would become role models for others with less confidence and less enthusiasm for overcoming their disability or incapacity. Such help could lead to more fulfilling lives and greater opportunity.

I wish my hon. Friend well in his new post and new Department, and I look forward to working with him on many of the other challenges that face it, particularly in dealing with the long-term unemployed. Constituencies such as Plymouth, Sutton will take even greater steps forward between now and the next election in tackling poverty through work and better arrangements for pensioners.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, it might be helpful if I told hon. Members what I intend. There could be a large number of Divisions at 4 o'clock. Some may say that there will only be 11, but as an ex-Whip I can say that there could be 12. I intend to suspend the sitting and then resume 15 minutes after the last Division. If the Divisions are compressed into less than 15 minutes, we should not finish too late. However, I can assure hon. Members that there is injury time and the sitting will last for the required length of time, regardless.

Mr. Levitt: On a point of order, Mr. McWilliam. Under those circumstances, would the sitting continue until 7 o'clock, or could it continue beyond that?

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): The sitting will continue for the number of hours allocated to it, which is three. It may continue after 7 o'clock without me, but there will be three hours of debate, regardless.

3.49 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Thank you for that guidance, Mr. McWilliam. I fear that the speech that I am about to start may be the longest that I have made in the House, and probably the longest that I will ever make. That is an accident of the timetable.

I should like to my add my welcome to the Minister and his Conservative shadow, both of whom bring to their tasks experience in education and employment that is obviously relevant to the new Department. I do not have the same expertise. I have followed a different and more unusual career path, similar to that of the Minister for Work, the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown), who has come from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The career structure is not obvious, but I am sure that I am as happy in my responsibilities as he is.

I welcome the establishment of the new Department, which was a logical step. I did not think that some of the changes to the structures of the Government, made by the Prime Minister in the flurry of reformatory zeal immediately after the election, had been thought through. However, the logic of the new Department's responsibilities is there for anyone to see, and its creation is a step that we have long promoted. I am less sure about its name, which has a distinctly Stakhanovite timbre. It hints that those not lucky enough to have

work and who do not yet qualify for pensions may not be the Department's top priorities. I hope that that concern will be dispelled as we see the Department in operation.

The new Department got off to a rather unfortunate start, and has received a poor reception to the changes in incapacity benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) was right to say that that could have been avoided with a more proper approach to consultation. It could also have been avoided if senior members of the Government had not commented on the subject with such relish. I was staggered on 25 June, during the debate on the Gracious Speech, by the comments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, if not the titular head of the Department, certainly sets most of its activities in motion. His embracing of and approbation for the economic and social policies of Ronald Reagan, and his wish to be seen to be endorsed by George Bush, raised doubts in my mind as to what will be the Government's intended approach over the next few years. It must have raised doubts in the minds of many Labour Back Benchers as well.

As long as the Department provides a helping hand to the elderly, those with disability or those seeking work, it will have the wholehearted support of the Liberal Democrats. When that helping hand is transformed into a bully's implied or actual threat, it will have our undying opposition. We will be robust in saying that we will not stand for a Department based on sanction rather than support.

Phil Hope: Is the hon. Gentleman saying, based on the position of his party, that he supports the changes to incapacity benefit, given that they offer individuals the support, rehabilitation and skills retraining whereby they can return to work?

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not accept the blank cheque that he offers on the assurance that what he says is what is intended. We are not yet convinced that that is the case. We hear the rhetoric but want to see the proposals and will discuss them in detail when a Bill is presented to the House. We are wary of what is suggested, as it may make life more difficult for people with disabilities, rather than helping them to obtain work if it is available, as we would want, and to gain security if it is not—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman may take things as he chooses, but he should listen to his hon. Friends to find out what concerns are shared within and outside this Chamber.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. Hon. Members cannot have private conversations, or we shall all want to join in.

Mr. Heath *rose—*

Mr. Levitt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heath: Having just taken an intervention, I think that it would be unwise to take another. It might incur your wrath, Mr. McWilliam.

We have heard, in the context of the new Department's delivery systems, about jobcentre plus and the Pension Service. I have no quarrel with the intention of integrating the delivery of services. Any sensible Administration would try to achieve that. However, we need to think about the detail and about what progress is likely to be made with integration. As to the Pension Service, the letter from the Secretary of State, which was widely distributed in the past day or two, stated: "The national service provided by the pension centres will in the future use modern technology to process claims for the range of benefits for pensioners, initially retirement pensions, MIG and winter fuel payments."

The Minister has corroborated that statement today. That is fine as far as it goes, but—and this is a big but—the Government do not have a good track record in introducing modern technology to carry out some of the functions in question. We need to ask the Minister what progress has been made so far on, for example, NIRS2. When will the many problems associated with it be resolved? When will we be able to deal with substandard information technology infrastructure? Would it not be better to solve one new technology problem before creating new ones?

As to the operation of programmes that have already been established, an expensive—and justified—take-up campaign has been run with respect to the minimum income guarantee. However, one quarter of the poorest entitled pensioners still do not claim. How will that problem be solved? Will the new integrated structure be better at ensuring that those who are entitled to claim do so, or is that issue considered to be water under the bridge? There are 1 million men entitled to winter fuel payments dating back to 1997. How will the Minister ensure that they receive the money to which they are entitled?

The structure of the Pension Service and jobcentre plus needs to be considered. I read the Secretary of State's letter to colleagues working in the relevant services and the first question that struck me was whether there would be redundancies. Will we lose from those services skilled people who are not located near one of the new pension centres and who cannot relocate? Will they be out of a job?

The process of integration will be more difficult with respect to jobcentre plus. I do not know how much thought the Department has given to that issue. Two different cultures are involved in the agencies that will be united. I do not say that the difficulties are insuperable, but the integration of cultures and management structures and the agencies' interface with the public are issues that will need to be dealt with. I am also interested—this point is relevant to the Minister's previous responsibilities—in how the new jobcentre plus structure will interface with the ConneXions service that he was so instrumental in introducing. Connection between them is important and should be established, if that has not happened yet. It should be integral to the working of the new agencies.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) spoke at length on the new deal. There is evidence that it has achieved some of its objectives. There is also concern, as the Minister knows, about whether it is doing everything that we would want it to do, particularly whether it is sustaining employment for the new deal entrants. The Employment Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Education and Employment looked at the matter in detail and, in its report of 13 March 2001, concluded that some 22 per cent. of new deal participants who had found a job through the new deal had not obtained

[Mr. Heath]

sustained employment. That is an important factor. Until the new deal is capable of guaranteeing sustained employment for those young people, it is not fulfilling its primary function. We need to be satisfied that that will happen.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) mentioned the staggering lack of appropriate legislation to deal with discrimination on the grounds of age. That is a great disappointment. The Secretary of State has stated that one of his objectives is to help the over-50s into work. Through private Members' Bills, many hon. Members have expressed their desire for legislation at an early stage. However, the Government are dillying and dallying, saying that it will not be introduced until 2006, the last possible date under the EU regulation—so not only did we not see legislation in the previous Parliament, but we shall not see it in this one either. That is regrettable. I know that there are difficulties in framing legislation, and that consultations have to take place, but it cannot be right that it will take another five years to introduce appropriate legislation in an area that is of great concern to many people.

I hope that the jobcentre plus structure will allow greater flexibility in the way in which the Department works. I am thinking in particular of how to deal with a matter that I have raised in the House—hotspots of unemployment that occur in areas that are otherwise areas of high employment. Often, the closure of a relatively small company in a market town or rural area can mean a temporarily high percentage unemployment rate in an area where it is difficult to create new employment because there is no infrastructure to attract business from outside—[*Interruption.*].

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is suspended until 15 minutes after the last vote has taken place. It is possible that the last vote will be on parliamentary pensions, with two amendments, (a) and (b). Hon. Members should be aware that not all amendments will necessarily go to a Division, and I shall not be handing out lines for lateness because I am as likely to be late as anyone else.

4.2 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

5.6 pm

On resuming—

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): I apologise to hon. Members who turned up in the Chamber before me. I seem to be late, but I had warned them about that possibility.

Mr. Heath: Thank you, Mr. McWilliam.

Some hon. Members have been kind enough to say that they enjoyed the last hour of my speech. I now want to move on to the more contentious matter of whether we are moving towards a regime of benefit sanctions. The hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) said that we were not. He believes the Government's press releases—but then he always believes the Government's press releases. I treat them with a little more cynicism than he does.

Such matters are a real worry to hon. Members and those outside the House. If we are moving to a regime that imposes more burdens on those who are rightly claiming benefits that we want them to have, we must understand what the regime entails and how it will impact on claimants.

I do not know whether the Government are retreating on the matter of incapacity benefit. I heard what the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said yesterday and I heard what the Leader of the House said this morning. The claim that the benefit will not apply to existing claimants was repeated today. That is not a change of policy. That is probably what the Department had intended originally, but such a line is now spun as a reaction to the adverse comments made at Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday and elsewhere. It may be helpful to the Government for such a decision to be seen as a partial retreat in order to secure the support of their right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Levitt: The phrase "new claimants" was certainly used in yesterday morning's press coverage.

Mr. Heath: I accept that such policy had existed previously. However, it is now packaged as a partial reaction to the adverse criticism that the proposals have encouraged. But what will happen to those individuals on incapacity benefit? Will they be subjected to a full medical test, as they are when they claim the benefit initially? Who will carry out the test? Will it continue to be carried out by the private contractors, Sema, which presently undertake the test? If so, the Minister knows the considerable criticism that has been levelled at the way in which medical testing and assessments are carried out currently. He will also know that I, as well as other hon. Members, have asked about the high level of successful appeals—about 50 per cent.—against the assessment. He will correct me if I am wrong, but that suggests that something is inherently wrong with the assessment. You will also know of the considerable criticism levelled by the Social Security Select Committee in the previous Parliament.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. "You" refers to me.

Mr. Heath: I am sure that you are aware of it, Mr. McWilliam, and it was to you that I referred. The Minister may also know—let us hope that he does. He will have read the report of the Social Security Committee from April and the comments on the present contractor arrangement, which states:

"the suspicion that standards are coming second to profitability".

and

"The Committee has not been convinced that there has been improvement in the quality of examinations and reports since contractorisation...Ministers should ask themselves whether one of the goals of contractorisation—improved service to the public—has really been achieved. If they conclude, as we do, that it is not, they should take steps to renegotiate the contract or otherwise influence performance to ensure that this goal is met."

That is as scathing a conclusion as it is possible for a Select Committee to reach, and begs the question whether the new Department will take action on the

matter. It would be perverse if the Department reacted by increasing the scope of those medical assessments by instituting a triennial check on every person who received incapacity benefit.

We are concerned that setting targets—and this Government are increasingly obsessed with targets—in such sensitive areas as benefit take-up and getting people into work may result in a loss of objectivity among the agencies concerned. On the question of lone parents and people with disabilities, the Secretary of State suggested that there should be targets that define the percentage who come off benefit and go into work. Yesterday, he repeated those targets. The aim is for 70 per cent. of lone parents to go into work by 2010, whereas the present target is 50 per cent., and for 70 per cent. of those on incapacity benefit to go into work. There is a fine dividing line between encouraging people to meet the targets and compelling people to return to work to meet them. That is our potential major criticism and the test against which we shall judge the proposals when they are finally put on the table.

I shall not go into detail on child credit because it is an area on which we are likely to find much common ground with the Government. I look forward to the proposals. I hope that they will not be over-complicated or bureaucratic and that it is possible to devise a system that integrates the present arrangements to a far greater extent.

Will the Minister clarify where the responsibilities lie both within the ministerial team in the House of Commons and between the Department for Work and Pensions and other Departments dealing with children and their welfare. It is important that we have a clear understanding; otherwise an important area of public policy may fall between the cracks.

Pensions policy is a matter of enormous concern to every hon. Member, and for millions of people throughout the country. We sometimes hear of the Government's good intent, not least in the debates that took place in the general election. However, we suspect that much pensions policy is being made up on the hoof—that it lurches from one programme to another and from one intent to another, with little coherence. We do not need to look far back to see the 75p increase: we considered that to be derisory, as did many other people. The public reaction to that produced a move to so-called transitional arrangements—a £5 increase in the pension this year, a £3 increase next year, and it appears that there will be a £1.50 increase in 2003. As that arithmetical progression does not encourage us to feel optimism on behalf of pensioners, we need to know exactly where it is heading.

As I have said, a quarter of the poorest pensioners who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee failed to claim it. It is extraordinary that the Government's pension credit consultation paper clearly states that the minimum income guarantee has several flaws. For example, it states that

"It sets a savings trap, penalising those getting the MIG"

and it goes on to say that

"Those just above the MIG level feel let down because they have gained little from having saved...It excludes pensioners from extra support, through inappropriate capital limits...It involves an intrusive means test."

That damning indictment comes from the Government, and it criticises a scheme that they, rather than the previous Government, devised. If anything amounts to an admission of defeat, it is that consultation paper on a scheme that was introduced merely two years ago.

We do not know what form the pension credit will take. It appears to be very complex, but we do not know in detail how it will work. We are, in effect, witnessing the abolition, after merely two years, of the minimum income guarantee, and it is possible that the second state pension will also be superseded.

Questions need to be asked. What proportion of pensioners does the Minister think will be on the means test after the introduction of the pension credit? How will the new Department deal with problems of take-up, such as those that have been experienced with regard to the minimum income guarantee? How will the pension credit interact with housing and council tax benefit? How will it work for people who are not receiving a full state pension? That final issue is not addressed in the consultation paper.

Those are important questions. It is possible that we will be told the answers to them today, but we may have to wait until the legislation is put before the House. However, for many of us, the bottom line is that we must establish a robust and sustainable pension arrangement for elderly people that fully recognises need and addresses the fact that frequently very elderly people have increasing needs. At the moment, there is little confidence that that is either in place or envisaged.

We welcome the establishment of the new Department. I look forward to working with others to scrutinise both the legislation that is put forward and the practical applications of the Department and its agencies on the ground.

I hope that we shall base our opinions of what is put forward on facts and figures, rather than on an unnecessarily impressionistic view that is coloured by the opinions of people who might not have carefully read the proposals or on an overly optimistic view that is spun by the Government and their Ministers. At the end of the day, the test is whether those who are vulnerable and who need the assistance of the state are better or worse off at the end of this Parliament. I am not yet convinced by what the Minister said. I have enormous respect for his personal qualities and I hope to see those qualities—both in terms of his intellect and in perception of what is needed—applied in full to the task ahead, and I hope that we will have fruitful discussions for the benefit of all the groups of vulnerable people whom we hope to serve.

Mr. McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. I apologise to the hon. Member for the unprecedented interruption to his speech. I also apologise to all hon. Members because the debate has been fractured in many ways. I have had the matter put on the agenda for the Chairmen's Panel when we meet on Tuesday, and I shall raise it in the strongest possible terms.

5.20 pm

Phil Hope (Corby): I welcome the debate about the Department, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his appointment. In his previous job, he and

[Phil Hope]

I had many conversations about matters that affect young people. He thought that he had escaped me—he has not. I will press him on what the Government will do for older people. I hope that I shall receive the support and response that I received in our previous discussions. I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. McWilliam, if, due to the unusual circumstances of the debate, I am unable to listen to the Minister's winding-up speech because I have another engagement.

It is widely recognised that we live in an ageing society. One fifth of the United Kingdom's population is aged over 60, and by 2030 it is estimated that that figure will rise by a half to more than 19 million. We are not only getting older but living longer. That is good for us, but not so good when one must pay the cost. The Secretary of State is the Government's champion of older people in Cabinet and has a crucial role to play. I shall focus my contribution on older people.

We must face the challenges that an ageing population brings, and the Department is at the forefront of responding to that. We must ensure that older people have financial security, and we must take action over a range of areas to plan for an ageing population and ensure that older people are at the centre of decision making. Public services must meet their needs and their contribution to society must be valued.

In the previous Parliament, the Government made significant progress in meeting those twin challenges, especially with the real improvement to pensions and benefits for older people. That has lifted many pensioners out of poverty and given more pensioners security in retirement. However, the debt that we owe our pensioners is not always appreciated. In recent months, I met voters on the doorstep—as we all have—and I was struck by the impact of the extra help that the Labour Government have given to pensioners, and by the need to do a lot more to put right decades of injustice.

As we approached the end of the past century, life had become hard for too many of the generation who fought for their country in the second world war. Conservative Governments from 1979 to 1997 made it hard to keep warm in winter because they put VAT on fuel, and made it hard to see because they put charges on eye tests. They made it hard for people to walk out of their homes in safety, because crime doubled. They created a national health service that failed our old people more, and there were year-on-year cuts in social services. That did not make for a great couple of decades for older people. It is a pity that when the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) spoke, he did not take the opportunity to make some small apology for the fact that, when the Conservatives left office, there were 3 million pensioners living below the poverty line.

I am pleased that we have turned the corner. Older people in my constituency recognise the measures that the Government have taken over the past four years to improve their quality of life. It was great on the street because I remember a pensioner saying to me, "I'm going to vote for you, Mr. Hope, because I've never been better off as a pensioner. In the whole of my life, I've never been better off. For the first time, as a pensioner, I've been able to put a bit by. I'm going to go to Blackpool for a week's holiday." For the first time, she had a bit to spare from her income to be able to take a holiday. That may seem a small thing to some Members of the House, but it is a significant achievement of the Government to tackle pensioner poverty and provide a decent quality of life and a chance of a holiday for pensioners who in the past could not afford it. We can be proud that 1.7 million of the poorest pensioners are better off by at least £800 a year, and that the average pensioner household is £11 a week better off than in 1997. The Minister quoted those figures in his introduction.

We must do more, however, not only for the poorest pensioners but for those who have worked and saved for their retirement. I welcome the Government's commitment, renewed in the manifesto, to reward pensioners who have savings. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) made the point earlier that the priority was to tackle the issue of the poorest pensioners. The legacy that I have described had to be addressed, and we spent many billions of pounds in doing so.

As for those pensioners above the poverty line, who have some savings and a small works pension but who are not seeing a reward for their savings and financial management, the pension tax credit is the way forward. There are legitimate questions on that matter, some of which have been asked this afternoon and which need to be answered through the consultation process. Those pensioners who fall just outside the minimum income guarantee and have some savings need to be rewarded for their thrift, not only because it is right but because we should give a signal to those who are saving now for their pensions that to do so will mean that they are rewarded when they reach retirement. The group of people who are older than 50 but have not reached retirement age will clearly be affected by the Government's proposals on incapacity benefit.

I said that those were legitimate questions to ask about the pension tax credit; questions may also be asked about the changes to incapacity benefit, but that is not the same as scaremongering. Although the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome asked some legitimate questions about the nature of the changes to incapacity benefit, he also suggested that people would be compelled to work—would be thrown out of their wheelchairs and made to work. That is scaremongering of the highest order, and should not be allowed.

If the hon. Gentleman read the speech that the Secretary of State made to the Institute for Public Policy Research, he would discover specific references to the fact that help will be given to people who have had accidents, to provide rehabilitation if they need special equipment for work, while more will be done to support those who will never be able to work. To introduce the notion of compulsion in this debate is scaremongering and must be rejected.

Mr. Heath: I said clearly that we would reject compulsion, were it to be proposed. I am not saying that the Government are proposing it. Does the hon. Gentleman not understand the distress caused to many disabled people by the current assessment process, let alone the idea of assessments at repeated three-year

intervals? Is he satisfied that that is an appropriate way in which to monitor the effectiveness of the benefit programme?

Phil Hope: The distress that I recognise is that caused when hon. Members in this House go out of their way to frighten people unreasonably with allegations of changes to policy that will not happen.

I move on to a more positive note by mentioning the Government's "Better Government for Older People" project—a national project being rolled out at local levels in different constituencies. I am delighted to tell the House that on Monday I will join Jim Waite, Corby's champion for older people, to launch a local strategy to deliver better government for older people. We are establishing a new partnership between Corby borough council and other key agencies within Corby borough, including healthcare groups, the police, voluntary organisations, the Benefits Agency, social services and organisations such as Age Concern.

The broad aims of the local strategy are to develop and implement better, more responsive and more innovative policies and services for older people throughout the borough. Crucially, we want to develop and support older people with their skills to ensure that they have the opportunity to play an active part in society. It is especially important that we get rid of the stereotyped and discriminatory image of older people as being stuck in homes without anything to offer to society. Next week in the House, a reception will take place to celebrate older volunteers, as part of the international year of volunteering. Older volunteers throughout the country will be recognised for their contribution, whether it is helping in their communities, serving on voluntary management committees or carrying out one of a range of other activities. It is crucial that we make a positive statement about the contribution that older people make.

We can teach old dogs new tricks. A school in my constituency, Lodge Park technology college, has just opened a new technology suite for the community. The people who are using it are grandmothers and grandfathers, who learn how to do things with computers that they never thought that they could do, and subsequently can help their grandchildren with their information technology homework. That is a terrific example of how everyone in the community can learn, at any age, and can benefit. I hope that more opportunities will be provided and barriers removed, so that older people have the chance to succeed.

Finally, I want to draw the Minister's attention to the Five I strategy published by Warwick university, which relates to better government for older people. The first of the five is information, to ensure that we understand older people's needs, views and priorities. The second is imagination, which creates a vision that will be translated into a real plan of action. The third is inclusion, to ensure that all the stakeholders who work with older people are part of a local strategy. The fourth is integration, because of the need to integrate local services, especially health and social services, to respond to the needs of older people. The fifth is implementation—getting the job done.

A local strategy can be very successful in bringing together the different agencies, putting older people at the heart of that strategy, listening to their concerns and responding to them. Life for older people in this country could be transformed if the Government took bold and practical action now, at all levels, to plan for an ageing population. They must consult and listen in order to ensure that our public services are responsive, integrated and of high quality. That is relevant not just for today's older people but for the older people of tomorrow, some of whom may be sitting in this Chamber this afternoon. "Better Government for Older People" means better government for all.

5.31 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope), and I agree with much of what he said. I certainly agree that "Better Government for Older People" was a welcome initiative. It is being developed in my constituency, as well as his, with some enthusiasm, and it will improve the ability of local elderly people—I include myself in that, as I am over 50—to participate more at crucial policy-making times when they can make a difference. The experience of the pilot scheme in the Borders in south-east Scotland was that the initiative was welcome, and long may that continue. The only comment that some local people would have made was that the central Government support that was enjoyed previously under the pilot scheme has since been reduced. That has diminished the ability to perform. However, one cannot have everything, and I am happy to concur with the hon. Gentleman's view that the initiative is welcome.

I am delighted that the Government decided to stage the debate. It is necessary, and the new Department is an essential part of the work of this Parliament. I wholeheartedly support the Government's desire to move towards a more active welfare policy, although I hope that it is an active and supportive welfare policy. One can construe the adjective "active" in a harsh sense. Some of the statements that have appeared on the No. 10 website, for example, refer to "value for money" in the welfare policy agenda. Everyone in the Chamber wants value for money, but there is a difference between trying to constrain a £7 billion incapacity benefit budget from the Treasury viewpoint of trying to save money, and developing a policy that is necessary and addresses the needs of those who require benefit.

The Minister's involvement in the Department—I say this honestly, without trying to sound too greasy—greatly reassures me. Knowing him as I do, I know that he will not have anything to do with any kind of policy that saves money for the sake of it. The debate has helped to explain the provenance of the Department, which is welcome.

This change involves huge administrative upheaval—no one should underestimate the extent of it. Even with the Minister's best endeavours and good faith, he may find many an administrative hurdle locally that will go against his serious plans for the future. The official start date for both the pensions agency and the new jobcentre plus is 1 April 2002. April fool's day may have been a mistake as a date to choose for opening the two new agencies; perhaps 2 April would have been better.

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

The timetable is enormously ambitious. If the Minister believes in his heart of hearts that that it is too challenging, I would rather that he postpone the formal launch date; we all experienced NIRS2. The integration of the computer schemes is the most ambitious target that I have encountered, and previous experience of that is inauspicious. I would rather do this to a sensible time scale with computers that work than try to rush it to a political timetable so that the Government can say that they have delivered the change on time. The Minister would certainly get my support and sympathy if he came to the House and said, "We are doing our best, but we need more time for the computers," because this is such an important change.

This is a cultural change in two directions. First, it is a cultural change in terms of trying to promote an active employment policy, which is the most important thing that the Government have done in their first term. They are getting the idea across to people that doing nothing is no longer an option, which is welcome. However, it will take a long time before that culture infiltrates down to the front line of the new service. Secondly, it is a huge cultural change for the staff of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service; when Sir Michael Bichard gave evidence to the Select Committee on Education and Employment in May 2001, he said that it was the biggest upheaval since the second world war. The change involves 80,000 members of staff and diverse computer systems. It includes not only the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service but the Inland Revenue and the Child Support Agency. The Government are taking on an ambitious scheme to rejig the CSA into a new configuration by July 2002. That is welcome, but it will not work if the computer systems are not in place. How can they get the integration over such a short time scale? It is a good trick if they can do it and I wish the Minister well in trying to deliver it. However, he must be careful not to bite off more than he can chew, which would result in claimants getting hurt because the system is not working and delivery services do not measure up to expectations.

There are some issues that the Minister will not have time to consider because this has been a detailed debate in which both Government and Opposition Members have raised interesting questions. I should like to know exactly what is happening to the social fund administration, which, as I understand it, is being split up. Some of the social fund services people of working age as well as those who are retired, which will mean disaggregating the current administration of the social fund. It is important that issues such as that are addressed sensitively and that we do not get things wrong as a result.

This is really a second order question, but it is important: some of the changes in responsibilities on anti-discrimination legislation will leave the Department for Work and Pensions responsible for disability issues across government. However, as was said earlier, the Department of Trade and Industry has responsibility for race equality in employment, but, as I understand it, the Cabinet retains responsibility for gender legislation and policy. There is a danger of incoherence as a result of that change because it will be difficult to focus properly on a strategic Government policy for anti-discrimination. The Government must be careful about that when they come to the fine print and the detailed execution of the change. However, it is both the right thing to do and a positive move. I certainly wish it well.

I shall now turn to some of the individual elements of the change. In terms of benefit and work, one thing that is often underestimated is the burden of responsibility that is placed on some of the staff. Staff of the middle management and lower levels are paid meagre salaries to do crucial processing as part of important public service work. That is particularly true of executive and administrative officers in London, as the Minister knows better than me. If such staff do not get their work right, or do not get the right training, or do not stay, there are breakdowns in the service quality that we would all like to see. I hope that any change to pay rates—or equalisation of them because, in some regions at least, Employment Service staff are usually better paid than those of the Benefits Agency—will be an upgrading, and that that will be an opportunity to float up pay rates for some frontline staff at the Benefits Agency. That opportunity may not present itself again for some time.

Sir Michael Bichard, when he gave evidence to the Education Sub-Committee, was keen to stress the very different culture for workers in the Employment Service compared with that for frontline staff in the Benefits Agency and its local offices. The question of those different cultures must be embraced very sensitively. The Government have left little time in which to do so, and I hope that that will not threaten the policy change.

I have said that the Government are slightly culpable for their lack of consultation on the treatment of incapacity benefit. However, I know for certain—I have the document in front of me—that the idea was floated in April 2000 in a report from the performance and innovation unit called "Winning the Generation Game". It was very interesting and thoughtful, but the press took a headline story out of it: men aged over 60 would have to look for work or face loss of benefit under tough plans drawn up by the Government to get more older people back into jobs.

I am the first to admit that the idea behind the policy is not new and that it does not come as any surprise. The implementation of the policy is, however, crucial. The 60-65 age cohort is especially difficult to cope with for incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance. I cannot remember, although I should know, whether people in that age group are currently exempt in the case of JSA. They certainly used to be, but I do not know whether the new policy change will embrace a new look at that.

There is a world of difference between those people and someone who experiences a life-threatening or life-shattering event, such as an accident—the Secretary of State used that example—at the age of 35. It seems entirely reasonable that there should be an award of incapacity benefit if there is eligibility and that that should be tested regularly, as long as there is support and the Government are not using that as a method of coercion. I support that measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) referred to a Select Committee report, and I make no apology for returning to it. Current medical services, and the work that they do in

disability living allowance and incapacity benefit, are very inadequate, with insufficient doctors to do the work necessary at the moment. Even if, as the Minister might say, much care will be taken in bringing the new cohort of claimants into the new regime, the Government can safely increase numbers of claimants for incapacity benefit only if they are absolutely sure that the medical profession can supply the specialist medical advice to service that policy change. Otherwise, there will be shoddy service, as there is at the moment. I am not satisfied that the Sema services contract is capable of withstanding anything like the number of prospective new applicants for work capacity tests that is envisaged.

The philosophy of the policy is acceptable, as long as it includes safety features, such as the presence of necessary doctors. We heard earlier about the active support that comes in once the benefit is withdrawn, and that is essential. It is especially essential for people in the 60-65 age group.

We must recognise that there is a world of difference between the economy that would be found by members of that age group facing a reduction in incapacity benefit who live in Reading, and that which would be found by those who live in Govan. The benefits structure inadequately reflects the different labour market circumstances, which are like night and day. People acting in good faith can nearly always get reasonably well paid work in a regional economy such as Reading or Northampton. In Toxteth or Govan, however, there is no effective labour market—there is a collapsed market—and special circumstances may need to be taken into account.

My final word about incapacity benefit is that I will be watching the situation carefully. I am willing to support the philosophy, as long as the delivery is there to support it. However, I will be robust and critical if the back-up is not there and policy change is introduced in a way that does not give personal advisers the chance to follow and support those who are having their incapacity benefit reassessed. Previous Department of Social Security research stated that Child Support Agency claimants are being looked after if they are coming in for first interviews or for return interviews at the 13 to 26-week review stage. However, early evidence suggests that personal advisers are not that effective at getting rid of the barriers to work for people who are not in those two categories. The Minister must be satisfied that such problems are ironed out before it is safe to proceed with the changes that he suggests.

The new pensions agency is a step forward. The psychological change of disaggregating benefit delivery from the Benefits Agency caller station is a welcome move. Many of my constituents who have retired were reluctant to sit in queues with people with whom they had no real community of interest. If sensitive arrangements, such as call centres and house visits, are organised and introduced, that will be welcomed.

I ask the Minister to consider something that might cost a little money. I have some reservations about the fact that the Government are funding the minimum income guarantee as heavily as they are—I would prefer to pay the money flat rate to the older cohort of pensioners than to use the means test for the minimum income guarantee—but there is an arguable case for the Government's position. It is easier when a pensions agency is disaggregated from the Benefits Agency, so why do we not impose a new legal duty on the new pensions agency to maximise pensioners' benefit income levels when an application is made? The Minister knows that at the moment no duty is imposed on the Benefits Agency to go prospectively fishing—if I may put it pejoratively—for other benefits to which people may be entitled, should they make an application. I would not suggest that that principle be applied across the gamut of the Benefits Agency's operations, in respect of income support and the like. However, now that we have a more focused agency, will the Minister consider the case that the new pensions agency, when set up, could be charged with a new legal duty to look at every pensioner application when it arrives and consider the range of benefits that a pensioner may be entitled to—things that are over and above what their application is for? I do not know how much that would cost; it might be very expensive. It would certainly be staff-intensive in terms of time. However, it would encourage people even more about the new pensions agency if the Minister said something positive about that.

I will not address the criticisms of the pensioner credit in full, but I look forward to seeing the detail of the Bill. I am worried about its interface with housing benefit and council tax benefit—an issue that was rightly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome. I cannot see how the two systems can be interfaced without causing people to lose housing benefit if they get added income from pension credit; it is a conundrum. If a person is on council tax benefit or housing benefit and they are awarded pension credit, it is simply lost at the other end. If that is true, the Government should say so transparently. Many people are expecting real support from the new agency, and I hope that they get it. I would not like them to lose housing benefit and council tax benefit pound for pound as a result.

I think that the CSA reforms are right, but it will be difficult to run two CSA policies after July 2002, when the new system is introduced. I make the plea that the Government consider introducing a £10 child maintenance premium for everyone after that date. It is unconscionable to have two neighbours—families who are in every sense identical in terms of family size and are both claiming child support from the Child Support Agency—one of whom does not get to keep the £10, just because they are on the old system, while the one in the new system does. That will cause difficulties in all our surgeries. If the Minister will give the matter careful consideration, he will do us a great favour.

I complete my remarks with two final points. First, the treatment of black and ethnic minority claimants is an issue that the Select Committee on Social Security was getting very vexed about. I do not want to pre-empt any decisions about what may happen in the reconfigured Select Committee, but I hope that, whatever its membership, it will return to the subject of the disadvantage that is experienced by ethnic claimants at just about every level because the systems are not sensitive enough and there are insufficient resources for interpreters and other such services. The problem is becoming so serious that the Department cannot ignore it any longer. I hope that the Minister will spend some time investigating that.

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

Secondly, the issue of take-up is an essential issue for the Government. I have some misgivings about the extent to which means testing is being introduced into the system. If the Government are going to take that route—as they obviously are, and there is a perfectly arguable case for targeting help at the people who need it most—they will need a systematic and continuous policy for take-up campaigns. I do not know how successful the Department thought that the pensions take-up campaign on the minimum income guarantee was. As the Government intend to move so far in the direction of targeted benefits in future—the percentage of the benefit claimant count reliant on means-tested benefits is continually creeping up—it is incumbent on them to come up with a more coherent, integrated, systematic and on-going administrative system that deals with the whole issue of take-up. Otherwise, people will not get benefits to which they are entitled. Although the Government will be able to say that the levels of means-tested benefits are reasonably generous, people who do not receive them do not get the advantage.

There is much work to do and there are many challenges ahead, and I seriously wish the new Minister well. I know that he will make as big a success of it as anyone can. My final word to him is that if one tries to be too ambitious and policy gets too far ahead of its implementation, the level of service to the claimant suffers, even with the best will in the world. I hope that he will carefully guard against that.

5.52 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I, in my turn, express my welcomes to my hon. Friend the Minister, who is in his seat for the first time in this Chamber, and to his Parliamentary Private Secretary. The team in the Department for Work and Pensions has a nice blend of experience and new blood. I look forward to the implementation of the Government's campaign to tackle poverty at all levels through many of the schemes that we have heard about today and will continue to hear about in future. Over the past four years, the Department of Social Security, as it then was, made significant strides forward in making a fairer, more accessible and more effective Department, and I am sure that that will continue.

The new band between working age issues and pension age issues is sensible. It removes the arbitrary definitions of in-work and out-of-work benefits and encourages a greater cohesion of the benefits systems for any individual who is of working age. The definition of pension age varies and is likely to vary again. It involves issues at the border. Not least, one of my constituents tells me that, as he is on incapacity benefit and his 65th birthday falls on a Monday, he loses his incapacity benefit for one week but does not get his pension until the week after, so he has a week without benefit to which to look forward to. If his mother had delayed his birth by a day 65 years ago, that would not have happened.

Under the old system it was easy for people to miss out on benefits and to fall between two stools. I echo what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said about take-up levels and the need for consistent take-up campaigns through Government agencies, the voluntary sector and welfare benefit services in local government and elsewhere. I am sure that the excellent start that has been made with, for example, the working families tax credit, which has a much greater take-up rate than the old family credit, will continue.

I shall spend most of my contribution talking about disability issues, but I want to respond to one or two of the points made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) about pensions. He referred to a worrying arithmetic progression of the basic pension from £5 this year to £3 next year and came up with £1.50 the following year. In terms of inflation projections and the rule that links pensions to the retail prices index those are generous figures. However, he missed out the fact that the minimum income guarantee will not only produce more money for the people who benefit from it every year but increase in relation to the rise in wages, so the benefit obtained from the minimum income guarantee will rise faster than that from the state pension. Also, more people each year will benefit from the minimum income guarantee as it gets higher, bringing more people within its ambit.

I hope that, when the pension credit is introduced, the tax system will identify people who would benefit from the minimum income guarantee so that take-up will be much easier. The three-year projection to which the hon. Gentleman referred includes the starting years for the pension credit. I believe that it is not the level of pension or benefit that elderly people receive but the level of income that provides them with dignity and the income to spend on the little extras that my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) mentioned. By concentrating on increasing pensioners' incomes by a variety of complementary systems, we shall ensure that poverty is tackled effectively.

This is not a short-term measure and I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Corby said about the response of elderly people to the help that has been available so far. During the recent election campaign, I came across two 86-year-old women in different parts of my constituency on two consecutive days who said that they would vote Labour for the first time in their lives because they felt more comfortable on their incomes than previously. I was a little concerned about a statistic that I read in a newspaper recently concerning the low turnout at the general election. In some constituencies, half those who voted were pensioners, so any Government who lose their way on the pensioner vote will pay a serious price. I believe that the majority of pensioners are convinced that we have made a good start; the measures that my Department will be taking forward in the years to come will only add to that.

I said that I would spend most of my contribution talking about disability. Before coming to the House four years ago, I was an adviser to local authorities on disability issues and a trustee of a major national charity for disabled people. The story that my hon. Friend the Minister told reminded me that I am also an employer within a sheltered employment scheme. A young lady with Down's syndrome has worked in my office one day a week for six months. The arrangement is working well and she now comes without her assistant to help and guide her. Her independence and confidence have grown and I look forward to her continuing to work there until

she feels able to move on to something else. I shall not stand in her way, but I hope to be involved again in such a scheme.

The special interest that I have had in disability matters led me to take an active interest and to sit on the Standing Committee on the Bill that became the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999. I have experienced a sense of déjà vu over the past 24 hours. The new debate on welfare reform, which is now 48 hours old, has not got off to the best start. However, if one examines the Secretary of State's speech yesterday, one finds that it is an entirely reasonable and sensible document. It contains proposals for future legislation and is clearly the beginning of a consultation and a discussion, and not the end of one. It contains no threats or axes, and was considerably more moderate than the spin that preceded it.

I must echo the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Corby about the way in which the issue has been presented. Twice yesterday I went on television programmes to argue the toss. Twice I was preceded by library video of disabled people in wheelchairs chained to fences and throwing paint around. That is not what the debate is about. This is not a confrontation. The Government are not attacking or removing the rights of anybody. The sort of images that are used, not just in the media but in the House, have not been helpful and do not lead to the best, most positive sort of debate.

I support the measures that the Government have proposed on incapacity benefit. I have read and understand them, in so far as the information is available. They are a logical progression from the steps that we have taken already on assisting disabled people into work and in work, and there are other good reasons for supporting them, to which I shall come in a moment.

Let me state, categorically, what these proposals are not. They are not proposals for cutting benefits for anybody who already claims existing benefits. As the proposals stand, only new claimants would be affected by the three-year rule. The proposals will not, therefore, affect the 2.3 million existing incapacity benefit claimants in any way. They will not affect disability benefits in any way.

I make a distinction between incapacity and the genuine disability benefits. The disability living allowance is a disability benefit. It is a sum that people get to compensate them for the effect that their disability has on their lives. Incapacity benefit is designed to be a moderate compensation for a loss of earning capacity related to a disability. If someone has an inherent need, which he or she needs to have addressed in order to live his or her daily life, there are disability benefits to address that. Those benefits, such as the special disability premium disability living allowance, are not mentioned, not touched, not threatened, not axed at all. For hon. Members to stand up in the House yesterday and talk about the effect on disability benefits was, understandably, frightening for many people. We are talking about one single benefit. It is a work-related, income-related benefit and not principally a disability benefit.

The average person on IB today is on that benefit for more than five years. In some cases, people are on it for life. If the average is just over five years, suggesting that we review that after three years may involve a large number of people. However, it is not the end of the world, when one considers that so many of those people are on incapacity benefit for five years or less.

The Secretary of State also made it clear that those with the most severe disabilities, those with the most permanent disabilities, those who have the smallest prospect, under any circumstances, of earning a sustainable amount, would be exempt from the review. Therefore, they would not have to go through that indignity. It is important that we understand that someone who goes on to incapacity benefit for a stress-related reason, for example, or as the result of an accident, has the prospect of getting better. A person who has lost a leg does not have the prospect of growing another one, but someone with a stress-related problem, who claims 15 or 20 years down the line that the cause of the same stress still exists should have a review. A review is justified in the case of someone who has had an accident and has gone through rehabilitation, as it can show whether that rehabilitation has helped and, if not, more appropriate rehabilitation measures can be put in place. Only those with severe long-term or permanent disabilities can make a case to be removed from the review.

Will the Minister consider a question about the future of incapacity benefit? If there is to be a review after three years but, for administrative reasons—I have the Child Support Agency at the back of my mind in asking this—it does not take place for three and a half years, please will he not let the outcome of that review be backdated? Let us say to individuals affected that, if they lose benefit as a result of the review, we shall not backdate it to the three-year point; we shall give them a few more weeks on benefit so that they have time to make new arrangements and become accustomed to their new circumstances, rather than finding themselves out on their ear with a bill for back payments.

Those who oppose the measures must answer three questions. First, given the variety of in-work benefits available to people who work for 16 or more hours a week—the working families tax credit, disabled persons tax credit or whatever—would not many people who receive £80 a week incapacity benefit be better off in work, even if only part-time? In some cases, the answer is no, but I am sure that in the majority it is yes. When we consider the amount of assistance, support and advice from skilled, experienced people available for such workers, and the legal obligations that employers have to facilitate the employment of disabled people, the answer has to be yes: in the cases where people can work, they will be better off in work.

Secondly, did the number of people who were so ill that they were incapable of any work really double between 1979 and 1997, or is that just a smokescreen to hide rising unemployment? As the Minister said, at that time, levels of health in the country were not worsening, so we must ask why the easy, the hidden, way of removing someone from the work force on to incapacity benefit was taken in so many cases.

Thirdly, is it really the case that anyone who claims incapacity benefit today is really incapable of all work of any kind for ever—as the present incapacity benefit status seems to suggest—despite the wide range of advice and technical support that is available? The answer must be no. However, some within the disability movement suggested yesterday that disabled people

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

may be seen as a sorry lot of miserable people who stay at home because they are incapable of doing anything else. That is not the image that I have of disabled people. It is not the image to which disabled people and many of their organisations aspire, nor is it the image that is put forward by the Disability Rights Commission, which says that a million disabled people in this country want to work but feel, for one reason or another, that they cannot engage in the world of work. Almost half those people, 400,000 of them, say that they could work relatively easily given the right support. That support is essential. It is in the support that there has been a change, which is perhaps why we did not have similar arguments on the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999. Even in the past three years, things have changed, and that has made it much easier for people to succeed in work with financial and technical support, as well as advice and rehabilitation.

Five years ago, a disabled person knew that if he were looking for a job, he would be competing against many unemployed people in the labour market. There was no new deal for people with disabilities and no disabled persons tax credit to make working life better paid than not working. A vacuum existed between the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service, a black hole into which disabled people could fall. At the same time, the disabled did not trust what they saw as a system of medical assessment for incapacity benefit that seemed to depend on the doctor, not on a fair and objective measure of a person's ability to work. If they tried work and it did not succeed, they would go back to the end of the queue and have to start the benefits system over again.

All that has changed. Unemployment has fallen and will continue to fall. Job vacancies are high, and anyone who wants to work should be able to find a vacancy somewhere. Measures are being introduced to help people whose disabilities and physical conditions gradually become worse to stay in work, which is one way to prevent people from taking incapacity benefit. The new deal provides special help and guidance on finding work and staying in it. The Benefits Agency and the Employment Service are coming together—only possible under the new departmental structure—to ensure a seamless service of benefits, employment advice and personal assistance. On a recent visit to the jobcentre in Glossop in High Peak, I was astonished by the change in atmosphere that has taken place over the past few years, and by the positive, involved and helpful attitude of the staff.

The test of eligibility for incapacity benefit is now fairer. The Government have established a new medical discipline of benefits-related medicine, to provide a system of qualification and training for doctors involved in benefits. It ensures a consistent approach across the country. No longer do individual Benefits Agency medical service doctors behave as though the money was from their own pockets. The aim is to ensure a consistent scientific approach to the measurement of people's capability to work.

If people come to the end of their three years and find that they will not continue on incapacity benefit, under the proposed rules they will not be left without anything at all. They will transfer to jobseeker's allowance and be able to receive the advice from the Employment Service that is available to other disabled people.

We have already made another crucial change to the linking rule. In the past, if a person went off incapacity benefit and unsuccessfully into work, he was nowhere. Now such a person has up to a year to give a job a good chance of succeeding. If it does not work, he not only goes back on to incapacity benefit but goes back on to the higher level if he was on it previously. He can carry on from where he left off if he re-qualifies for incapacity benefit, for up to a year after leaving it.

In the past, disabled people were rightly fearful of the unknown. They had a bad, inconsistent and ungenerous deal, and they were often without hope. Through the changes that we have made to the benefits system, the swifter implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission, all that has changed. Those who seek to whip up fear about such issues, from whatever Benches, media or organisations, do disabled people a great disservice. We will not leave sick and disabled people alone. We have an obligation to help them to maximise their dignity in life and their contribution to society.

The speech that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions made yesterday was about the future of his Department, as was today's speech by my hon. Friend the Minister. New opportunities now exist for disabled people in work, but they can succeed only through the success of joined-up government. Connections must be made in sensible places. The new Department exemplifies such action. It will set up structures that are potentially sympathetic to disabled people. I am sure that its services for such people will go from strength to strength. It will overcome its temporary difficulty of presentation, and we shall deliver for disabled people as we will deliver for everyone else.

6.15 pm

Malcolm Wicks: I now know that the only difficulty in initiating a debate on the Department for Work and Pensions is that it will develop into a wide-ranging debate. If I had the time—which I do not, because I am watching the clock—I could pick up many of the broad-brush, but detailed and proper, points that have been made. I thank all hon. Members for the way in which they have contributed to the debate and their serious discussion of the issues.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) began his speech by thoughtfully discussing the pros and cons of the new Department, vis-à-vis issues about education and skills. Coming from the Department for Education and Employment, I understood his argument. However we divide up an organisation, whether it is concerned with local or central Government, and however we slice the Whitehall cake, we must ensure that we properly join up the responsibilities. As has been acknowledged, the advantage of the new Department is that it joins up employment and social security, which is important for people of working age. It makes possible the setting up of the new organisation, jobcentre plus, although it will depend critically on IT, which is a great disadvantage. I was asked whether my Department joins up with the new Department for Education and Skills; the answer is

yes. I reassure the Opposition spokesman that we are fully aware of that and that we are doing our best, at both ministerial and official level, to have the joined-up government that we all seek.

I was touched that the hon. Gentleman had dug out of a library a volume that I wrote some years ago, which is, unfortunately, no longer available in all good bookshops. I am nervous that he may read other pages that I wrote when I was a young academic. However, among other matters, I suggested that the Inland Revenue and the Department of Social Security should integrate one day. Well, that has happened for the purposes of national insurance and tax benefits. The hon. Gentleman may learn some other insights. The book may help the Opposition and I recommend that they read it.

On specific points, I was asked which Department is now responsible for age discrimination issues. They now come under the remit of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that matter. It was not as I understood the position. Can he confirm what other aspects of discrimination legislation are the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions? Under whose remit are those that are not the Department's responsibility? What is the rationale behind such decisions?

Malcolm Wicks: Not all aspects of discrimination legislation are my Department's responsibility. The Home Office is still concerned, for example, with racial discrimination. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and give details of where the different aspects are located. He said that we needed to pull together certain general themes and I am conscious of that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the stakeholder pension. We are determined that it will be a success. Forty-seven schemes have already been set up. In terms of information dissemination, we are doing our best to ensure that we move in the right direction.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important point about the security of our staff. We recognise that in bringing together the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service, we are bringing together two different traditions, services and cultures. It is our intention that jobcentre plus will deliver its services in a predominantly unscreened environment, but we are also looking diligently to safeguard the well-being of staff. Too many of our staff have been attacked, and in difficult cases—such as those involving the social fund in which emotions tend to run high—we will deliver the service through a screen wherever possible. The welfare of our staff is paramount.

In our ONE pilot projects that are testing issues for jobcentre plus—I believe that Suffolk may be an example—we have found a willingness and enthusiasm for Benefits Agency staff to work without screens. I am hopeful that we can move forward with change while being careful to ensure the safety of our staff.

There has been some argument throughout the Chamber about the new deal for young people. We believe that it is a success. It has helped 299,000 young people into work—a success by any measure. The average cost of helping a person on the new deal is approximately £2,200. Half of all participants have found work, so the cost per job is approximately £4,000. Research by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research shows that long-term youth unemployment would be twice as high without the new deal. No doubt these important matters will be discussed in future.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the mobility of civil servants between the Departments. Those from the former DFEE and the DSS are now working happily together in the new Department for Work and Pensions. Staff up to and including grade 3 from the former DFEE have joined what was the DSS. That is the logic of it, because the employment chunk of the DFEE has come over to the new Department. As a Minister from the DFEE, arriving at what was the DSS, I immediately saw many former colleagues. There is a level playing field. Now that I have improved the standard of coffee in my private office, I am happy with the seamless transition.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned some important matters about the annual report.

Mr. Brady: I also pressed the Minister on whether, in addition to mobility between the Departments, the overall level of costs and establishment was being maintained, or whether there had been an increase in establishment at DWP without an entirely equal decrease in establishment at DFES.

Malcolm Wicks: Would the hon. Gentleman forgive me if I write to him on that matter? I am not trying to avoid the question. I know that I have the data somewhere, and I should like my answer to be accurate.

The move toward resource accounting in the most recent annual report of the DSS makes it difficult to compare the information with that for previous years, for technical reasons. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State provided more information during parliamentary questions and answers in May. I will bring the problem to his attention, if he has not already dealt with it. He also promised to reflect on how best to provide information in future annual reports, so the point was well made.

I enjoyed a sunny day during the election campaign with my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), and I am sure that the six or seven leaflets that I handed out at the bus station ensured her fantastic victory. Although I regard myself as a keen follower of the Select Committee, I was touched that my hon. Friend made the effort to get hold of a video recording of one of the sittings that she missed, as I have never gone to such lengths. I would like to borrow that video during the summer recess because if, on a wet evening, I cannot decide whether to watch "Casablanca" again or an episode of "The West Wing", I might choose instead to watch the Select Committee, starring the nice Archy Kirkwood.

My hon. Friend raised several important issues with regard to the Pension Service, and I cannot respond to all of them. We want to move towards a service that makes the best use of the new technology. I have watched the video that demonstrates where we in the Department want to be in relation to the issue. Many older people will feel more comfortable if, when they make a telephone call, they hear a human being talking

[Malcolm Wicks]

to them, rather than a machine. We will have local outlets where that is necessary. To offer the diverse service that some people need, there will be outreach in libraries and community centres—and why not in supermarkets, too?

The point about the difficulty of transforming the technology has been well made. I hope that we have learned the lessons of what we referred to as NIRS2. I remember visiting my hon. Friend's constituency with the Select Committee. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) was in the Chair when the staff proudly wanted to demonstrate the system to us, but it had crashed that morning. Therefore, I am aware of the difficulties, and I am sure that we are all aware of the ambitious nature of what we are introducing in terms of IT.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) asked the question about NIRS2, and I have now given a brief response to it. He also raised several other issues that I cannot discuss. He mentioned ConneXions. Of course the ConneXions service that is starting to roll out will want to make links with the jobcentre and other agencies. However, given the endeavours of that new service, it will often be trying to persuade young people of up to 19 years of age and older to pursue training rather than to enter work. At a later date, questions will need to be raised about the jobcentre and jobcentre plus.

I shall move on more rapidly than courtesy demands, because time is limited. With regard to the matter that the hon. Gentleman raised about the staffing levels of the Pension Service, a key aim of our plans for the new organisation has been, and will continue to be, to ensure that all present staff have a job in the Department at, or within reasonable travelling distance of, their current place of work. We are concerned about that matter. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about the taxation of child benefit, I reiterate the Chancellor of the Exchequer's clear statement. Child benefit will not be taxed, it will remain universal, and it will rise in line with inflation.

With regard to incapacity benefit, a couple of hon. Members raised the point about Sema and the medical services. We are aware of the difficulties that have arisen, and we have responded to the Select Committee with regard to those issues. We are determined to overcome those difficulties, because the quality of that medical service and the test are crucial to our progress.

Questions were raised about pension credits and means tests. Over half of all pensioners—that is, 5.5 million people—will benefit from the pension credit. I am familiar with the debates about the definitions of means testing: the pension credit will be based on income assessment. Therefore, it is more like the tax assessment that many of us are used to than the old-fashioned weekly means test.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) made a thoughtful contribution about old people, and made specific points. I was particularly aware of his argument that we must accord older people the status and dignity that they deserve in society, and that we must consult them more often about the services that they need. I commend his work in his constituency.

The right hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Kirkwood: Alas, not yet.

Malcolm Wicks: Whatever his formal rank is, the hon. Gentleman has a very high status in my eyes.

The hon. Gentleman made many of the points on which I touched about the administrative task that we face. He did not exaggerate when he said that the matter was a huge upheaval in terms of administration and information and communications technologies. I had better not compare that to the second world war—although the outcome in that was okay for us—but it is one of the biggest organisational changes and information technology challenges in Europe. I am not using any form of exaggeration. We are convinced that we can stick to our timetable, and I listened to the hon. Gentleman carefully.

On the social fund, we will respond to the Select Committee shortly and, obviously, before the end of the summer term. I should not say much more about that, but the social fund will clearly take full account of the new jobcentre plus and the Pension Service. Much of that will apply to people of working age, but other aspects are better organised in the Pension Service. That will become clear in due course.

If I may hurry on without mentioning every point, I shall now mention the arguments by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt). I do not think that I have missed anyone out—I am sure that I have not. I welcomed his comments and support for the logic of the Department's reorganisation around the Pension Service and people of working age. We are all aware of his track record on disability, and his reasoned and thoughtful comments on incapacity reform were very well put. I wish that more people were debating the issues in that thoughtful manner. We must bring rationality and reality to the debate, and my hon. Friend did that well.

I thank everyone who has participated in the debate. As you have mentioned, Mr. McWilliam, it was unfortunate that we had to go and debate more trivial matters about other scale rates and housing benefit schemes in the middle of it. However, we have returned full of energy. I shall examine the *Official Report*, and if I owe hon. Members more explanation and data, I shall write to them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Seven o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 10 July 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

GPs (Sussex)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Sutcliffe.*]

9.30 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am delighted to have secured this debate so early in the new Parliament. I welcome the new Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), to her first outing in such circumstances. We will be gentle with her. I am pleased to see so many colleagues from West Sussex. They, too, have encountered the problems that I am about to recount; my comments will relate mostly to Worthing, but the problems are found throughout the two counties that comprise Sussex.

I hope that I do not gain a reputation for whinging on behalf of my constituents if I claim that we in Sussex—especially in Worthing—have special problems. I have initiated several Adjournment debates on the problems facing the elderly in West Sussex, the enormous pressures that are put on social services by the high population of elderly people, and the great pressures put on the health service generally in the county. Much of what I say will strike a chord with other hon. Members but, as they would expect me to say, the situation in Worthing is far more acute.

That severity is the result of a cocktail of contributory factors, not least the fact that the population of the borough of Worthing is the oldest in the entire country: 48 per cent. of the electorate in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) are of pensionable age, making the population there by far the oldest in the country. The knock-on effect is felt in many of the other Sussex constituencies where the proportion of elderly in the population is nearly as high. That is why I broadened the debate to include the whole of Sussex, even though I shall concentrate on Worthing.

Worthing has more than double the national average of over-65s and more than treble the national average of over-85s. Of the 211 hospital trusts in England, Worthing hospital now has the ninth longest waiting times; they have been gradually worsening for the past four years. Hospitals with even longer waiting times include those of the neighbouring Mid Sussex national health service trust and the Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS trust, which is not far away. My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) knows of that problem.

A great deal of work caring for patients who wait inordinately long times falls back on GPs. Patients whose operations are cancelled need some form of ameliorative treatment while they wait. The enormous pressure on social services—I introduced a debate on that subject some months ago—leads to significant problems of bed blocking. All those factors result in increased fallback on GPs, particularly in Worthing. One Worthing GP says,

"To be an average GP would be wonderful for us",

but in Worthing there is no such thing as an average GP.

I do not mean to be alarmist or scaremongering, and I am not trying to score party political points. What I am about to describe is based on facts and the experiences of several GPs in Worthing and elsewhere in my constituency who are at their wits' end.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): We in Bognor Regis have the same problems. The Bognor Regis health centre has cut 1,000 patients from its list. This morning, I received a letter from a doctor saying that there is simply no leeway—he cannot accept more patients. Grove House in Pagham is full and not taking more patients, Maywood and West Meads surgeries are full, and Feltham and Middleton have recently discarded patients. The doctor points out that there might well be 2,000 patients in Bognor Regis who have no GP at all.

Tim Loughton: I thoroughly understand the problems in my hon. Friend's constituency, just along the coast from my own. The situation in Worthing is rather more alarming, although that does not improve the situation affecting him and his constituents.

My comments stem from a meeting that I had just before the election with a couple of dozen GPs, at their behest, and from a letter sent to patients of one surgery in Worthing that has had to close its list. Virtually all the GP surgeries in Worthing have now closed their lists to new patients. My argument also stems from the anger that that engenders in many patients, even though they understand the pressures that their doctors are under. Usually mild-mannered doctors have gone public to give details of their plight to patients, not least in a series of articles run by the *Worthing Herald*, a local paper to which I pay tribute for the work that it has done on the issue. In an article entitled "Why your doctor fears for your health", one doctor is quoted saying:

"I do a 12 hour day average. I have no lunch and it gets dangerous. We cannot deliver the quality of care patients want and deserve. We try to squeeze everybody in but it's impossible."

Another says:

"There's a massive danger of burn-out and an increasing risk of mistakes. The only thing that stops that is the sheer professionalism of doctors in this country... It is just killing us. I would not let my children go into medicine."

A letter from Shelley road surgery in the centre of Worthing—it lies in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West but caters for many of my constituents in East Worthing—informed patients that it was about to close its list. In it, the doctors stated:

"There is now no room for any more work without adversely affecting patient care and our own health. It is our firm belief that consequently it is dangerous for the Health Authority to continue to allocate patients to this practice until further notice."

Those professional doctors are not pulling any punches. They are responsible and experienced GPs who work hard in their patients' interests in increasingly difficult circumstances. Those doctors did not close their surgery

[Tim Loughton]

on the doctors' day of action in May; instead, they made a responsible protest by informing their patients of the problems that they were experiencing.

I pay tribute to the doctors who, although they are working under enormous pressures, have, both on and off record, contributed to my speech. In particular, I thank the Shelley road surgery and Dr. Bruce Allen, who has taken the decision to speak out on behalf of his patients and colleagues because the local GP service is at breaking point. He sent me some comments for the debate, which I received yesterday; he apologised for having taken so long to get back to me after learning that I had secured the debate. His excuse—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): His reason.

Tim Loughton: Indeed. His reason for taking so long was that on Thursday he had worked solidly between 8 am and 11.30 pm, on Friday he worked solidly between 8 am and 8 pm and on Saturday he worked solidly between 7 am and 10 pm. He typically works between 60 and 65 hours per week. It is not a question of being on call or waiting for something to happen—all the work involves intensive patient contact.

The surgery deals with 11,400 patients and has a full-time equivalent of 5.7 doctors, which means that each doctor has about 2,000 patients. Doctors live in fear of falling ill themselves because of the problems that that would cause in terms of getting cover for patients, and because of the pressure that it would put on other doctors in the practice. On top of those working hours, in the past few weeks Dr. Allen has had his face spat at, been threatened with violence and sworn at profusely, and has had paint stripper poured over his car; one of his partners has had two tyres slashed and another a knife scraped down the side of his car. That has happened in cushy, affluent, south-coast Worthing.

The statistics are clear. In Worthing, 14 per cent. of the patients on a typical GP list are aged over 75; that is more than double the national average of 6.9 per cent. On the list of one surgery in Worthing, 22 per cent. of patients are aged over 75; that proportion is thought to be the highest in the country. The proportion of over-85s on patient lists in Worthing is 5.1 per cent.—more than three times the national average of 1.6 per cent. Worthing primary care group has 30 nursing homes caring for 778 people and 78 residential homes caring for 1,515 people. The Shelley surgery has 125 nursing home patients and 190 residential home patients on its list. That works out at an average of 55 per GP, whereas the UK average is five per GP. That surgery copes with 11 times the national average of patients from care homes.

The *British Medical Journal* states that nursing home patients require just over two times the number of visits required by patients of equivalent age who live in their own home. The home visit rate for over-85s is double that for over-75s, and we know the additional requirements that over-75s bring. However, no additional capitation is available for over-85s. That problem is not unique to Worthing, but many people like to retire to Worthing and, because of the general niceness of the place, they tend to live a very long time. We are delighted that they do, but local GPs face an inordinate amount of extra pressure as a result.

There are many other factors involved. Many people in our town live alone, which is a known cause of increased demand on GP services. In the Central Worthing ward, 16 per cent. of the population are aged over 65 and live alone; the figure is more than 21 per cent. in another ward. That compares to only 5 per cent. of the population in "younger" Sussex towns. Despite those extra pressures, Worthing does not have more district nursing services available than any other area of Sussex.

We have a serious problem with nursing recruitment. There have been 70 vacancies at Worthing hospital for more than five years. There is a particular problem with recruiting practice nurses to help with the work load: they simply do not apply for the jobs. Worthing also has a serious shortage of health visitors to deal with the under-fours. The absence of those extra staff creates additional pressure that falls back on to GPs.

Worthing has more than its fair share of deprivation. Of 155 wards in West Sussex, Nos. 1, 11 and 16 in the rank of deprivation are in Worthing, but local GPs describe the deprivation payments that come within the national health budget as very inadequate. In addition, there are enormous pressures in the mental health sector. We have three homes in the centre of Worthing for long-term psychiatric patients. Many patients have recently moved to the Shelley road surgery area following the closure of Graylingwell psychiatric hospital further to the west: the capitation fee to the GP is much lower, but the patients' problems are not diminished. I remind hon. Members of the tragic case of Sarah Lawson, who was killed by her father while she was in a desperate mental state. He is a constituent of mine and the tragic incident took place in Worthing, although I am sure that the report on it will show that local GPs and the staff of the local care trust offered a great deal of support and performed very professionally.

Extra local pressure is caused by four homeless hostels that contain potentially high demand patients, including people with serious alcohol and drug misuse problems and are therefore susceptible to hepatitis and HIV. There are two local homes for disturbed children, including one for mentally disturbed adolescents from Southwark in London. It is cheaper to house them in Worthing than in London, but they are far removed from their social care workers. A doctor told me that a youngster from one of the homes recently ran amok through the streets of Worthing brandishing a knife. To section him, the doctor had to locate and contact the social worker and psychiatrist in London. In addition, the Shelley Road surgery runs fortnightly methadone clinics on a shoestring budget and meets demands from three local hostels for asylum seekers, with the extra pressure and costs that that involves.

Things are not easy in Worthing and the situation is getting worse. At the Shelley road surgery, each doctor sees an average of 58 patient contacts in a working day: that is one every 8.27 minutes, including home visits and telephone consultations. Those figures represent a 21 per cent. increase during the past six years. The doctors have also to deal with referrals, incoming paperwork, letters and test results that require action. They must also run practice premises, achieve national service framework targets, attend primary care group meetings and postgraduate education meetings, run

audits, participate in local development schemes, hold weekly practice meetings, monitor prescribing patterns and keep within their budget.

An enormous extra work load has been placed on general practitioners across the country. They now must administer drugs to deal with cholesterol levels, monitor more blood pressures and achieve blood pressure reduction targets, which involves administering more drugs. Forty per cent. of patients being monitored for blood pressure typically require three drugs to achieve targets, and those drugs must be administered by the GP. They are also administering more antidepressants and treatments for osteoporosis. They, rather than hospital out-patient departments, now give prostate injections, and there have been further shifts from hospitals to primary care in dealing with routine diabetic care and coronary heart disease follow-ups. In addition, the closure of long-stay geriatric and psychiatric hospitals has given greater responsibilities to GPs. Those may be progressive developments, but they were usually made without consultation as to their likely impact on GPs and without proper additional resources accompanying the patients. As one Worthing GP puts it,

"ten years ago most people had never heard of cholesterol and osteoporosis—nobody worried about blood pressure. We now handle an enormous amount of things but have got no extra staff."

All that is without proper additional funding and, as I said, we have woefully inadequate extra capitation for the elderly.

The funding model for GP surgery staff is 30 years out of date. Many GPs have to subsidise from their own pocket the necessary extra staff. It has been estimated that GPs in West Sussex subsidise the staff model by between £750,000 and £1 million a year. There has been an alarming rise in resignations among practice staff: one surgery in Southwick in my constituency has lost five out of its 16 members of staff in the past six months. Losing experienced staff means that it will have to increase the number of new staff, if it can find and recruit them. As a consequence, the staff budget will be overspent by £20,000, which will cost each partner £4,000 from his or her own pocket. As one said,

"in effect, we are being penalised for trying to deliver 'the new NHS'".

GPs are having to pay to move to new premises in Worthing because the old ones are bulging at the seams; they are not getting the necessary support from the local health authority. There should be sporadic reimbursement for computer equipment, but the total budget for computers in Worthing in the current financial year is, in effect, zero. How are surgeries supposed to modernise? New local development schemes, which the Minister might mention as bringing extra funding, provide only 20p per patient per annum, and practice development money amounts to only £1 per patient per annum—and both have been described as hopeless. Worthing GPs are particularly annoyed to have received no fees from the Government for flu jabs for the over-65s, despite the Government claiming success for averting a flu crisis.

The situation is not a happy one. At the Shelley road surgery, there is a two-week routine wait to see a GP and a one-week routine wait to see a nurse. Out of 48 GP positions in Worthing, there are four full-time equivalent vacancies. The last three advertised posts attracted zero applications, and the health authority acknowledges the problem. As one GP put it, new GPs consider working in Worthing, but decide to move elsewhere because resources do not flow there proportionately. Although nearly all the surgeries in Worthing have closed their lists, the lists continue to increase because the health authority compulsorily allocates additional patients.

The closure letter sent by the Shelley surgery said:

"We write to inform you that we will be closing our list with immediate effect".

Ten reasons were given:

"1. The increasing complexity of medicine with no increase in GP numbers or resources.

2. Extra NHS funding is not reaching GPs in any useful way.

3. New initiatives in primary care mean more work for individual GPs.

4. The continual shift of work from secondary care.

5. We have 11 times the national average of Nursing Home patients...

6. We have a very high elderly population but no extra resources to deal with them...

7. We have significantly less than our share of District Nursing provision within Worthing (based on capitation alone)...

8. The proliferation of high demand children/adolescent units and community psychiatric units in the local area with no extra provision for primary care.

9. We have for many years provided a specialist clinic for drug addicts which has been totally inadequately resourced.

10. The final straw has been the recent dramatic rise in allocations to this practice."

The letter ends by quoting a local GP:

"Safety is one of the most important issues. It is forcing me to the point of being too quick, with a greater potential for missing problems and making mistakes. I feel that there is an abuse of my integral rights as a human being, consistently overloading me with extra work. My only option is to resign and I will be tendering an undated resignation"—

that is a tragic culmination of a GP's career.

There is a crisis not only in recruitment of new GPs, but in retention of experienced GPs. A recent survey in West Sussex showed the age at which GPs hope to retire: 30 per cent. hope to retire between the ages of 52 and 55, and 60 per cent. before they are 60, whereas only 4 per cent. want to retire aged between 60 and 64, and 6 per cent. want to retire as soon as possible. Experienced GPs are talking about leaving an already demoralised service. They cannot be replaced by going to a shop and buying a new packet of seeds to grow some more.

The health authority knows about the problems, but the glossy, professionally assembled briefing pack full of wonderful brochures with which general election candidates were provided may have led one to think that the health service in West Sussex is flourishing. It was difficult to find much discussion of the problems that I have recounted today. The community health council—long may it remain in Worthing, but if the Government revisit their previous intention, it will not last much longer—flagged up four problems: retaining GPs other than those retiring and recruiting new GPs; appointment times for non-emergency conditions extending in many practices; GP contracts being renegotiated with an adverse effect on morale; and the acute need for more nurses to lighten the load, but severe difficulties in recruiting them.

[Tim Loughton]

We hear a great deal from the Government about their plans for NHS hospitals in terms of hospital waiting lists and recruitment of doctors, but GPs account for only 3 per cent. of the entire NHS budget. Small wonder they feel that they get a raw deal. In 1990 there were 27,523 GPs and by 2000 their number had increased to 30,252, which is a 6 per cent. increase in working time equivalent GPs, whereas there were 15,520 consultants in 1990, compared with 23,045 last year, which is a 45 per cent. increase. No wonder GPs feel that theirs is the Cinderella service in the NHS. The statistics on GPs are confused by the full-time working equivalent figures: a truer estimate of the increase in the GP work force is probably no more than 1 per cent.

When international comparisons our made, the figures in this country are woeful. There are 554 doctors per 100,000 patients in Italy, 350 in Germany and 303 in France. In the United Kingdom, there are 164 GPs per 100,000 patients; the next lowest figure in the European Union is Ireland's, where there are 219 GPs per 100,000 patients. In the whole of Europe, only Turkey and Albania have a worse ratio than the UK. The future is worrying. According to the British Medical Association,

"The imminent retirement of large numbers of GPs in the next few years in some of the most deprived areas of the UK is a cause for great concern. One in six GPs currently practising in the NHS qualified in a south-Asian medical school and two-thirds of these are likely to retire by the year 2007."

Apparently, only about 20 per cent. of junior doctors are interested in a career in general practice. The BMA says that a 30 per cent. long-term increase in the GP work force is needed, yet in their NHS plan the Government are promising 2,000 more GPs over the next four years, of whom 1,100 were already planned.

No doubt the Minister will say that the Government are doing their best to retain doctors by offering £10,000 golden handcuffs. It seems amazing that doctors are not interested, but behind the figures is the fact that a GP who retires at the age of 60 in West Sussex has an average life expectancy of 14 years, whereas a GP who retires at the age of 65 has an average life expectancy of only two years. That is a no-brainer—£10,000 in exchange for 12 years of life in retirement is hardly an attractive proposition. The Government need to look beyond that gimmick, because it has not been well received.

We worry, too, about the increase in clinical requirements in the NHS plan, as they will require longer patient consultation times even though doctors' schedules are already tight. An increase of one minute in the average patient consultation time is an increase of just under 10 per cent.; that will require a corresponding increase of more than 3,300 GPs. The BMA notes:

"GPs' morale is at an all-time low, with many doctors feeling that patients are being let down. Inadequate consultation times, burgeoning paperwork, a shortage of doctors, nurses and hospital beds plus under-resourced new directives and targets all lead to patients not getting the care they deserve."

That is the verdict of grass-root GPs. When operations are cancelled or people face long weeks of waiting to see a specialist, the family doctor has to keep the patient going until treatment has been delivered. The Government are not facing reality, and GPs are fed up with warm words. One GP quoted in a national newspaper said:

"We just don't seem able to get ministers to listen. They seem absolutely bent on ignoring everything we say. GPs are fed up and when we talk to them around the country the sole topic of conversation is 'When can I get out?'"

That is the nature of the challenge. That is the drastic problem facing the GP service nationally.

All those factors, and more, are concentrated in and around my constituency, especially in Worthing. The risk is that doctors will leave the NHS en masse, and perhaps leave the country or leave the profession when we can least afford it. Help is needed before something breaks. The current situation is not fair to our doctors or our constituents, nor is it safe.

I ask the Minister to have a close look at the problems in West Sussex and Worthing, which have a high concentration of elderly people and problem patients. Sussex and the coastal strip are not wealthy, cushy areas, but the Minister's colleagues have dismissed them as such. We desperately need help. I implore the Minister urgently to consider the matter in the light of the alarming statistics and case studies that I have presented to her. I hope she will agree to meet GPs in my constituency to see what can be done to help them before things really snap.

9.59 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on initiating the debate. I welcome the presence of Conservative Members of Parliament from Sussex. The issue clearly matters to Labour Members as well, and I am glad that they are so well represented—[*Laughter.*] I would like especially to pay tribute to the Whip for his contribution to our debate.

My hon. Friend's speech was far better than any of the rest of us could have delivered. He brought together the points that matter, and I will not repeat them in any detail. I invite the Minister not just to respond to the debate, but to give a lot of thought to how to respond to the issues that have been spelled out.

In Worthing, West Sussex, Sussex as a whole and in the country, great efforts are being made, and I pay tribute to the efforts of the auxiliary staff, support staff, nurses, doctors, managers and administrators across all the health services. However, it is also true that more could be done but is not being done. Many people's experience of the national health service is that it has become a national waiting service. Some things can be put right. There was a time in Worthing when the wait for a 20-minute hearing test at the hospital on the NHS was a year; once the assessment had been made and the hearing aid had been ordered, it took five months to have it fitted—six weeks for it to arrive and three and a half months to get an appointment to be shown where the on-off switch was. However, that temporary problem has been resolved.

Many other waits have not been resolved. Worthing and Southlands hospitals have reduced some of their waiting times, which is welcome, but they remain far too long. My hon. Friend mentioned the situation in Surrey: one in 10 of those waiting for more than a year in Surrey

are waiting for in-patient treatment, and the Sussex figures are not that different. However, it is instructive to contrast those figures with those for Durham health authority area that covers the Prime Minister's constituency: there, the rate is one in 100 or one in 200. There may have been reasons why that disparity arose, but there is no reason for it to persist four years after we were told the NHS was going to be saved.

Hon. Members and their GPs all know people who have died because they have had to wait. The debate is not about hospital services, but I do not want to focus solely on GPs and not mention the efforts being made by people working in hospitals. Some complaints are unjustified, others are justified, but all need investigation and consideration. In GP services, complaints about what doctors do are far fewer, but the concerns about things going wrong have been well spelled out by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham. GPs hours are far in excess of those agreed for junior hospital doctors, and at least junior hospital doctors are trying to get experience of new sorts of cases.

GPs working 60, 70 or 80 hours a week is not the same as a Member of Parliament working those hours. Much of our work consists of going to parties or listening to our colleagues speaking: we do not hold people's lives immediately in our hands. Every time a GP examines someone he has to ask serious questions—for example, he might have to determine whether a baby has meningitis, which requires him to be alert to symptoms that are not obvious. I pay tribute to a GP who diagnosed an ectopic pregnancy in someone who matters a lot to me. He dropped his surgery commitments and came round after hearing a couple of sentences on the telephone through his receptionist. That is the kind of skill that GPs exercise all the time.

The underlying point—the challenge for the health authority and the Government—is the special position of Sussex, West Sussex and Worthing in particular. The issues that my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham spoke about—people with special needs who are in their middle years or younger—do not apply only in inner cities. People with such problems live in many different areas—they include troubled teenagers and people who need to escape addiction to illegal drugs or legal ones, for example, alcohol. However, the real problem locally is the population of over-85s. Thirty years ago, health policy administrators understood the extra loads that the over-75s brought, but the over-75s of that era are the over-85s today.

Three years ago, West Sussex health authority carried out a pilot study to find out how to analyse the needs of the over-85s. The study was not continued, in my view because the cost or resources implications were unsustainable at local level, and because the health authority could not justify using the extra resources that would otherwise help family doctors to meet their patients' needs in a humane way if they could not find the cash.

I shall not say how the resource allocation model penalises places like Sussex. We could start a debate about morbidity and mortality rates, but I am sure that the Minister will become familiar with those and many other figures. Instead, I want to talk about what Worthing is showing the rest of the country. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham pointed out that the proportion of over-85s in Worthing is five times higher than in the rest of the country. What is happening now in Worthing will be happening everywhere in 20 years' time. The actuaries can tell us how such things happen.

The spread of the over-85s will come about as did the spread of the over-75s. If we had had this debate 20 years ago, and if I were making the same point about the over-75s, people would have nodded and said that I was right. That is certainly what has happened. It will now happen with the over-85s, but the average person of that age will give doctors almost twice the work load of someone aged over 75, which is many times the load imposed by a person of my age. I am 56 and I see a doctor every two or three years for trivial complaints; I am lucky, but it is a function of my age. However, when I am 75, I am likely to need to see a doctor once a month, and when I am 85 I might have to see a doctor once a week.

That acceleration puts an extra burden on GP services and on their staff and surgeries. The doctors do not mind doing the work—in fact, most of them go into medicine, and most of their nursing contemporaries go into nursing, to help people avoid illness and disease, to help cure those who can be cured and to care for those who cannot be cured. The question is how much of that burden each of them has to shoulder. The fact that 11 per cent. of patients in West Sussex are over 85—the national average is 5 per cent.—has an impact on doctors' surgeries. That should be recognised; an extra doctor, or even an extra half doctor, would make a difference to the work load. It would also allow a bit more room in what I think of as the concertina.

None the less, the problem remains of what happens when a doctor retires, or is sick, or is called away to help run the local primary care trust. This may be the right place, but it is not the right time to rerun the argument on GP fundholding. There are some excellent GP fundholding practices in my constituency, which includes Rustington, but we are now to have primary care trusts. I shall not argue about that today. However, I strongly support what my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham said in connection with the community health council, and I plead with the Minister to ask her colleagues not to abolish CHCs.

The work of Trevor Richards, chief officer of Worthing and district CHC, and his colleagues has been important and I pay tribute to them. It was their asking whether the Association of Community Health Councils opposed the Government's determination to abolish the councils that began to make the difference, and the timing of the election has made it possible for the Government to think again. I ask them to do so. I ask them not to abolish community health councils. CHCs' work can be expanded into the family doctor field, but the experience that they bring to the job cannot be supplied by reconfiguration, patients' advocates or the other arrangements that the Government have in mind. I do not ask the Minister to say this morning that Government policy will be changed, but I ask her to present our plea to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

I also ask the Minister to request that the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister visit the coastal area of Sussex, together or separately, for a private meeting. I would suggest that the doctors came to No. 10 or to

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

Richmond house in Whitehall, but the travelling time would result in their being unable to see 30 or 40 patients. If the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister could spare the time, they should come to Sussex to meet the doctors, nurses, support staff and local managers and administrators. By all means, let the meeting be private—there is no need for cameras to be present—but it is important that they hear directly from those who can reflect upon today's conditions in Sussex, which will spread around the country over the next 10, 20 or 30 years as the benefits of old age and the consequent burdens on the health service extend.

I pay tribute to the doctors who raised this issue in a responsible manner. The headlines said that no more patients would be accepted south of the railway line in Worthing, but the doctors knew that if a practice kept its list open while others closed theirs, it would get all the new patients. By closing their lists, practices required the health authority to make allocations, but that does not solve the underlying problem of the excessive burden. If the Government could see a way forward through the health authority and implemented a plan to get resources through—rather than relying only on words and charm—doctors would notice the difference, and patients would, too.

I have been a Member of Parliament for quite some time, although not for as long as you, Mr. Winterton. I have had experience of GP services in depressed areas of Victoria, in Stockwell in south London, and in my previous constituency in south-east London. I am now watching GPs in my Worthing constituency. Partly because of conditions there and partly because of the age of the people and the burdens involved, the stress and strain in Worthing are greater than any I have known during 26 years as a Member of Parliament.

I plead with the Minister to ensure that resources can flow and that the approach to the problem can be modified, so that GPs can do their work and meet our constituents' medical need.

10.10 am

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on his excellent speech and my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) on reiterating the points that it raised. I also congratulate and welcome the Minister. The spirit of today's debate is non-partisan—it is about solving practical problems.

I cannot add to the well researched presentation of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, which dealt with problems along the Sussex coast. If I may, however, I want to discuss an instance involving GPs slightly to the north, in my part of Sussex. I, too, plead for the Minister's help to solve a fairly simple problem—it will involve no cost to the Government—that illustrates some of the problems that GPs elsewhere encounter.

In Pulborough, we have outstanding doctors. Two fundholder practices came together to create a bunch of incredibly hard-working and innovative doctors who serve their community well. For two years, they have been working on plans for a remarkable new centre, which was to have been a model for the country and to have received a beacon award. To get the necessary funding, they used local help to put together a scheme with the Dunhill trust. At the time, they had the support of Horsham district council.

The scheme addresses several problems constructively and collectively. First, the new medical centre would provide nursing care facilities, operation facilities and convalescent facilities—services that a rural community needs. Secondly, by moving into the Horsham and Chanctonbury GP group area, the scheme would gather 140,000 patients who would render the future of St. Richard's hospital much more secure. One of our problems is whether hospitals have enough patients to guarantee their futures; the scheme would indirectly address that and enable consultants to come out and do a lot of operations on the spot. Clearly, the doctors could not finance such a scheme by themselves, so it was a blessing when a charity was brought in to put up the finance and combined the scheme with the provision of a modest retirement village. That would also meet a need, as that part of the world has nowhere of a sheltered nature for elderly people to go, which presents other social problems.

The scheme was worked out over two years. The district council identified the Oddstones site as suitable and suggested that those involved apply for it. Then planning policy guidance note 3 was introduced. At the last minute, the head of planning took the view—wrongly; the note contains certain qualifications— that he could not recommend the site after all because the majority of it was greenfield land. As a result, the planning committee, doing what it thought was its duty, turned the application down. The doctors have spent £100,000 out of their own pockets on planning costs. The district council, trying to be constructive, has made some alternative suggestions but, for a variety of reasons, those will not work.

I was in contact with the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), about the scheme, because it would have been a model for the country. West Sussex health authority and the national health service had offered tremendous help, but the rather unhelpful letter that I received—I am sure that it was not written by the former Minister herself—said that the health authority could not be involved in planning issues. That illustrates the precise point that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has endeavoured to address. We have held huge public meetings—attracting 10 times as many people as any political meeting—as the community is genuinely furious that a project that everyone wants is being frustrated.

The community does not want any more housing than it needs, nor does the problem involve choosing one section of the community over another. There is a cast-iron case for using a bit of greenfield land because that is the only land that would meet the criteria for the site. I have written to the Secretary of State asking for help because there is no point in having a public appeal to finance a planning appeal unless such a planning appeal has a chance of success; otherwise we would be misleading citizens. The doctors cannot be expected to finance that, given what they have already spent to no avail. The issue is bipartisan, involving health and the environment, and the essence of the decision to be made is political: is there a possibility of PPG3 being

interpreted in a different way? The question is then whether the health case for the total combined package and the model that it represents are sufficiently deserving to warrant such an interpretation.

I warmly invite the Minister to come and look at what is being planned at the same time as she looks at the more acute problems in coastal West Sussex. It is an example of doctors, on their own initiative, seeking to solve several major problems of the community. They have constructively found the resources to address the problems yet—incredibly frustratingly—they have been blocked by what is perceived locally as narrow-minded pedantry arising from a different issue, that of excessive housebuilding in the area.

We all face the problem of an ageing population. The question in West Sussex is what is the right level of resources for both GPs and hospitals in a community that has both a high average age and an increasing number of people aged over 85. The problems of GPs differ between rural areas and the south-coast urban area. The pressing need in rural areas is for the type of centre that I have described. A lot of beds will be released if there are local convalescent facilities, and a great deal of time and expense will be saved if many minor operations and nursing care can be undertaken in a local centre. For a group of doctors who have come up with the answer to be frustrated in such a way is not only a shame, but a disgrace. I plead for the Minister's help.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) to speak for the Liberal Democrats, I remind the Chamber that the debate is fairly narrow, relating to NHS GPs in Sussex. I shall be generous in showing discretion, and no doubt hon. Members will want to draw comparisons, but I urge them to note the narrowness of the debate.

10.20 am

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). I could not disagree with anything he said—he may find that unusual coming from a Liberal Democrat. The hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) also raised pertinent points. I understand your warning, Mr. Winterton, but the speeches that we have heard not only describe problems in Sussex, but tell of events around the country. From Sussex to Sunderland, from Cumbria to Cornwall, the problems highlighted are present in varying degrees. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham referred to GPs as normally mild-mannered individuals. I agree. Most people share that perception of their family doctors. However, when I was at the BMA conference last week, I realised that the people in the hall were angry—they had had enough.

Before I turn to more general points, I should talk about the specific problem of an ageing population, which has been identified in Sussex. GPs receive more money for elderly patients, but the way in which contracts have developed has shown a sticking-plaster approach. GPs realise that they have more work to do for elderly patients, they negotiate a little more money, and on the system goes, but as the needs of the elderly become more complex, they require a lot more time, and time is money. There is a balance to be struck. Even if a GP has plenty of work, his patient numbers remain the same, which is a problem. A GP from the north of the country told me that things balance out somehow, but that is clearly not the case. It was said that what is happening in Sussex will happen throughout the United Kingdom in 10 or 20 years. GPs in other parts of the country do not face the problem so acutely, so I thank the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham for making that good point.

GPs want increased time for consultations and are scathing about the 48-hour target that the Government have set for appointments. Some people can wait: those having routine appointments do not need to see a doctor within 48 hours, so it is patently ridiculous to set a target for them, whereas people who require urgent help need to receive it within 24 or 12 hours. We have set a target without thinking about what we need to achieve for the benefit of the patient.

The GP's job has changed. Thirty years ago, GPs referred tonsillitis to specialists, but they would be laughed at if they did so today. There has been a shift from treatment in hospitals: there are no general physicians in our hospitals now; everyone is a specialist. Conditions such as asthma and diabetes are managed in the surgery, which takes an increasing share of the time of doctors and other staff.

It is frustrating for doctors that to an increasing extent they have to manage patients who are on a waiting list. In many areas—I suspect that it is so in Sussex—there is a wait of 18 months for an orthopaedic appointment. In that time the burden of managing the patient's pain and expectations falls on the GP, who probably in the end prescribes antidepressants—after all, it is pretty miserable to wait 18 months for an appointment. More multi-agency working is also taking place. Often funding must come from health, education or social services, so more GP time is taken up in meetings. We all know how frustrating and time-wasting those can be.

Computerisation has been mentioned, but no one pointed out that, because most computers are surgery based, GPs who previously took notes home to work on them must arrive at work an hour or two early to update records on the computer.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Blears) *indicated dissent.*

Sandra Gidley: That is not just my view. If the Minister does not agree, perhaps she would like to look at a series of press cuttings compiled under the heading "A time for general practice". There are many quotations from GPs telling how it is.

The stress of being on call has increased. The requirement has grown over the years as many GPs—especially older ones—decide to sacrifice income and pay to have a good night's sleep. GP morale is at an all-time low, and not just in Sussex. Dr. John Chisholm, who chairs the BMA's general practitioners committee, has said:

"First rate family doctors feel their patients get a second rate NHS service—or worse. Many doctors say they are planning to retire early, or leave the profession, rather than go on with the intolerable burdens of paperwork, bureaucracy and the frustration they feel from fighting to get appropriate treatment for their patients."

[Sandra Gidley]

It is not just politicians, therefore, who are making such points. It is doctors.

There are also problems of recruitment. I have talked to a local GP about this and we have heard about a similar state of affairs in Sussex. Twenty years ago there would be 30 applicants for a job in a certain practice; four years ago there were three applicants for a job in the same practice; another vacancy arose recently and not a single person applied for the job. If our doctors do not want to become GPs, we shall face a crisis. There was a crisis of GP provision in the late 1960s. Reference has been made to the Asian work force. In the 1960s efforts were made to find GPs abroad, but most of those GPs work in the more difficult practices and are approaching retirement age. We desperately need ways to tackle the problem that will probably hit us in about six years.

A recent survey showed that about 80 per cent. of family doctors will consider resigning their NHS contracts next spring if the BMA's GP committee is not able to secure a new and acceptable contract. Negotiations are under way. A public perception survey showed that 72 per cent. of people thought their GP was either fairly overworked or very overworked. If the people whose views were sought heard today's debate, the percentage would probably increase.

We have heard about the rise in the number of consultations per GP, which is contributing to the problem, and about the number of additional GPs announced under the NHS plan—not 2,000 but 900, and it is not even certain that those are to be full-time equivalents. The BMA has calculated that an extra 10,000 GPs are needed to meet increased patient expectations and to cope with the demands of the national service frameworks. However, the Government appear to have developed an ostrich approach to the problem. A BMA briefing states:

"The Health Departments...did not accept that there was a significant problem with morale and recruitment. They accepted there had been an increase in workload, but maintained that it could be addressed by working smarter as well as harder."

I am sure that Members of Parliament would not like to be told that. The briefing adds that

"they declared that the availability of NHS Direct and skill mix options should reduce work for GPs."

That really is the ostrich approach.

The doctors speak for themselves more eloquently than I can. The final comment that I want to use comes from someone in Cumbria; I apologise for the fact that it is not from Sussex, but the problem is nationwide. The person states:

"We are simply pig sick of the health service. We are having to deliver government promises to patients with no extra funding. This is not a party-political statement as the fault lies equally between the last Conservative Government and the current Labour Government. They have promised and are promising the earth to patients knowing full well that we cannot possibly deliver and it is the patient at the end of the day, who is suffering.

Roughly an extra £10 million has been given to North Cumbria...Very little has filtered down into primary care and yet doctors are being expected to deliver on the new national service frameworks for all sorts of different treatments; asked to carry out appraisals on all staff; reorganise counter services; make improvements in line with national directives; prescribe more expensive treatments; constantly report back to our health authority on a vast number of issues and fill-in a whole host of documentation.

There won't be a GP left in Cumbria"—

any part of the country could be substituted for Cumbria, I think—

"who is not fed-up with this system".

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Is the hon. Lady going to mention Sussex?

Sandra Gidley: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. To keep you happy, I will substitute Sussex for Cumbria.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): On a point of order, Mr. Winterton. Who is the Chairman to whom the hon. Lady keeps referring?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I am being very tolerant today. I am not yet an additional Deputy Speaker for sittings in Westminster Hall. The hon. Lady can call me Mr. Chairman or Mr. Winterton. I accept either.

Sandra Gidley: Now, back to Sussex.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If we were on the radio I should press the button to challenge for hesitation.

Sandra Gidley: I have already been accused of deviation for not speaking on Sussex, but I shall carry on and finish the quotation. It continues:

"We've been piggy in the middle for too long working with diddly squat and we've had enough. We've been running so fast for the last ten years just to land up standing still. We're exhausted, fed-up and are now ready to say we've just had enough."

10.32 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this debate and raising important issues. I also congratulate and welcome the new Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), to her important job.

What has been said this morning about West Sussex is to a great extent true of the whole country, although my hon. Friends have raised an important point about the mechanism for allocating funding to health authorities and the system's apparent failure to recognise the severe problems caused in some areas by increases in the elderly population. However, that is a matter for another debate. The Government are examining the allocation mechanisms for health service spending, so no doubt we shall return to the subject.

More than nine out of 10 patient contacts in the national health service are at primary care level, and the majority of those will be with GPs or their staff. The family practitioner service is the jewel in the crown of the NHS. On the whole, it has served the NHS extremely well and provided an efficient, relatively low cost and high quality service. It is apparent to us all that that jewel is under severe threat, and I am amazed that the Government appear to be willing to tolerate that threat to a service that is the core of the NHS, especially in view

of the fact that the NHS plan states that development of primary care services is to be the key to the modernisation of the NHS.

I would like to take hon. Members back to before 1997, to fundholding. I shall not argue the merits of fundholding. It had its faults and never covered a sufficient percentage of practices to be evaluated fully. However, from the fundholding experience, I want to draw out a fact that the Government now recognise, which is that entrepreneurial spirit can be unleashed in the delivery of public services. When it is unleashed, it is a powerful force that empowers GPs to develop their practices and find best practice solutions for their patients. The primary interest of the vast majority of GPs is to serve their patients and develop professional services for them, and they can do that enthusiastically using their undoubted skills and imagination. Fundholding certainly stimulated something in the GP population.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman refer to fundholding in Sussex?

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to you, Mr. Winterton, for reminding me that fundholding practices in Sussex made an important contribution to the delivery of services in that area. By contrast, GPs in Sussex have found the Government's reforms prescriptive in nature and bureaucratic in structure. The reforms have created significant additional bureaucratic work that has undermined Sussex GPs' ability to use their professional judgment in the interests of their patients. The Government's attacks on the medical profession in Sussex and their sometimes unwise inflation of patient expectation in Sussex and elsewhere have caused morale in general practice to fall to an all time low ebb. No one can doubt that, so I shall not quote from the report of the BMA conference with which we are all familiar.

The Government's agenda is to shift the emphasis of service delivery to the primary care sector and to propose better quality GP services. Most GPs think that that should involve spending a longer time with their patients, but the Government focused on the time before access to a GP is achieved and set a 48-hour target. Additional pressures arise from the Government's programme. I accept that some of the measures are entirely necessary and inevitable, for example, revalidation and continuing professional development, but they must be seen against the demographic background that we have heard described, which will place incredible pressures on the service in future.

My concern is with the Government's response to the problem. In the national plan, they set out several outcome targets including a target for access to GPs. They underpinned those with some input targets that they must know will not deliver the output targets in the plan—the former Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), came close to admitting that. The Government have raised public expectations that cannot and will not be met. That places GPs in Sussex and elsewhere under extreme stress and pressure. Day in, day out, they face patients whose expectations have been raised, but the GPs do not have the wherewithal or resources to fulfil those expectations.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) spoke about the GP numbers in the national plan. The Government have set a figure of 2,000 additional GPs by 2004, but the BMA says that 900 of them are already in the system, so the figure represents only 1,100 genuinely additional GPs. I do not want to get into an argument about that, but I am concerned that the figure of 2,000—as against the BMA's figure of 10,000—does not represent whole-time equivalent GPs.

I should tell the Under-Secretary of State that there is no doubt about that. I asked the former Minister of State an explicit question and his answer was explicit: it is a head-count figure. That means that if 2,000 full-time GPs retire or leave the service and 4,000 half-time GPs are recruited, the Secretary of State will be able to say correctly, arithmetically speaking, that he has met the target of delivering an additional 2,000 GPs. However, not one additional doctor-hour of patient service will be available.

That problem must be seen against the backdrop of the changing profile of the medical profession and the increasing feminisation of the medical work force. Across the nation, 34 per cent. of GPs are female; that is a fair reflection of the position in Sussex. Last year, the majority of entrants to medical schools—58 per cent.—were female. Our medical work force will, therefore, become increasingly feminised. That is a good thing, but the Government must recognise the fact that female doctors, because of family responsibilities and a greater predilection for part-time working during at least part of their careers, contribute fewer working hours on average over their careers than their male colleagues. That means that, as the medical work force is feminised, it will have to get larger to keep the service at a standstill.

The figures in the NHS plan, which are not whole-time equivalents, take no account of such factors. There is a real probability that the Government will meet the target that they have set themselves in the NHS plan in technical terms, but deliver fewer general practice doctor-hours in total. I challenge the Minister to explain why the Government do not express their targets in whole-time equivalent GPs. That would be a meaningful figure and would underpin, in a way that could be understood across parties and in the community, the Government's laudable strategy to increase the number of part-time workers in the NHS by luring back into the service people who, for various reasons, including family responsibilities, are unable to give a full-time commitment.

There is another problem. The Minister will no doubt tell us about the increased numbers of training places. The Government have committed themselves to creating 450 additional GP training places by 2004, but training GPs is not enough: we must get them to join the service once they have completed their training. However, conversion rates are falling: in 1996-97, 1,029 doctors joined general practice; in 1999-2000, the figure fell to 958. Whether we like it or not, GPs are among the best educated and best trained members of our work force and they are generally endowed with some of the best interpersonal skills. They are therefore much in demand outside medicine. I am sure that other hon. Members know many GPs who have been recruited away from medicine to other careers.

[Mr. Hammond]

We must recognise those competing demands. The NHS will never be able to compete simply by offering GPs financial incentives, and I do not think that it should. Obviously, money is important, but it is not the whole game and is probably not the most important factor. GPs want the freedom to exercise their professional discretion in the interests of their patients. They want freedom from scapegoating by the Government. Of course there are a few rotten apples in the barrel, as there are in any barrel. Even in so joyous a place as Sussex, we find the odd GP who falls short of the standards that we all expect. However, the vast majority have, as their primary and overriding concern, the ability to deliver, with the benefit of their extraordinary skills and professional training, the best possible services for their patients. To do that, they need not only the resources and the support of Government combined with freedom from scapegoating and the blame culture, but the liberty to exercise their professional judgment locally in the interests of their patients.

The Government must recognise that the primary care group-primary care trust experiment, whatever else it may bring or has brought, has not engaged GPs at the grass roots as was anticipated. It has not provided an alternative mechanism to fundholding for unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit among GPs. The Government must recognise that the practice is the fundamental unit for general practitioners. They need to enthuse and inspire GPs at that level if the services that the public expect and the Government want are to be delivered.

That brings me to my final point about the delivery of first-class general practice services in Sussex. During the general election campaign, the Labour party and the Prime Minister offered the British people world-class public services—not just good or better, but world-class. The ball is now firmly in the Government's court: they have been given a clear mandate to deliver those world-class public services. The Minister must know that the public will be watching. In this Parliament, the Government will be judged by their success or otherwise in delivering world-class public services. They cannot do that in relation to health care unless they win over the GPs in Sussex and elsewhere by inspiring them and empowering them to deliver and develop their professional practice for the benefit of their patients. Unless they have the freedom to do that, we will never restore general practice to what it was and should be—the jewel in the crown of our national health service.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): In calling the Minister to reply to the debate, I, too, congratulate her on her appointment.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this important debate. I have welcomed the atmosphere and tone in which it has been conducted and have learned a great deal, particularly about the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the specific problems there. I would also like to thank all hon. Members for their kind words of congratulation. I will do my best to address my comments to Sussex and Worthing and to be as direct and focused as I can.

I represent an inner-city constituency that has many problems of deprivation, but that does not mean that I do not recognise that there are sometimes real pockets of hardship, poverty and deprivation in seemingly affluent areas, especially in many of our coastal towns. There are particular problems associated with the structure of the population in such places, and the hon. Gentleman has highlighted the issue of NHS care for the elderly. About 75 per cent. of the NHS centres on care for older people; it is a fundamental part of the service and we need to take it into account.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of the combination of services. Older people are not the only ones involved. His area has four hostels for the homeless and a number of institutions looking after vulnerable children. I have been made aware of that combination—he referred to it as a cocktail of ingredients—and I will take it seriously.

Several hon. Members asked if I could arrange for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister to visit the area and talk to GPs and listen to their problems. I cannot promise the Secretary of State, and I certainly cannot promise the Prime Minister, but I can promise myself. I have regional responsibility for the area and I intend to get to know my areas in detail. I want to listen to the GPs and the nurses, the people working at the front end of our services, to find out what it is like on the ground. There is nothing more valuable than hearing people speak in their own voices, rather than reading official documents. Much to the disquiet of some of my officials, I intend to go out during the recess on a tour of the areas for which I am responsible. I shall do my best to visit the areas that are represented by hon. Members who have spoken today.

Let me start my first debate as Minister by paying tribute to all who work in the national health service. They have changed the landscape of the NHS in recent years, and have a key role to play in its future. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) referred to public sector entrepreneurs—a phrase that was, I think, first used by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It is good to find that we share a view. In my constituency, a school for social entrepreneurs is developing the imagination, creativity and innovation of people in the public sector. Staff are the key to developing different ways of working.

However, today's debate is about GPs in Sussex. We owe GPs a great debt. I acknowledge the energy that they put in day in, day out, week in, week out. We have heard about their long working hours and their tremendous amount of patient contact. Their commitment is resulting in improved services in all communities. Because the Government recognise the pressures on GPs, we made a commitment in the NHS plan to help to develop primary care services. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge told us that 90 per cent. of patient contacts in the NHS are at primary care level. That is why the development of primary care is the key to modernising and improving

services. One of the things that we have constantly emphasised is our desire to give people in the front line the power, the resources, the money and the decision-making opportunities to change the services that we provide.

Let me run through a few of the things that the Government are doing. I shall not have time to tell hon. Members about everything in the NHS in 10 minutes, but I hope to expand on some issues in future. We are investing £100 million over the next three years to encourage the recruitment and retention of GPs. Some of that will be spent in Sussex. Although new GPs receive £5,000 to enter general practice, I acknowledge that financial incentives are not the be-all and end-all. People work in public service because they believe in it and they want to provide services to their communities. However, financial incentives can help when they are deciding where to practise and what kind of work to take up. It is important that the Government acknowledge the need to attract more people to general practice by providing extra incentives.

We are also trying to provide extra incentives for women returners. The point was well made about the increasing feminisation of the service and the need to ensure that women can continue to practise and that their skills remain up to date while they are at home caring for relatives or on maternity leave. We have introduced a scheme under which women work for four sessions a week in the NHS to maintain their contact and to continue their professional development, so that when they are ready to return, they constitute another pool of workers from which to draw.

We are investing £100 million to support service development. Sussex received £3 million this year—that is about £10,000 per practice, half of which can be spent entirely as the practice wishes. It is important for creative and innovative GPs to be given the resources to change their practices. We recognise the personal strains on GPs, which is why we are setting up the first ever occupational health service for GPs. If we do not look after their health, their ability to care for others may be impaired. In addition, we are trying to reduce the administrative burden on GPs, although there remains a lot more to do. We have saved them from having to sign applications for passports and driving licences, and all the extraneous things that people ask doctors to do. Doctors should be doing what they do best: seeing patients, providing consultations and working out care plans.

We are also modernising the surgeries of 3,000 GPs. It is important that GPs, like Members of Parliament, work in a decent environment, because people's working environment affects the quality of their work.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Is the Minister going to advise us how many surgeries in Sussex have been modernised? It would be helpful if she directed more of her remarks to Sussex.

Ms Blears: I am grateful for that comment, Mr. Winterton. I am sure that at least a proportionate amount is being spent on modernising GP practices in Sussex—[*Laughter.*] When I visit the area, I shall have the opportunity to see for myself the improvements that are being made. I look forward to it.

We are also increasing the number of GPs, although it is a slow process. The target in the NHS plan of 2,000 extra doctors is a floor, not a ceiling. We would like more GPs—indeed, we have asked the BMA to suggest ways in which we might increase the number of doctors. The BMA has not yet responded, but I hope that it will. In fact, the number of GPs in Sussex has increased from 802 in 1997 to 835 in 2001. It is not a huge increase, but it is going in the right direction.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister say whether that number is a whole-time equivalent, or whether it is a simple head count that conceals an actual reduction in whole-time equivalents?

Ms Blears: I do not have that information with me today, but I shall find out and let the hon. Gentleman know.

We are moving in the right direction. I remind the Opposition that GP numbers began to fall in 1991 and continued to fall for the next five or six years; only now are we beginning to solve the problems caused by the massive reduction in training places that took place under the Conservative Government. I appreciate that we are not here today to make party political points, but we should remember that the GP training places and GP numbers fell dramatically under the Conservative Government.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If the Minister cannot cover the subject in the remaining few minutes—I realise that we do not have much time—would she write to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, sending copies of the letter to the rest of us, saying how she plans to analyse the additional burdens imposed by the over-85s? My hon. Friend and I both spoke about the need to look forward. It may not be possible to answer that question today, but we should be grateful if she would to write to us.

Ms Blears: I certainly shall. In the few remaining moments, I shall try to give some pertinent examples of how GPs are being helped to look after elderly people in Worthing.

First, local primary care groups are considering how to use nurse practitioners to provide general medical care in nursing homes. They are already running clinics that deal with coronary heart disease and high blood pressure, which relieves the burden on GPs. Three GP practices in the area now have a dedicated health adviser for the elderly, providing support especially for the over-85s. Under a local scheme, the scoring assessment for those who need cataract operations is now being made when they visit the optician, so that they do not have to return to their GP; that innovation, too, is relieving pressure on general practitioners in the area.

Many general practitioners in Worthing and in Sussex generally are embracing change and innovation. They are looking to the future and are prepared to consider new solutions. We have heard a great deal today about the problems of general practice. The challenge for the Government and for Parliament is to try to come up with long-term, sustainable solutions so that GPs feel really valued and know that they are an important part of the health service. The innovations that we are introducing in Worthing, Sussex and elsewhere help to support GPs in their work.

[Ms Blears]

I must also mention the work of NHS Direct. That service takes thousands of calls a month. It refers people to different kinds of care, gives them advice on how to look after themselves, and refers them to pharmacists, midwives and a range of other services.

If long-term sustainable solutions to the pressures that GPs undoubtedly face are to be found, we politicians must be more creative and more imaginative—we must work smarter and not simply work harder. We need to achieve investment at the front end, so that we can provide patients with appropriate care. It is not always right to visit the general practitioner; patients can often receive care in other ways and in places that are quicker, more appropriate, and that better meet their needs.

We have a responsibility to look creatively at the whole of the health service. We value general practitioners enormously, but we must not forget that the NHS comprises a range of primary care workers, whose contribution I acknowledge. Nurses, advisers and community-based workers are doing a marvellous job in supporting patients and providing services. We rely on them. I want to ensure that they find their working lives enjoyable and satisfying, rather than consisting wholly of pressure and overwork.

Transport (East Midlands)

11 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I rise from this phalanx of east midlands Members of Parliament to raise a subject that I believe will engender a lively debate. I shall start by setting out the principles on which any modern transport strategy should rest. First, every citizen should be able to fulfil most of his or her daily needs by travelling on foot or by bicycle, which requires, as I shall explain, a change in the way in which we plan our built environment. Secondly, every citizen should have access to quality public transport—by "quality" I mean sufficient to enable people to get to work or to fulfil normal shopping needs. By that criteria the twice-weekly bus service common in some of my villages is inadequate. Thirdly, people need comfortable, affordable access to other parts of the United Kingdom. Delightful though South Derbyshire is, its inhabitants sometimes want to travel to other parts of the country reasonably cheaply and comfortably, without difficulty in accessing the mode of transport that they use from where they live.

Fourthly, companies in our region should have speedy access to their markets and to other parts of their supply chain so that they can build more successful enterprises and reach new markets and new customers. Fifthly, our modes of transport should be integrated. It is not enough to have a bus service if it does not link to the rail network or to the local airport. Such links are sadly too often missing, both in the east midlands and in other parts of the country. Sixthly, information should be made available to people to enable them to make informed transport choices. It should not be difficult to find out where one can catch a bus or a train, or what air services are available in an area. Again, there is a need for improved information and communications technology, in the interests not merely of creating better informed citizens but of creating alternatives to transport.

Seventhly, we need to ensure that alternative transport choices and fiscal measures discourage the most polluting car uses. I represent a rural constituency and recognise that possession of a car—I have one—is virtually essential to carry on any sort of normal life in my area and, although we cannot see too far into the future, probably always will be. However, we want to ensure that we take measures that encourage the most efficient use of a car and not the gas-guzzlers that are still on our roads. Eighthly, we should try to ensure that information and communications technology is fostered in a way that allows people to choose not to travel at all, so that people could, for example, work from home for a substantial part of their working life, thereby minimising transport use.

How can we apply those principles in the east midlands? Our demanding economic goal to turn the east midlands into a top 20 region within Europe by 2010 is made more complex by the fact that the region is substantially rural. People choose to live there because of the smallness of many of the communities, the delightful countryside around them and the quality of the environment that people can enjoy. The last thing that we want is to develop a successful region by polluting its attractiveness and destroying the reasons why many people choose to live and work there.

Therefore, transport strategy and the choices that we make are crucial parts of building that successful economy and protecting the things that most of us regard as essential if the east midlands is to continue to be an attractive place to live and work.

Specific measures that must be taken include improving the quality of the rail services in the region. It is crucial that we upgrade the Midland Mainline service between the Derby area, which is the part of the region that I represent, and London. That means increasing the speed and frequency of the service that is available.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that, in the 10-year transport plan, the west coast main line and the east coast main line are both listed for major investment, but there is no mention whatever of the need to invest in the midland main line? That will have terrible consequences on urban conurbations such as Nottingham, Derby and Leicester.

Mr. Todd: I entirely share that view. However, a seed of hope—perhaps the Minister will reassure us—in the M1 multimodal study, which I will touch on shortly, is the emphasis on and thorough exploration of upgrading the midland main line as an alternative to some of the more frightening prospects of widening the M1.

Phil Hope (Corby): Corby is the largest town in Europe without a passenger railway station. Midland Mainline has been involved in a feasibility study with a view to reopening the railway station in Corby to make a direct route between London, Corby, Nottingham and the north. A passenger railway service is vital to Corby's regeneration and to attracting new retailers and new building to the shopping centre.

Mr. Todd: Although I am not nearly as familiar with the needs of Corby as my hon. Friend is, I share his view. A community the size of Corby should have a proper rail service, and the lack of it certainly makes it more difficult to attract inward investment and to regenerate the town further—I recognise that there has already been a great deal of success. The position in my constituency is substantially worse than in many others, as there are no rail services in any part of South Derbyshire, except for the two little villages of Willington and Hatton. Swadlincote, the only town in my constituency, lost its railway service in the Beeching cuts. I shall return to that subject shortly.

In developing a strategy for the east midlands as a whole, we should also explore the need for dedicated rail freight services. That might require support for Central rail. I have an open mind about that: there are some advantages to the Central rail project, but it needs further study. It would be a brave private sector initiative to provide a link from the north-west to London and then into Europe. It would run through our region and provide significant advantages to the areas that it touched. Regardless of that proposal, it would be desirable to increase substantially the freight carried by rail, perhaps moving towards the goal of 10 per cent. of total freight volume by 2010.

We must invest in new local rail services to link the major routes—in this case, the midland main line—to centres of population. That would reduce road use, and I can use myself as an example. When I work at the southern end of my constituency in Swadlincote, I have to use a car, either to reach the rail network or to drive down to London to get to Parliament. The links to the rail network are inadequate, and it takes about half an hour to reach any rail station from Swadlincote.

There is the opportunity to open the existing rail freight line that runs through part of my constituency. It has been called the Ivanhoe line or, increasingly, the National forest line because of its route through the National forest, which is developing successfully throughout that part of our region. The line would provide passenger stations in my constituency on the edge of Swadlincote, as well as linking into Burton and areas of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor). I was pleased to see that that option was recognised by the M1 multimodal study as a possible way of dispersing traffic from the M1. I attended the meeting at which that was discussed, and commend the imagination shown. I recommend that approach to the Minister as another reason for supporting the National forest line, together with the opportunities for regeneration and improvement of the environment in South Derbyshire and North-West Leicestershire.

We must invest in railway station improvements, because some stations are unattractive. There has been a welcome programme of improvements in Derby, but other stations in the region do not encourage people to use them. The investment in the new parkway station south of Derby would substantially increase the attractiveness of the Midland Mainline to many people. It would make it easier for people to reach a railway station to join a mainline service, rather than having to choose the unappealing option of heading into a major city.

On the road network, I have already mentioned the M1 multimodal study and I commend its imaginative approach and breadth of vision. I was impressed by the initial consultation document, which set out many alternative strategies to the obvious option of providing more lanes and changing the interchanges for the M1. That should be the least favoured option, and we should ensure that the study produces action on a range of alternative measures that reduces traffic on the M1 and prevents the need for substantial road widening. I have touched on some initiatives—improving the midland main line is certainly one, as was recognised in the strategy, and the Ivanhoe line is another—and many others are available. I understand that the multimodal study will be published later this year, and many people are looking forward to its contents. I am looking forward optimistically and hope that it will dispense with the arguments for massive road widening along much of the route.

Another multimodal study affects one crucial issue in regional planning, which is linkage between regions. We all represent east midlands constituencies, but we must remember that the region links into other parts of the country as well. The multimodal study on the A38, which touches one side of my constituency, is also crucial, but now I must be rather less positive. The initial information that I received showed that people were starting strongly to favour major widening schemes along the A38. I am not saying that none of that is necessary. The road is heavily used and links Derby,

[Mr. Todd]

Burton and Birmingham, but I was disappointed at the lack of consideration for other modes of transport, and particularly other interchanges with other modes of transport, that might be fostered.

I shall now deal with air transport. East Midlands airport is a major economic growth point in the region, as everyone examining economic strategy for our region has recognised. We all welcome that. In particular, its success in freight shows the need for a more holistic consideration of strategy. Surely it is crazy for a major freight airport to have no rail link. It is clearly inappropriate that any freight arriving at East Midlands airport has to move to a road-based mode of transport.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I endorse what my hon. Friend said about East Midlands airport being a major engine for economic growth, but will he comment on two related concerns? First, the lack of environmental controls produces extensive night noise. Secondly, the airport is a catalyst for large-scale urban sprawl, particularly around junction 24.

Mr. Todd: My hon. Friend has snatched the words out of my mouth. Our constituents regularly draw attention to the difficulties of night noise and general noise from the airport. In addition, more than 80 per cent. of the airport's employees travel to it by car, which is not satisfactory. We need better public transport links to the airport to reduce that proportion substantially. The parkway station, which is conveniently located relatively close to the airport, may help to reduce the burden, but more work is required.

Rigorous controls on night flying and noise generation by the airport are needed as the price of its future development and growth. Last year, the Government consulted on noise controls at the airports that are not subject to national noise controls; the east midlands region awaits the outcome. Many people from my area contributed to the consultation, which has taken a year so far. In a recent parliamentary answer, I was told that we could expect a response later in the year. The sooner it arrives, the better.

North West Leicestershire district council has proposed the alternative approach of adding East Midlands airport to the three London airports, obliging it to be subject to national controls. One suspects that the Government may not favour that option, because they consulted on a locally based framework for noise controls, but an early response to the consultations would certainly put many people's minds at rest, assuming that the Government moved in favour of locally set controls.

Lastly, I shall deal with the bus network. All of us who represent more rural parts of the region welcome the substantial additional investment in local transport through bus grants available from county councils, supported by the Government. In my area, there has been an increase of about 50 per cent. in real terms in the amount of money available for that purpose from 1997. That has been well spent on extending evening and weekend services, at least in my constituency. That improves the accessibility of public transport, and people now recognise that it is available all the time, most notably in the community transport system. South Derbyshire community transport in Swadlincote has received a substantial additional amount of money and is now a major bus operator in the area.

I have two criticisms. First, insufficient money is available to introduce substantial numbers of new routes. As I said, many villages in my constituency have minimal or non-existent bus services. Secondly, we have not yet worked out how to integrate community transport and scheduled bus services; people still see them as "either/or" rather than a seamless service in which one could catch a bus from Church Broughton, for example, in the northern part of my constituency, and join a scheduled service in Hilton, which still has a rudimentary bus service. Integration of those services should be more actively explored. It can be done at a local level, but the Government could prompt such initiatives, as a large effort has been put into community transport.

We must have a planning system that supports communities. In my constituency, 200 houses have been built on an old hospital site and 200 more are planned. The estate has no bus service, so possession of a car is essential. Such developments are inappropriate; a planner to whom I spoke about the matter said, "I don't think we'd do that nowadays." We must build into the planning system an obligation to provide public transport, and ensure that there is access to it. Section 102 agreements should be used to fund public transport systems, which are essential in such areas.

Local authorities must more actively engage in the use of information and communications technology in public transport and in providing alternative means of working without needing to use public transport.

People want a growing regional economy without losing the region's beautiful environment and without having to rely on one or two economic sectors which, although they may make organisation of the transport network easier, make our economy more vulnerable. That is why transport diversity and flexibility is crucial. I have emphasised modes of transport and integration between the various parts, and the role of local government in knitting them together. I look forward with keen interest to the Minister's response.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. It appears that as many as eight hon. Members may wish to contribute to the debate, including the Opposition spokesman. There must be adequate time for the Minister to reply, so I ask hon. Members for self-discipline so that everyone who wishes to speak may do so.

11.23 am

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing this important debate. Our east midlands constituencies are the nexus of regional communications, as they contain the East Midlands airport, the M1 motorway, the Midland Mainline railway, the M42-A42 and the Derby southern bypass, and to the south lies the A14-M6 link. Our constituencies are at the heart of the east midlands but, as my hon. Friend said, we need better regional rail services to link with the national network.

Few people remember the third man on the moon, or will remember the third person to drop out of the Conservative party leadership contest, and few will remember that the third commercial railway line to open in this country was the Swannington to Leicester line, much of which is on the National forest route, which my hon. Friend mentioned. The line was opened in 1832, the year of the great Reform Act, and it substantially reformed the lives of businesses and people in our area. Beeching came along 131 years later and, together with thousands of miles of network in the United Kingdom, the line was axed. Many stations—and access to the mainline network on the then Leicester to Burton line, running through North-West Leicestershire, South Derbyshire and other constituencies—were removed.

In the subsequent 20 years the line was used mainly for freight, linking local pits and other employers to the network, but closure continued. The National forest came into being, with a major impact on the environmental and economic regeneration of our area. It brought with it new industries, including the expansion of leisure and recreation, but the people who want to live and work in our area still lack an adequate rail service. That was recognised early on, and the Ivanhoe line project of the 1990s meant the planned opening of 16 new stations on the route from Loughborough via Leicester and Coalville to Burton and Derby.

Twelve sites were identified and work was done to bring track and signalling up to passenger standards. Passing routes were constructed and four trains were to be purchased to run the service. The relatively easy add-on section between Leicester and Loughborough was designed, built and opened in 1994. Along came another Conservative Government to restructure the rail network under the Railways Act 1993. That brought about two changes that had a serious effect on the second stage of the Ivanhoe project—the part that we now call the National forest line. First, capital investment was to be carried out by Railtrack and recouped through track access charges. Secondly, all trains were to be leased rather than purchased. Those two changes had the effect of transferring costs from the capital account, which previously would have been funded by Government grant and borrowing approvals, to a revenue account funded directly by the county council.

The county council baulked at a bid under the rail passenger partnership fund because the outline capital cost was about £15 million. Each train cost about £600,000 to operate, with a third going in lease charges. The forecast revenues meant that the deficit under the restructured rail network was about £2 million a year—a significant sum. At a meeting last year, the county council cabinet of a Conservative-Liberal administration decided not to make a pre-qualification bid to the rail partnership passenger fund.

Many campaigners were extremely disappointed. The argument that the Ivanhoe line did not represent value for money was narrowly financial, born of the cold hearts of accountants in dim and dusty rooms. I speak as an accountant in attributing those qualities to accountants. What of the wider environmental benefits: the reduction in pollution and congestion in cities and towns surrounding the route, the accident savings—despite Hatfield, it is much safer to travel by rail than by car—the regeneration benefits through access to the National forest, and the reduction in social exclusion? My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire mentioned that earlier: we represent similar areas; people living in the rural areas often have poorer access to services and facilities than those in urban areas do.

The county council went cool on the project, but the North-West Leicestershire district, in conjunction with others such as South Derbyshire, did not let it lie there. The project was reviewed to establish whether there was a way ahead. The partnership was and remains more positive about the potential for this line, but even it agreed with the county council that the RPP fund as presently constituted was inappropriate for the scheme. Either the rules on RPP funding must be revised to permit capital grants or another source of grant aid must be used. The failure to address that problem will frustrate Government policy, as laid down in "Transport 2010" and elsewhere.

Some of the options in "Transport 2010", the 10-year plan, suggest that there are ways forward for the scheme. For example, the rail modernisation fund provides investment

"that is necessary to expand the network and increase passenger rail use by 50% and rail freight by 80%. The fund will...encompass a range of funding mechanisms, including capital grant and debt finance".

I should like the Minister to respond to that point, or perhaps write to me.

The partnership that is investigating possible ways ahead has concluded that there are three major aspects to a scheme to restore passenger services on this important regional line. The prime objective must be to open the line to passenger traffic; any expansion of freight or transit excursion traffic should be secondary and should not prejudice a regular passenger service. That is the partnership's key conclusion. The Strategic Rail Authority and train operators must, of course, be involved.

Secondly, my hon. Friend referred to developer interest, which offers some sources of funding. However, in most cases, planning gain for the developments that are seen as necessary in the structure plans up to 2011 and beyond has probably already been taken, so I am not sure whether that option gives us much in the short term.

Finally, the partnership has included the line as a proposed coalfield transport regeneration project, which it has submitted to the Coalfield Communities Campaign. That option offers a great deal, and I am optimistic that it will provide further funding of the sort that we saw in earlier years.

I conclude with three quotes from three campaigners, some of whom have been heavily involved in the issue over the years. County councillor Horace Sankey told me that I should

"support developers who will give money to Burton-Leicester Railway and would make it real"

and tangible. He added that I

"should start pushing for Government to at least part own Railtrack".

and I go along with that.

[David Taylor]

Mr. Gerald Box, who, together with Keith Payne, has been an active campaigner, said:

"In this district, there is a superb opportunity to set the seal on all the exciting developments that have replaced the rape of the coal industry—the re-establishment of a railway. This would be 1) a visible symbol of national government policy, 2) a practical piece of social, environmental engineering and 3) a chance to use an existing asset to join us to Europe."

Thirdly, to show that it is a cross-age and cross-community issue, I want to quote Matthew Smith, who is 13 and who wrote to me this week. He said:

"The people of this area have recently re-elected you"—

the Labour party—

"back into power...Labour did promise"

that this time would be better and that it would

"do the will of the people. If this is so, make a difference and do your best to improve this area's transport by opening up this rail line and helping people without cars or the elderly to travel more easily."

I look to the Minister to give us that support; it will find an echo in the community and be warmly welcomed by groups and individuals such as those whom I have quoted. I look forward to his comments.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I should say that I or whoever succeeds me in the Chair will call for winding-up speeches to begin at 12 o'clock.

11.33 am

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): This is a welcome and timely debate. The regional transport strategy is part of the draft regional planning guidance, the final part of which will be issued this autumn.

There is a great feeling in the east midlands that we need to be in the premier league of top 20 regions in Europe. To achieve that, we need to build our infrastructure. A major aim must be to increase our skills, training and education to enhance the quality of our work force. A secondary and extremely important aim is to invest in the transport infrastructure. I shall briefly discuss three issues that affect the east midlands.

Three major rail routes run out of London: the west coast main line, the east coast main line and the midland main line. In the 10-year plan, there are major investments for the west coast and east coast main lines. The midland main line has always been perceived as the poor relation. It serves major conurbations such as Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, and we must ensure that investment in it continues. The train operator, Midland Mainline, has done well, with its Turbostar service and the parkway station at junction 24. However, major track improvement is needed over the next 10 years. A spur to that will be the redevelopment of the St. Pancras-King's Cross interchange, which will involve the Eurostar coming in to north London. It would be a travesty if the speed of the service on the midland main line were pedestrian compared with that on the line through Kent and the chunnel to France. We need to work hard on that. We also need to work hard on the east coast main line. My hon. Friends who have spoken have mentioned the need for quality services and stations. Further investment is needed in Newark station on the east coast main line.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) spoke about the multimodal study on the M1, which is important and must not be delayed. We must think carefully about its consequences. I say to people in Westminster Hall today and to a wider audience that we must tackle the thorny issue of the A453 from junction 24 on the M1 into Nottingham. There has been procrastination on the subject for many years, and the time has come to grip the nettle. Investment will not come into the Nottingham conurbation until hard decisions are taken about widening the route of the A453. Certain routes proposed by some of my colleagues would be environmental disasters. Hard choices must be made following the study, so I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will not renege on them, but will take them and get on with the job.

I want to talk briefly about the need to regenerate coalfields, which my hon. Friends the Members for South Derbyshire and for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) mentioned. The Robin Hood railway line has been an enormous success in the east midlands, especially in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, whose county councils I commend for pursuing it. We have reopened a derelict line, and the service has been a tremendous success. Unfortunately, its success outreaches the infrastructure available. The trains are crowded, new carriages are needed, and there should be a half-hourly service rather than an hourly one. We must improve quality and reliability. An extension should be made as well, providing a route from Mansfield to Tuxford, taking in Edwinstowe and Ollerton.

We must consider the use of mineral railway lines across the east midlands. The moratorium on their use was recently lifted. If possible, we must reserve the lines for park-and-ride sites, but many of them will not qualify. Many run from urban areas and pit villages into the countryside. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire said, we must encourage people out of urban areas into the countryside on their feet and bikes.

One of the problems with Railtrack, aside from simple inaction or the inability to deliver a quality service, is an inability to take decisions about redundant railway lines. If the Government were to examine closely the issue of mineral railway lines, use them positively where possible and, where not, use them for amenity and recreational purposes, that would be a major feather in their cap.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his succinct and brief remarks.

11.40 am

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I am keen to ensure that Lincolnshire plays its full part in making the east midlands a premier region, an aspiration that I share with my colleagues in the east midlands group of Labour MPs. We have worked together to advance that.

Lincolnshire is the largest county in the east midlands, with the greatest length of roads in the region. However, with a population of around 600,000 it has the second

lowest population density in the region, and that brings its own challenges. As part of the large network of highways in the county, there are some 2,500 miles of public rights of way, the reopening of which by the county council following the foot and mouth crisis has been desperately slow. Many of my constituents are unhappy about that, as am I, and I urge the county council to get on with the job that they should have got on with already.

Transport is one of the greatest challenges that the present Government have to face. It is one of the greatest messes that we inherited and we face the challenge of putting it right. In my constituency, improved transport links are crucial for attracting, retaining and improving investment and business. They are also essential to enable people to get about safely, conveniently and comfortably, to develop communities and to improve the quality of life.

Lincoln has long suffered from being cut off. The situation will be greatly improved by the dualling of the A46 between Newark and Lincoln, as the Government have now approved the £28 million scheme. However, Lincoln's standing would be greatly improved by better rail services. We have no direct link to London, and the existing routes do not provide the service that many of us would reasonably expect in the 21st century.

As hon. Members will be aware from previous debates and from questions that I have raised in the House, Lincoln also suffers from the unenviable distinction of being the only major city that is cut in two every time a train passes through it. However, we have another challenge before us, as part of the national transport agenda is to remove heavy goods vehicles from the congested road network. The proposal to improve the London to Edinburgh east coast main line includes doubling the present volume of freight over the next 10 years. An integral part of that upgrade would be to divert freight from the east coast main line on to local parallel rail routes. That would mean more freight transport through Lincoln, and would adversely affect the city. As chair of the Lincoln rail working group, I have worked with others to find solutions to the problems that will be created by the new scheme. Although it will bring tremendous benefits to Lincoln and the surrounding area, it must be implemented without detriment to the city.

The Lincoln rail working group is not simply made up of local interested groups and local authorities, but includes representatives of Railtrack, the East Midlands development agency, the Government office for the east midlands and the Strategic Rail Authority. Its composition should give hon. Members an idea of the importance of the issue, in both regional and national terms.

The east coast main line upgrade is a vital scheme that could bring national, regional and local benefits, including the potential for improved rail services, direct services to London and rail freight facilities that would serve local needs. However, it would be completely unacceptable if there were no change in the provision of rail services in Lincoln as that would lead to immense difficulties in the city and the surrounding areas. We are working to address that. Only yesterday, I went on a walkabout in my constituency with members of the Lincoln rail working group and representatives of the Strategic Rail Authority looking at the problems and considering how to overcome them. Our proposals in "Vision @ Lincoln", which were presented to the public some months ago, included an underground and a surface option. I shall be meeting my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in a few weeks to discuss it.

My firm belief is that we have a one-off opportunity in Lincoln to cure a long-term ill—one that the city has lived with for 150 years. I also believe that it is very much in line with Government thinking that transport solutions should help create new opportunities for regeneration by bringing investment to local areas as well as providing better passenger services and assisting in the movement of freight.

I have no doubt that, without a major development in Lincoln, an artificial cap will be placed on investment and development in the city; again, that would be unacceptable. I must emphasise that it is not a matter only for Lincoln. It is a matter for the region and beyond, which is why I am pleased to have had the opportunity to raise the matter once again in this Chamber.

Transport links are a key matter for the city and surrounding area. An eastern bypass for Lincoln would clearly ease the increasing traffic pressure on the city centre. I am sorry that Lincolnshire county council did not see fit to acquire the land necessary to enable it to be built.

The operation of bus services presents a considerable challenge for companies such as Roadcar, but Paul Hill and his team have worked hard to service Lincoln and beyond. Lincolnshire has received considerable Government funding for rural bus services, and I saw the outstanding results of that investment on the route between Lincoln and Langworth. Use of the Lincoln to Skegness, Inter-Connect bus route has increased by 112 per cent. That is not surprising, because it is supported by the new flexible bus services, CallConnect and CallConnect Plus, which are designed to allow those who live in rural areas to reach the main service routes by making a simple telephone call. That must be the way for the future, and I hope that the Minister will continue to endorse such schemes.

As I represent an urban constituency, I have a question for the Minister. What about support for urban bus services? Although it is right and proper to support rural bus services, many needs remain unresolved and unmet. We need continuing support for urban bus services, so that people wanting to travel to Bracebridge Heath or Birchwood and all points between can be sure of travelling when they want in comfort and safety. Transport is the key to lasting prosperity. I ask the Minister to see it in that light and to act accordingly, so that the east midlands region can take its place in the premier league.

11.48 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I shall give a transport perspective from the northern extremity of the east midlands, and I shall start with the railway. The east coast main line bisects my constituency. I hope that a decision on the franchise will be made in the near future. I hope also that the Government will consider afresh the intricate freight network, which is underused or not used at all, that criss-crosses my constituency to connect current and former coalfields with power stations. As a

[John Mann]

potential freight network, it is unparalleled. For economic regeneration, it needs to be used not only for the locality and the region but as part of an expanding national freight network. That should be our hope for the future. Little work has been done on that recently, but I hope that the Government will consider it.

The issue of roads is a major one, not least following the Government's announcements on improvements to the A1M, with the removal of six roundabouts between the A1M in Yorkshire and Huntingdonshire. Three of them directly affect my constituency. In local jargon, they are called the "killing fields" because of the number of fatalities that have taken place on and around them. I urge the Government to consider reversing the previous Government's somewhat hidden policy of not allowing short-distance expansion of motorways. The A1M stops at Blyth roundabout, and I should like to see it expanded southwards to at least Newark.

It is absurd that one has to compete with cyclists on the A1, having left the A1M. Hon. Members may not be aware of the cycling heritage in my constituency. On Sunday, I opened a BMX track in Harworth, where the Tommy Simpson memorial museum is based. I hope that the Government will support the proposed new cycleway and racing track that we would like in Harworth as a true memorial to Tommy Simpson. I want to take cyclists off the A1 and put them somewhere safe for them and for motorists. The expansion of the A1M by at least 20 miles southwards would be a major step forward for the region. The number of accidents caused by tractors and others criss-crossing what was the Great North road is absurd. A slight reversal of policy at minimal cost would serve the Government well.

Many hon. Members may want road safety projects in their constituencies. If they want road humps, I have them to spare. In my constituency, Nottinghamshire county council seems to regard road humps in the same way as the mythical bus: we never see one until 100 come along at once. Manton estate has 900 road humps. Some cul-de-sacs have almost as many of them as houses, which shows the absurdity of the decisions. I am all for road humps that secure safety, especially that of young children, but not for those that almost become a BMX track or skateboard park in their own right due to their sheer number. I urge the Government to advise local authorities on road humps, to ensure a balance. Some of the road humps in my area should be removed to more needy parts of the east midlands.

The Chesterfield canal has been a major success for this and the previous Government, and I commend the investment in it. At this time of year, the issue on inland waterways is safety. The Government need to urge British Waterways more strongly, throughout the summer and especially the school holidays, to maintain vigilance and public education to ensure that the fatalities that have occurred over the past two summers on the Chesterfield canal in my constituency are not repeated. Young children dive in and attempt to swim in what can be very dangerous water, especially for them.

The issue of cars brings me to the issue of cable. One way to get cars off the road is to allow people to work from home. In the Bassetlaw constituency, however, it is rather difficult to work from home, because neither NTL nor Telewest has, in its wisdom, chosen to cable the area. I hope that policy on telecommunications and transport can be integrated to put pressure on those companies, which the Government have given lucrative franchises. In that way, we can ensure that my constituency is cabled so that many people—particularly those in rural villages who work from home or wish to do so—can have the benefits of cable, and can minimise the number of journeys that they make. Clearly, that is common sense in this technological age. However, it is also common sense that infrastructure requires investment if local people are to make proper use of it in their homes.

Finally, the east midlands has one airport and the north midlands needs a second airport. Finningley was an air base in Nottinghamshire until someone decided to change the boundaries and stick it in Yorkshire. We can live with that in north Nottinghamshire, but we want aircraft to take off and land at Finningley, as the Vulcan bombers did year on year.

When a new airport or an extension to an airport is proposed anywhere, we seem to see the NIMBYs. In my constituency, however, we have the YIMBYs—which stands for "yes in my backyard". We want an airport at Finningley. We want the runway to be used; we want new developments there; we want to see aeroplanes landing and taking off; and we want the job creation that will result.

I hope that the Government will consider the absurd public inquiry that is taking place. It is wanted not by anyone locally, but by competitors and, in particular, by Manchester airport, which seems to be trying to buy up the regional airport stock of Britain. This Government are a Government of competition, and competition among regional airports is essential. Finningley will increase competition, and I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that competition is good for the economy. I hope that all hon. Members from the east midlands will join together to support the case for a new regional airport to service the north of the east midlands in particular. I hope that we shall have that new airport at Finningley in the near future. That would benefit the east midlands and the country.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), I make a plea to the Opposition spokesmen. This is a relatively narrow debate and remarks must relate to the east midlands, although I and my successor in the Chair will show some latitude.

11.58 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I shall try to confine the vast majority of my comments to the east midlands.

I start by congratulating the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing this important debate; he touched on many important transport issues. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on coining the term YIMBYs. I wonder whether everyone who lives around the proposed airport site is quite as keen on the development as he appears to be.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire touched on the subject of railways and improvements to the midland main line route to London, which Liberal

Democrat Members support. However, until changes are made to the way in which Railtrack is run such improvements are likely to take place only in many years' time, not in the immediate future. At the moment, Railtrack seems more interested in pay-offs and pay awards than in building railways.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Ivanhoe, or National forest, line. The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) pointed out that there was some opposition—or at least lack of support—from the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats to the scheme. The hon. Gentleman did not say where the funding for the scheme would come from; it would cost something of the order of £2 million a year over 25 years, which is the amount that the council spends on the concessionary fares scheme. Leicester county council would therefore have to make a substantial financial commitment, but it is unclear where the funds would come from. I am sure that there is no objection to the scheme in principle, but Opposition Members need to demonstrate an economically viable way of implementing it.

David Taylor: Two million pounds was the original figure for the scheme, which caused the then Liberal Democrat-Conservative county council to shy away from it, but the present partnership has identified a less costly option, which seems to have considerable potential. I hope that the county council will back it.

Tom Brake: I am pleased that a cheaper alternative has been found. I also hope that the council will, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, consider such associated issues as the environmental benefits of the scheme.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire also mentioned East Midlands airport. I understand that the flight path goes over his constituency and also that it is one of the airports that has unrestricted night flying. We support the development of such regional airports, which can have a positive impact on regional economies. However, we are concerned about the increase in the number of short-haul and domestic flights, at the expense of more environmentally friendly means of travel such as railways. We do not want an unfettered expansion of airports, and we would like the Government to incentivise rail travel, to promote alternatives to damaging short-haul and domestic flights.

There have been no clear guidelines, standards or rules governing the future expansion of airport policy. A national policy is needed, and soon, so that those matters can be considered in the round rather than as individual proposals—whether that of the hon. Member for South Derbyshire or the on-going terminal 5 inquiry. If the hon. Member for Bassetlaw was referring to the Heathrow inquiry when he said that no one locally was in favour of it, I am surprised by that assertion and I disagree with it. That is not the view that I get. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): I hope that we shall not have a discussion on terminal 5 at Heathrow. Will hon. Members stick to the agenda?

Tom Brake: Thank you, Mr. O'Brien. Perhaps we shall talk about the issue when the terminal is complete.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire also mentioned roads, including the M1 corridor multimodal transport study and the A38 multimodal transport study. I understand that at least three other such studies are on-going in the region. That demonstrates the need for the sustainable transport authority for which we are pushing, which would encompass and integrate all modes of transport. Such an organisation might do away with the need for such a proliferation of multimodal studies, which require time and effort to complete. Setting it up may remove the need to put effort into specific multimodal transport studies.

Hon. Members mentioned the Government's 10-year transport plan; the eye-catching headline figure of £180 billion is significant, but dissecting that figure shows that it is only £158 billion at current prices. If what will be spent on new projects, rather than on-going maintenance, is removed it leaves only £103 billion. The £48 billion investment from the private sector is not certain to be forthcoming, given the difficulties that are being experienced in respect of another project that requires massive private sector investment: the London underground. Dissecting the different parts of the £55 billion of committed investment over a 10-year period shows that the annual investment figure is not as great as the £180 billion starting figure suggests.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire mentioned bus services in the east midlands, and I support his call for more bus services in the east midlands, London or anywhere else. Bus services can deliver improvements in public transport more quickly than any other mode of transport. An initial proposal for the Ivanhoe or National forest line was a complex bus service that would have delivered more frequent and more flexible services than the train alternative.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire identified some important transport issues in the east midlands, which will not be resolved without fundamental changes to the way in which such matters are governed. That is why my party's alternative Queen's Speech proposed a Bill to establish a sustainable transport authority that would integrate the functions of the Strategic Rail Authority and the rail regulator and oversee buses, coaches and other modes of transport. It would remove from Railtrack its responsibility for operating the railways and put it in the hands of a not-for-profit organisation, which would be much better placed to deliver the transport improvements that the hon. Gentleman wants.

12.7 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): First, Mr. O'Brien, I must tell you that I have an interest in a family business concerned with building and road haulage, which is declared in the Register of Members' Interests.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing the debate and on the reasonable manner in which he presented his case. Listening to what he and other hon. Members said—my party is in listening mode at present—left me in no doubt about the importance of transport in the east midlands. I cannot help reflecting on the major economic changes in the coal and steel industries that have affected the region, which has done extremely well to adjust to those

[Mr. Robert Syms]

changes. However, integrated transport is the key to attracting jobs and growth in the region. The east midlands is a successful area, but we should not be complacent about it.

In the past four years, the Government have not delivered as much as they promised in respect of transport. A litre of petrol cost 59p in 1997; it is now 80p. The Government have taken about £9 billion from road users, much of which has gone to the Treasury rather than being spent on improving public transport, which many hon. Members consider to be a priority in their constituencies.

The 10-year plan is coming up to its first birthday but we still do not know how the £180 billion—if, indeed, it is £180 billion—will be spent. We need more details and more dates from the Government.

The Confederation of British Industry, the British Road Federation and others in the industry have spoken about the effect of congestion on the economy and on job creation. Transport must be a priority for the nation in the next few years.

Several constituency-specific issues were raised on which it will be more beneficial for the Minister to comment than the Opposition spokesman. However, I shall pick up one or two points. We rightly discussed regional airports, which are most important. Terminal 5 is relevant because the Government's new deal for transport promised a White Paper on regional airports, but they will not produce that document until the inquiry on terminal 5 has reported, which will probably be in the autumn. In the meantime, can the Minister give us some idea—

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. By discussing terminal 5 at Heathrow, the hon. Gentleman is straying away from the subject of transport in the east midlands. Will hon. Members stick to the subject, please.

Mr. Syms: Thank you, Mr. O'Brien.

Can the Minister tell us when the White Paper on a new deal for transport and regional airports will be published? It is relevant to the East Midlands airport and to those hon. Members who are interested in what happens in Finningley—there are many more besides the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). We all know the impact that the regional airports have on the regions and it is important to have an overall strategy. The impact of competition was mentioned in the context of the Manchester airport company buying the East Midlands and Bournemouth airports and others.

We have heard much about multimodal studies, for which the previous Government will be known; the challenge now is whether they will be implemented and what impact they will have on the M1, the A38 and so on. Some important conclusions can be drawn from the studies, which need the Government's support and taxpayers' money.

I enjoyed hon. Members' contributions, especially that by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw. I have much sympathy with what he said about humps and bumps and what goes on in his constituency, and I look forward to hearing more from him in debates.

The Government have raised from the road user a substantial amount of tax that has not been put back into the infrastructure. We look to the Government to deliver in the next three or four years; they must give transport in the east midlands a high priority.

12.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I join hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing the debate and for the measured way in which he introduced it. His constituents, and those of other hon. Members with east midlands constituencies, have powerful advocates for transport in the region.

I shall refer to each contribution to the debate and then make some general points. In addition to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire, there were good contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), for Lincoln (Gillian Merron), for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann). The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), flew into the debate from Heathrow. At one time he seemed to be on a non-stopping train through the east midlands; he paused only occasionally. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) spoke in his usual measured way. He is a good contributor to these debates but he, too, took the non-stopping train through the east midlands and got on to the subject of Heathrow. Bearing in mind your strictures, Mr. O'Brien, I shall avoid that matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire made the important point that highways—I shall use that term to consider both the road surface and pavements—are for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists, not just for cars. That point is at the heart of our policies. My hon. Friend also mentioned the need for information for people using public transport. Our proposals on the transport direct service include exciting proposals on the use of new technology to allow passengers to make more reasoned choices.

My hon. Friend also spoke, rightly, about pollution. The Government have made major inroads on that issue by encouraging the use of cleaner fuels by cars and particularly by heavy and diesel vehicles in urban areas. That is important in my hon. Friend's area. We are also encouraging the use of vehicles with smaller engines by reducing vehicle excise duty for vehicles under 1,549 cc from September.

I shall deal with the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire during the rest of my speech. I hope that I can even embrace some of the points made by his constituent, Matthew Smith, in asking us to do the will of the people.

The east midlands is a diverse region. It is not dissimilar to the areas that I represent in that it has not coalesced into a large urban sprawl. It is a series of habitations contained in a large rural area. Most of the urban areas are relatively self-contained, although the size of their travel-to-work areas continues to increase, partly as a consequence of the improved living standards that they enjoy. I take to heart what my hon.

Friend said about our transport policies' informing our regeneration policies and creating new jobs and enterprise. Several hon. Members made that extremely important point.

The main north-south routes—the M1 and A1—are increasingly congested, and in urban areas the rush hour is lengthening. The proximity of settlements to the M1 corridor and the success of economic developments close to it have encouraged the use of private cars and road freight.

Several hon. Members mentioned the regional transport strategy and local transport plan. The integration of transport and land use planning is one key to developing a sustainable transport system. In the east midlands, development of the draft regional planning guidance is well under way, and I expect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to issue the final version before the end of the year. The draft regional transport strategy, which forms part of the regional planning guidance, sets out a policy framework for transport in the east midlands, which is reflected in the development plans and local transport plans produced by local authorities.

In recent years, the resources awarded by Government to east midlands local authorities for transport have increased substantially. Since 1999, the level of the settlement has doubled year on year, and under the 10-year plan we expect a further doubling of annual resources by 2010. Notwithstanding the cynicism shown by Opposition Members, people on the ground have seen some of the benefits of those resources. That step-change in investment will enable good progress to be made with the implementation of the region's local transport plans.

Importantly, the funding will enable the east midlands' authorities to address the Government's 10-year plan target of halting the deterioration in local road conditions by 2004 and eliminating the maintenance backlog by 2010. Just before this debate started, I attended a conference in Euston at which we launched a new code of practice for surveyors in local authorities on improving the quality of road maintenance. I believe that the east midlands was represented there.

Several hon. Members mentioned multimodal studies. The content of the regional transport strategy and local transport plans will be informed by the three multimodal studies currently under way in the east midlands. They will identify options for addressing the transport problems of the M1, the A453 and the M42-A42 corridors. The outcomes are likely to amount to a substantial package of new infrastructure and service improvements across all modes of transport.

The Government recognise the urgency of completing the studies as quickly as possible. However, it is important that the studies examine all options in the open, inclusive way that was set out in the transport White Paper. The groups of interested parties that we have established to manage and direct the studies are working effectively, which is a testament to the high degree of partnership working in the east midlands. We expect the M1 and the A453 studies, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood asked, to report to the regional planning body next spring. The M42-A42 study will report in spring 2003.

The east midlands authorities have an impressive track record of success in bidding for funds under the rural bus challenge, which aims to stimulate innovation in the provision and promotion of rural public transport and improve quality and choice. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln spoke about the success in her area. Indeed, Lincolnshire's winning Inter-Connect scheme has been nationally acclaimed as an exemplar for improving rural accessibility, while Leicester and Rutland's Cross County scheme is, at £1.6 million, the largest single award in the history of the competition. I took careful note of what my hon. Friend said about urban transport, especially the integration of buses with other services. Her points were well made and are relevant to other areas.

Building on the success of the rural bus challenge, we have launched an urban bus challenge to improve public transport in deprived urban areas. Some £46 million is being made available during the next three years, and bids have recently been invited. We look forward to receiving bids from the east midlands authorities for innovative and imaginative projects, and some of my hon. Friend's points might be met in that context.

The matter of rural motorists was raised by many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Poole. In many rural areas, there might be no practical alternative to the motor car for some people. The Government recognise the problems experienced by such motorists, with the price of fuel increasing because of the world price of crude oil. The hon. Gentleman will know that we scrapped the fuel duty escalator, which was introduced by the last Conservative Government; I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

In the previous Budget, the Chancellor also announced a package of measures that will benefit motorists in rural areas. That includes a reduction in duty on low sulphur fuels, a freeze on vehicle excise duty until next year and a raising of the small car threshold for vehicle excise duty on cars. The latter should benefit those in rural areas who have larger cars for travelling longer distances. The hon. Member for Poole should bear in mind the fact that evidence shows that the cost of car use is greater to people who live in an urban area than to those who live in a rural area. People in rural areas who have to travel longer distances, or those using smaller diesel vehicles, might also want to consider converting their vehicles to use liquid petroleum gas. It is considerably cheaper and does not have the pollutants that other fuels do.

There were many mentions of rail investment. In recent years, we have seen substantial levels of investment in the region's rail network. For example, Midland Mainline has doubled the frequency of trains on its routes, and during the next eight years there will be further investment of £230 million in more new trains and facilities, including a parkway station near the M1 at junction 24.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

Of course there is much more to be done, as several of my hon. Friends mentioned today. In particular, there is a growing desire among many local communities to be connected to the rail network. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope), who has now returned to the Chamber, mentioned earlier that Midland Mainline and local authorities are investigating the potential for reconnecting Corby to the passenger rail network. That will be very good news to his constituents, and I am sure that he will continue to press all the relevant authorities on that matter.

Derbyshire county council and its partners are working with the Strategic Rail Authority to examine the potential for reopening the Matlock to Buxton route. No doubt that springs partly from the hugely successful Robin Hood line project, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood. It has made the former Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coalfield area much more accessible and has brought regeneration and other benefits in its wake. It was to facilitate such schemes that we introduced the rail passenger partnership fund. The proposal to extend the line to Ollerton is interesting and is, I understand, to be the subject of a bid to the rail passenger partnership fund by Nottinghamshire county council.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire mentioned the Ivanhoe line. Stage 2 of that project is an interesting proposal. His 13-year-old constituent, Matthew Smith, said that we must follow the will of the people. I hope that his constituent will see some progress by the time he takes his A-levels—or even before. I acknowledge the wider benefits that that scheme would bring, but the economic appraisal of the line shows that a prohibitively large operating subsidy would have to be met by Leicestershire county council. I know that my hon. Friend has met previous Ministers to discuss the way forward. Direct capital funding for rail projects is one of the funding options contemplated in the 10-year plan, and the options are being worked up by the Strategic Rail Authority whose strategic rail plan, to be published later this year, will set out the principles of investment support and describe the forms of funding that will be available for rail investment.

David Taylor: The projections of the deficit are linked closely to the county council's estimate of passenger revenue, which is thought by the new partnership to understate the actual position.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. Those who are assessing the project will obviously consider that aspect. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be the first to draw attention to it as an advocate on behalf of his constituents.

I shall now discuss problems with the existing rail network in the east midlands. The upgrades of the west coast and east coast main lines have implications. There is an issue about the extended journey time between London and Northampton on the west coast main line following the upgrade, but a working group of local authorities, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority is identifying potential solutions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln discussed some problems with freight transport through her area. We, too, are aware of the problems that are caused in Lincoln and Spalding by the diversion of freight traffic from the east coast main line during its upgrade. I recognise the seriousness of the issue and its potential implications for retail and other activity in affected towns. The Strategic Rail Authority, with local partners, is already engaged in that issue and will help in working up prospective solutions and advising on the financial role that the Government could play.

In the short time left, I shall mention the East Midlands airport. I acknowledge that public concern is growing about the environmental impact of the airport and the surrounding developments on the local community. I understand that the airport has established a community fund to provide grants of up to £1,000 to soundproof homes affected by aircraft noise.

I have little time left and I know that I have not covered all the issues in detail. If hon. Members draw to my attention any points that they believe have not been covered in enough detail, I will certainly write to them. We have had a useful debate, conducted in a constructive atmosphere. I hope that my comments have been helpful.

Orthopaedic Waiting Times (Norfolk)

12.30 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): My reason for calling the debate is to draw attention to how long people in Norfolk have to wait, often in real pain, to see an orthopaedic specialist—and then even longer for an operation. We all agree that waiting more than a year for a first appointment with a specialist is unacceptable. From first referral to the specialist to having an operation performed can sometimes take a further two to three years. The Government must now respond with additional resources to recruit more specialist staff and enable the Norfolk and Norwich healthcare trust to deal with this waiting-times scandal.

I shall refer to three particular cases. Depressingly, they are not exceptional. The first case is that of Mrs. Green of Trunch, who tells me that she suffers so badly from pain some days that she is unable to walk. She saw her GP in March this year and he wrote to the hospital requesting an appointment with a specialist. Two months later she received a letter from the hospital dated 24 May. It stated:

"The current waiting time for this kind of appointment is approximately 85 weeks. We are very sorry for the long wait and for any inconvenience this may cause."

She regarded that, understandably, as a sick joke. The letter suggested that she might be able to see a consultant in about January 2003. If she subsequently needed an operation, it would probably not happen until early in 2004. Waiting that long simply cannot be justified.

Mr. Oliff of Cromer is another case. He suffers from osteoarthritis and is in considerable pain. He finds it hard to walk, but he is also a carer for his wife, who is a diabetic, has had two strokes and has problems with her balance. Mr. Oliff's GP referred him to a specialist in May last year. When he attended his appointment in January this year, he was told that the wait for an operation would be between a year and 18 months. Let us all try to imagine the problems that he and his wife will suffer while he waits all that time for his operation.

The third case involves a lady who, understandably, wants to remain anonymous. She is 54 and worried about losing her job. She is on long-term sick leave, waiting for an operation. It has been pencilled in for January 2002, but her employers told her that they would retain her job for only six months.

Those are just three examples of people who have come to see me, often in distress, deeply worried about when they will have their operations. Long waiting times have other implications. One consultant explained that a patient's condition often worsens while they are waiting, which can result in more complex, more expensive surgery. Sometimes the patient suffers other medical problems—a stroke or a heart attack—so it is not possible to operate. Patients are likely to remain in pain for the rest of their lives, or simply die before ever being treated. That cannot be what a modern, efficient and responsive health service aspires to.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that in my travels around my adjoining constituency of North-West Norfolk, I have encountered many similar cases. The Queen Elizabeth hospital at King's Lynn has the same problems that he mentioned in respect of Norwich. Does he agree that it is not just a question of the long waiting times given to patients, but the fact that there is a waiting list to go on to the waiting list, which makes the actual waiting times even longer?

Norman Lamb: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and I intend to allude to that very problem.

I want to deal with the extent of the problem in Norfolk in comparison with the rest of the country. I shall focus first on the out-patient and then on the in-patient waiting times. Regarding the time that patients have to wait between a GP appointment and seeing the specialist, in the first quarter of 1997, just 59 people in Norfolk were waiting more than six months for the first appointment. In the first quarter of 2001, that number had increased dramatically to 461. Interestingly, trusts and hospitals do not even keep statistics on the number waiting more than a year for an appointment, presumably because nobody ever imagined that it would be necessary to compile them. We now know that that is the reality for people in Norfolk.

In-patient waiting times between seeing a specialist and having an operation are similarly worrying. The Norfolk and Norwich trust now has 3,392 people waiting for operations in this specialty. Of those, 445 are waiting more than a year from their specialist appointment. That compares with just 68 people waiting more than a year back in March 1997. The Government should be ashamed of that record.

The Norfolk and Norwich health authority has one of the highest in-patient waiting lists in the country—it is eighth out of 99 health authorities in England, and the proportion of those waiting more than a year is almost double the national average. The Minister may wish to reflect on the enormous variations across the country. In North Yorkshire, only 0.2 per cent. of those on the waiting list wait more than a year, compared to Norfolk's 12 per cent. That demonstrates the postcode lottery in orthopaedic care, which should be taken into account in determining whether it would be fair and equitable to provide additional funds for the worst affected areas.

Why is the position in Norfolk so bad? The problem stems from winter 1996. In the run-up to the 1997 general election, there was a serious problem with emergency admissions. Resources were switched away from specialisms such as orthopaedics to deal with the crisis in emergency admissions and the resulting curtailment of elective activity quickly led to a backlog, which has remained ever since. Depressingly, the year-on-year figures demonstrate that the position has worsened.

I must stress that it is not the problem of an under-performing or inexperienced department. Norfolk's specialists are among the most highly regarded in the country. Among their number is a past president of the British Orthopaedics Association, the president of the British Knee Society and the secretary of the British Hip Society. These are eminent professionals and Norfolk is lucky to have them, but they need extra support and additional resources. Their throughput of patients is one of the best in East Anglia, but because of their reputation, they have specialist work from

[Norman Lamb]

neighbouring trust areas referred to them. That is part of the problem and part of the reason why they need more resources to cope.

Another cause of the continuing failure to eat into the backlog of patients is that there are not enough beds in Norfolk's main hospital. Shortage of beds means cancelled operations and longer waiting times. Bed numbers have fallen year after year. Although the recent arrival of Philippino nurses has helped, it remains a depressing picture.

Last year, the occupancy rate at the Norfolk and Norwich hospital was 91 per cent., which compares with the nationally accepted standard of 85 per cent. The inevitable result of a hospital operating at such a high occupancy rate is that for much of the time, and not just during the normal winter crises, the hospital is full. That means that operations have to be cancelled, because no beds are available. In the past two years, 500 operations at the Norfolk and Norwich hospital have been cancelled. That is a ludicrous state of affairs, because it leaves expensive highly trained surgeons twiddling their thumbs rather than operating on patients.

What can be done? We have had reassuring words from Norfolk health authority about more funds being invested in this specialty and more people being treated than ever before. I am sure that the Minister will allude to that. I fully recognise that Norfolk has a growing elderly population, but that is an extra justification for more resources to deal with the appalling backlog of patients and to keep pace with demand.

A plan is in place for an eight-month overlap between the opening of the new Colney hospital and the closure of the old Norfolk and Norwich hospital, so that both hospitals operate simultaneously. That could help to reduce the backlog—although it will not remove it—but to achieve that, the hospitals will have to recruit short-term contract surgeons. That has not yet been achieved and will not be easy. Recruitment to permanent posts is hard enough, but recruitment to short-term contracts is even more difficult. I think that it is accepted across the board that the transfer to the new hospital will result in a reduction in activity for a time. It is possible that no operations will take place for two weeks.

Overall, therefore, there is little reason to believe that things will improve in the foreseeable future. Waiting times for orthopaedic appointments and surgery in Norfolk are unacceptably long. It is critical that the Government respond to the debate by providing additional funding to remove the backlog of cases. Further significant investment is needed now, so that the trust can plan its way forward. It must not be left with more uncertainty until the new financial year.

In reality, we have a two-tier health service in this specialty. If people have money, they can opt out of that horror, but if people are on a low wage, unemployed or reliant on the state pension, they simply have to wait and wait and wait. We cannot accept that any longer. The Government must deal with the underinvestment in this specialty and provide the resources that Norfolk needs.

12.42 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing what I believe is his first Adjournment debate and I welcome him to Westminster Hall. Without wishing to sound patronising—I am probably failing—he has done an excellent job on behalf of his constituents. I am aware that there has been considerable local interest in orthopaedic waiting times in Norfolk, and I appreciate his concerns and those of his constituents. I hope that I can reassure him that progress is being made.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Government have made significant progress in reducing waiting times. As part of the NHS plan, maximum in-patient waiting times will fall on a staged basis from 18 months now to 15, 12, nine and eventually six months by 2005. As a first step towards that, the 15-month maximum waiting time for an in-patient appointment will be achieved by the end of March 2002.

Most out-patients are already seen within six months, which will be an absolute requirement by the end of March 2002. The plan is that by the end of 2005, the maximum waiting time for a routine out-patient appointment will be halved from more than six months to three months. Within those new guaranteed maximum waiting times, patients will be treated according to individual assessment of clinical urgency. The Government's eventual objective is to reduce the maximum wait for any stage of treatment to three months.

We are committed to reducing waiting times for orthopaedic treatment, in line with the national targets set out in the NHS plan. The NHS plan will see year-on-year increases in equipment, facilities and staff. As the extra capacity becomes available, the Government will be able to reduce waiting times. The areas with particular problems will be targeted for special action. On the specific issue of Norfolk, we are committed to increasing resources to the NHS to achieve our aims, and I am pleased to announce that Norfolk has received record increases in funding. I am sure that the honourable Gentleman is aware of the announcement in this year's Budget statement of the largest ever increase in funding for the NHS in England. The total allocation for Norfolk in 2001-02 is £504 million, which represents a total cash increase of £40 million and an increase of 8.6 per cent., or 5.9 per cent. in real terms.

The Government have therefore already to some extent recognised the hon. Gentleman's call for resources and his plan for the future. As he pointed out, we may need to reform and improve the system to ensure that his constituents and people throughout the country receive the treatment that they deserve. The hon. Gentleman is right to be concerned about waiting times for orthopaedic treatment in his area. As he said, waiting times for orthopaedics began to rise in 1995 and increased dramatically in 1997. However, that trend was halted at the end of 1997 and the trust responded with a range of waiting list initiatives and activities to begin dealing with the problem. Those initiatives halted the rise in waiting lists but, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out, could not address the large number of patients that had been added to the waiting list. I recognise the honourable Gentleman's concern about

in-patient and out-patient waiting times. As I have said, the Government are committed to tackling the issue. Action has been and will be taken in Norfolk to address the issue.

Since 1997, an additional £1.5 million has been invested in orthopaedic surgery. That includes the appointment of two additional consultants and supporting orthopaedic investment. There remains the issue of the total number of patients waiting for surgery, which is proportionally higher than the national average. The average waiting time for an orthopaedic operation at the Norfolk and Norwich hospital is 4.9 months, compared with the national average of 4.1 months. That has put a great deal of pressure on the trust, an issue to which I shall return.

Norfolk health authority is reviewing orthopaedic services, under the leadership of Dr. Norman Pinder, Norfolk health authority's director of public health. The review will look at Norfolk as a whole. Importantly, it will identify best practice from independent sources such as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Audit Commission and will relate it to implications for the NHS plan and national service frameworks. It will focus not just on hospital services, but will also give opportunities to examine how current orthopaedic referrals are managed, looking particularly at alternative ways of treating patients. Examples could include the use of surgical podiatry, therapy services for the management of back pain and increasing capacity in rheumatology for the treatment of medical musculo-skeletal problems. Those matters are important, because I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the wait for out-patient appointments is too long and that action must be taken.

On one case that the hon. Gentleman raised, it is worth saying that patients who are in considerable pain while waiting for an operation may return to their general practitioner for reassessment of their condition to be re-referred as an urgent case. Notwithstanding that, we must ensure that the system operates properly with appropriate resources.

In addition to the specific orthopaedic services review and to ensure that the Government's targets are met, the national health service plan implementation programme committed the NHS to undertaking local modernisation reviews during the summer. The reviews are intended to aid implementation of the NHS plan by genuinely localising implementation and engaging staff, patients and partners in local government and the private and voluntary sectors. The findings from each review will be used to create robust three to five-year plans, describing specifically how the NHS plan will be implemented in local health communities. There will be a two-stage approach to the local modernisation reviews, the first of which will be completed by the end of this month. The orthopaedic review in Norfolk will inform its local modernisation review by identifying what additional provision must be made and where it should be provided.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the review envisage out-of-area treatment? For example in the case of the Queen Elizabeth hospital in King's Lynn, there was a period last summer when there were so many road accidents that orthopaedic operations were continually put back. Will there be an opportunity for people waiting for such delayed operations to be treated outside Norfolk?

Jacqui Smith: I am sure that the balance between emergency and elective care, and the pressures on the system from wherever they come, will be part of that review, and that the hon. Gentleman will be able to feed into the review's conclusions.

As the hon. Member for North Norfolk suggested, the Norfolk and Norwich hospital is recognised as an efficient trust and is opening a new hospital later this year. It will be a brand new, purpose-built hospital for the residents of Norwich and the surrounding area, and will cost £229 million. It will be the largest new single-build hospital to be built in the country under public-private partnership. Although completion was contracted for January 2002, construction has proceeded considerably ahead of schedule, and I am pleased to note that it will open to its first patients this autumn.

The hospital is designed with the latest state-of-the-art facilities and technology, which will provide substantial improvements in accommodation. Perhaps more importantly given today's debate, the new theatre complex will include four orthopaedic theatres that will benefit from an airflow system that will minimise the risk of post-operative infections and allow a greater range of orthopaedic procedures to be performed.

I am pleased to report that the health system has identified an opportunity, as the hon. Member for North Norfolk suggested, to use the vacated space at the old hospital to provide additional surgery, including orthopaedics. That will cover the three-week period during the hospital move when, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, no elective surgery will be performed. To do that, Norfolk health system has funded an extra £3.9 million to carry out 2,000 additional operations at the old hospital during an eight-month period beginning in the autumn.

Through the proactive work of the local health system, an extra 1,200 patients will be treated during this financial year, at least half of whom will receive joint replacements. The trust aims to reduce the number of long waiters on the waiting list, depending on the suitability of patients to be treated at the old hospital.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raised the issue of staff. The trust is actively recruiting staff at present with a view to commencing the project in October and operating it until July 2002. There will be two additional wards, and two further locum orthopaedic consultants will be appointed. Hon. Members from the area will be interested to know that the programme will offer patients general surgical and urological facilities as well.

I recognise that the trust did not achieve its in-patient targets last year and reported a shortfall of 1,470 against its target for in-patient surgery. I have already referred to the historical difficulties with orthopaedic activity at Norfolk and Norwich hospital. However, recent work by local commissioners has revealed that the department's efficiency compares favourably with departments of similar size and similar large acute hospitals. That has been verified through the use of well-accepted modelling techniques and was highlighted by the hon. Member for North Norfolk.

[Jacqui Smith]

How is the trust tackling its waiting list targets? It has produced a recovery plan and support has been provided by the regional modernisation action team. In addition, expert advice has been sought on waiting list management to improve the capability to model and forecast waiting list pressures and to work through how different solutions could be used. Despite that efficiency and the additional investment that I outlined, in-patient and out-patient waiting times are still too long, and hon. Members are right to be concerned. However, the GP referral rate is not rising and the number of patients being added to operation lists following out-patient attendance is in equilibrium with the number of operations being carried out.

In addition to the review of orthopaedic services and input into the local modernisation review, the local NHS is clear that early action will need to be taken to reduce waiting times. The trust and health authority are currently developing a proposal to open two additional operating theatres at the new Norfolk and Norwich site, which will considerably alleviate the waiting list problem. The plan will be presented to the regional office in September and, if approved, the new theatres will be operational in July 2002. The local modernisation review will report later this month, and I would be happy to follow up any significant issues if hon. Members would find that helpful.

I recognise that the targets are challenging, but I am reassured that collaborative working with the regional office, health authority and local primary care organisations will allow the targets for 26-week out-patient appointments and 15-month in-patient and day-care waiters to be achieved by the end of the financial year. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, in addition to the extra investment in the system and the action taken to ensure that that investment is spent in the most effective way, I, and no doubt other hon. Members, will be keeping a close eye on ensuring that his constituents get the health service that the Government are committed to delivering.

Corporate Killing

12.59 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise this subject in Westminster Hall, and in doing so I welcome my right hon. Friend the Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform to his new position. He has already given a speech on this subject in the past three weeks, and he is on the case. I look forward to his reply to the debate.

Hon. Members are aware of the public disquiet that arises when the criminal law seems helpless when faced with catastrophic events, such as the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster, the King's Cross fire and serious rail crashes at Clapham, Southall and Ladbroke Grove. There are also other, less well-publicised tragedies in which people are killed and nothing seems to happen. Today I intend to outline why I believe that holding the companies responsible for such tragedies to account in law is both principled and possible.

I begin by drawing the attention of hon. Members to the problems with the law at present. With regard to the tragedies that I referred to, there might well be prosecutions under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. The Court of Appeal, in a 1999 decision—Howe—said that fines for health and safety offences should be of a level that brings the message home to a company's managers and shareholders. Consequently, First Great Western Trains was fined £1.5 million following the Southall crash. However, can we with all honesty say to the public that such action recognises the degree of culpability that should be attached to a company and its management in such tragedies? If we, as a society, can say that motorists who do not intend to kill someone, but do so through recklessness or irresponsible driving are guilty of involuntary manslaughter, how can we absolve the company that pays little regard to the safety of its staff or its customers? When the inquiry judge in the Herald of Free Enterprise case found that the company was infected from top to bottom with a disease of sloppiness, did that not illustrate the need to make companies as accountable as individuals for their actions? Such sloppiness was not the fault of one individual, but of a culture in which safety was very much a secondary consideration compared with profit.

The recognition that companies are responsible for the ethos and the culture that pervades their action is central to the principle underlying an offence of corporate killing. Safety should not simply be seen as secondary, but as an equal part of the problem. Companies and organisations must recognise their place as stakeholders in society. At the recent conference organised by the British Safety Council at which the Minister gave a speech, Sir Michael Latham, chairman of the construction company Wilmott Dixon, welcomed a law that punishes managers who make no serious attempt to protect people on construction sites. He said:

> "Safety is a culture. Those who believe in it and care about it will take it seriously. Those who do not will not voluntarily mend their ways. And if that means they fall foul of the new corporate killing law, I for one will have no sympathy with them at all."

The public disquiet about the lack of an offence of corporate killing reflects the sentiment expressed by Sir Michael—that safety should be a non-negotiable part of business culture.

Having outlined the principle behind an offence of corporate killing, I want to turn to the practice. First, I commend the Government, who have recognised the problem. At the last election the Labour party committed itself to the introduction of an offence of corporate killing. In May last year, the Home Office published a consultation paper based on a 1996 Law Commission report. No implementing measures were mentioned in the Queen's Speech, but I commend the Government for giving a lead on the issue.

I want to discuss the points raised by the Home Office and Law Commission documents. Both show that the ordinary criminal law is inadequate. The Southall rail crash is indicative of the way in which a company's lack of attention to safety led to safety systems on the First Great Western express either being faulty or not being switched on, and inadequate procedures for determining when a train should not be taken out. The Crown Prosecution Service prosecuted the company but the judge halted the trial. The matter was referred to the Court of Appeal, which in February last year upheld the decision of the trial judge on that point.

The result is that, at present, to convict a company of manslaughter by gross negligence it is still necessary to identify the top management of the company as being to blame, rather than to recognise that the company as a whole should be responsible. It is not possible simply to find that the company has a duty of care and has been in breach of it in a grossly negligent way; nor is it possible to aggregate management failures whose cumulative effect is negligence.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) introduced his Corporate Homicide Bill last year, he rightly pointed out that the so-called identification theory led to the law discriminating against small companies in which it is easier to identify a manager or director who is to blame. Indeed, it is no surprise that the only three successful prosecutions for corporate manslaughter have involved small companies. With larger companies, responsibility is diffuse, so there is often no one person to whom blame can be attached. Even if an individual can be identified, it is highly unlikely that that person will be part of the top management, to accord with the identification theory.

It was to overcome the identification problem that the Law Commission in 1996 proposed a completely new offence of corporate killing. No longer would it be necessary to establish first that an individual was guilty of manslaughter and secondly that he or she was part of the top management. Rather, the prosecution would have to establish that the company's conduct, which caused death, fell far below what could reasonably be expected. Causation would be established by a management failure, such as the management and organisation of activities in a way that failed to ensure the well-being of those affected, whether employees, customers or others. Corporate killing could result from the cumulative acts of several individuals in the company. That approach was rejected by the Court of Appeal in the context of corporate manslaughter.

The offence of corporate killing would not be precluded even if the immediate cause of death was the act or omission of an individual. However, in contrast with corporate manslaughter, individual blameworthiness would not be a prerequisite for corporate killing. The law would then better recognise the reality of business life—that often it is the cumulative effect of many actions within a company's culture that causes poor attention to safety and, sometimes, tragedies. However, as I have said, there might be cases in which, although a charge of corporate killing was available, an individual in the company could also be prosecuted for manslaughter offences. In that way, the offence of corporate killing sidesteps the identification problem. However, that problem would remain outside the context of a death, so that—absent vicarious liability—a company could not be liable in criminal law for wrongdoing unless a directing mind was blameworthy. That causes difficulty with a range of statutory offences that demand mens rea. It is also a problem with the application of statutory defences. I wrote about that problem many years ago. While some judges have indicated a willingness to overcome the difficulty, ultimately we need legislation. However, that is a separate issue.

The Government have accepted the Law Commission recommendation for an offence of corporate killing along with changes in the general law of manslaughter. Those are not my concern today. Indeed, the Government have gone further than the Law Commission and accepted that the offence of corporate killing should be applied not just to companies but to all undertakings such as NHS trusts and partnerships. In their consultation paper they say that some 3.5 million organisations might come within the ambit of the offence. There is no good reason not to extend the law of corporate killing to cover Government bodies as well.

Let us turn to some of the difficulties in implementing an offence of corporate killing. It has been suggested that business is against such a proposal, but that is a red herring; many prominent business leaders, such as Sir Michael Latham, are in favour of the new offence. While there is resistance to a new offence—in some cases, I have to concede, by lawyers—the debate is being won by the proponents of change.

When the consultation document was published last year, the Institute of Directors said that it was happy to support its proposals; in fact it called it a step in the right direction. There were those at the recent British Safety Council conference, like Gwyn Hughes from P&O Princess Cruises, who feared that a law of corporate killing would lead to co-operation and information drying up or being destroyed. However, he said that he could not object to legislation because he had no solution to the social need to allocate blame.

The difficulties that I envisage are to do with the legal ramifications of such an offence. The offence of corporate killing will arise irrespective of individual culpability, although it may be that, as well as citing severe corporate failure, the prosecution in particular circumstances might be able to proceed against an individual—whatever his or her level in the company—for a manslaughter offence. My concern is whether there should be additional, new consequences in the criminal law for people such as directors or managers of companies that are convicted of corporate killing. There can be little argument with the proposal in the consultation document that an individual who contributes to a management failure resulting in death might be disqualified from participation in the management of any future undertaking. That is a

[Ross Cranston]

principled extension of the company directors disqualification legislation, and would enable the sanction to be tailored to the individual's failure.

More controversially, the consultation document asks for comments on secondary liability for corporate killing for individuals who "substantially contribute" to the undertaking's primary offence. Presumably, the degree of culpability would fall short of conduct otherwise giving rise to a manslaughter prosecution—in the new scheme for that offence, reckless manslaughter, unlawful act manslaughter or manslaughter by gross negligence. However, there are problems of principle and of policy. There must be some causal connection between the individual's conduct and the killing. It should not be enough that he or she happens to be a director or manager of the undertaking—putting the individual in the dock might satisfy a sense of vengeance, but it would be unjust and would provide no incentive for corrective action by undertakings. It would also undermine the principle that the offence of corporate killing should hold to account not individuals but companies as a whole, with the aim of encouraging a business ethos that recognises the duty to stakeholders.

The only way that I can see to take the notion of "substantial contribution" forward is to build on the well-established test for making directors, managers or other similar persons liable under regulatory legislation, such as section 37 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, which is about whether corporate killing has the consent or connivance of, or is attributable to neglect on the part of, such a person. For individuals to be convicted on that test, it must be shown at least that they have responsibility for making relevant management decisions and have failed, for example, to adopt a sound safety policy based on acceptable risks or to ensure that mechanisms are in place to review and monitor the application of such a policy.

The offence of corporate killing is essential for the sake of public confidence in our system of justice. All too often, companies and organisations have been able to escape the net of the general criminal law for gross errors that would have seen individuals in the dock. The offence of corporate killing will be an important additional string to the bow of making all companies take safety seriously. Most companies recognise not only that they have a moral obligation to those affected by their activities, but that it makes good business sense as well.

In the long run, a good safety record will pay for itself, as shareholders, employees and customers gain confidence in companies. The offence of corporate killing will help all organisations to appreciate that, and help to change corporate culture so that safety is given the same priority as profit.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) on securing the debate, and also on the quality of his speech. It was wide ranging and covered the ground on corporate manslaughter effectively.

As my hon. and learned Friend points out, we are committed to the introduction of an offence of corporate killing that will hold companies to account for serious wrongdoings. Our consultation paper, issued in May last year, set out our thoughts on how to reform the law on involuntary manslaughter as a whole. One of the key proposals was to introduce a new offence of corporate killing to be used instead of the current law of manslaughter. The fact that there have been only three successful prosecutions of a corporation for manslaughter highlights the need for reform. A company may be convicted only if an individual or a group of individuals who embody the company are found guilty. That requirement, known as the identification doctrine, means that it is difficult to secure a conviction, even when a company has been found to be at fault under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

I shall use an example already cited by my hon. and learned Friend. In the case of the Southall rail crash, which claimed seven lives, the judge ruled that a charge of manslaughter could not proceed because of the difficulty of identifying someone when Great Western Trains was responsible for the negligence. However, it was not in doubt that the company had done wrong. It pleaded guilty to a charge under the 1974 Act and received a fine of £1.5 million. We recognise that convictions under the 1974 Act are serious, but we share the view expressed by my hon. and learned Friend that it is important that a company can be charged specifically with a homicide offence when a death is caused by its wrongdoing.

The proposals put forward for consultation built on the Law Commission report entitled "Legislating the Criminal Code: Involuntary Manslaughter", which was published in 1996. We use the term involuntary manslaughter because our proposals concern the criminal liability of those who kill when they do not intend to cause death or serious injury. There are two ways to consider such people. One way is to argue that society should always punish a person who causes terrible consequences. The other is to argue that a civilised society should not make people liable to punishment for a serious crime simply because of the result of their conduct, but only when they were aware that their conduct could lead to death.

One criticism of the current offence of unintentional manslaughter is its wide scope. At one end of that range is conduct by a person who causes death while engaged in a criminal act that carried with it no more than a risk of causing some slight injury. At the other is death caused in circumstances in which the risk of death was obvious. One of the problems with the wide range of conduct covered by manslaughter is the difficulty that judges have in determining appropriate sentences for particular cases. It also leads to problems for the public, who may not understand why a judge has awarded a particular sentence. It was against that background, as well as because of concerns at the lack of successful prosecutions of corporations for manslaughter, that we made our proposals last year.

The consultation period ended in September 2000. During that time, we received more than 160 responses. Almost all were of high quality and required careful consideration. As my hon. and learned Friend will know, it was not possible to fit a Bill to reform the law in this area into what was to be the final Session of the previous Parliament. Nor was it possible to include such a Bill in last month's Queen's Speech. There has been a

benefit, however, in that we have been able to devote more time to giving those responses detailed consideration.

We have yet to make final decisions in the light of the comments put to us. However, the introduction of a new offence of corporate killing is a manifesto commitment. Needless to say, we aim to honour that commitment, but I cannot say exactly when a final decision will be announced. When we make our announcement, we plan to publish a list of those who contributed to the consultation exercise, together with a summary of their responses, except in those cases when contributors asked not to have their comments made public.

Our aim is that the law should be more effective in making private individuals and undertakings accountable for their actions. Unless there are overwhelming reasons against doing so, it is reasonable that large undertakings should be no less liable to prosecution for manslaughter than private individuals or sole traders.

The Government are mindful of the need for businesses to continue to operate successfully. However, corporations must also operate responsibly, and effective sanctions against the kind of negligence or recklessness which kills are an important way to ensure that. To mark the seriousness of the offence, it would be triable on indictment only. We also propose, however, that alternative verdicts under sections 2 or 3 of the 1974 Act would be available to a jury in the event of a defendant being found not guilty of corporate killing.

The proposals set out in the consultation paper focus on the way in which activities are managed or organised by the undertakings. The offence of corporate killing will be committed when a management failure is one of the causes of death. Management failure will be defined as conduct that falls far below what can reasonably be expected of the undertaking in the circumstances. That is an exacting test, but not an unreasonable one; conscientious enterprises that take seriously their responsibility to ensure the health and safety of those affected by their activities should have nothing to fear. Expert witnesses will be available to assist a jury in determining what it was reasonable to expect of a particular defendant in the circumstances.

We also propose that companies should be liable when management failure is a cause of death rather than the cause of death. That is because, in many cases, the death may be more directly connected to the operational negligence of an employee—for example, a train driver may pass through a red signal, or a construction worker may erect scaffolding dangerously. However, the management failure might consist of a failure to take precautions to prevent such negligence, or a failure to introduce appropriate training or supervision.

The Law Commission suggested applying the offence of corporate killing to incorporated organisations only. That would create anomalies, because it would exclude large partnerships yet include some public companies and others that were not run for profit. As my hon. and learned Friend pointed out, we propose going further than that and applying the new offence to all undertakings.

Our proposal would considerably broaden the scope of the offence to about 3.5 million enterprises; for example, it would include NHS trusts and voluntary bodies. That reflects our view that the offence should be as inclusive as possible, and that employees and members of the public should be entitled to the same level of protection, regardless of the status of the undertaking.

Our proposals also recognise that Crown bodies should be held accountable when death occurs as a result of management failure. We have proposed an approach similar to that in the Food Safety Act 1990. That would allow the courts to make a declaration of non-compliance with statutory requirements, which requires immediate action to rectify the shortcomings that have been identified. The proposal provoked considerable debate, and we are carefully considering how Crown bodies should be held to account when a management failure is a cause of death. As my hon. and learned Friend recognised, it is a difficult issue, which raises important constitutional questions about how—not whether—the Government should be held to account.

Our consultation paper also invited views on whether individuals should be liable when they have contributed to a corporate killing. One concern is whether corporate liability alone might fail to provide a sufficient deterrent, particularly within large or group companies. Another consideration is that individuals who are responsible for a fatal incident can be prevented from continuing in similar positions, where the public would be vulnerable to similar conduct. If the causal link between the individual and the death were sufficient, it would be possible to prosecute for one of the individual offences. However, even when the individual cannot be prosecuted for manslaughter in his or her own right, we recognise the force of the argument that the public interest demands that individual directors who have contributed to management failure resulting in death should be subject to specific action against them. As my hon. and learned Friend said, there is already the option of disqualification for up to 15 years under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 in the case of directors who are convicted of an indictable offence in connection with their promotion, formation, management or liquidation of a company.

The consultation paper also invited opinions on whether there should be an additional criminal offence in respect of contributing to the corporate offence and, if so, whether imprisonment should be available as a sanction. Not surprisingly, we received many comments on that proposal. It will come as no surprise that that was probably the most contentious part of the consultation paper. I have noted what my hon. and learned Friend said on the issue, and I agree that the approach taken in section 37 of the 1974 Act is worth considering. We shall have to come to conclusions on the right way forward. In doing so, we will take careful note of the comments that we have received.

Although I cannot say what conclusions we shall reach on that last question or on the other issues of detail, I can set out the broad considerations that we believe we need to bear in mind in reaching them. First, reform is needed. The train accidents that have occurred over recent years, involving the death of passengers, have ensured that the process that the Law Commission started in 1996 with the publication of its recommendation for a new offence of corporate killing remains as relevant as ever.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

Secondly, life cannot be made entirely risk-free. We must guard against raising unreasonable public expectations in that respect. The programme of maintenance work that Railtrack put in hand after Hatfield and the disruption to train services raise the issue of the lengths to which an enterprise should go in ensuring safety.

I mention those two points because they underline for us the need to strike the right balance when introducing our proposals on corporate manslaughter in the light of the consultation exercise. My hon. and learned Friend referred to a balance, and safety must be given the same priority as profit. The public and employees have a right to be protected from goods and services that are lethally substandard. On the other hand, we must bear in mind the fact that too strict a test of liability might lead the more conscientious enterprises to question whether to continue supplying goods or services that attract risk. It is important that we consider those issues in detail; we must get it right before we proceed to legislate. We should not let up in our determination to reform the law in this area. I thank my hon. and learned Friend for the opportunity that he has provided for the Government to reiterate those points.

Hazel Grove Bypass

1.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise the issue of the Hazel Grove bypass, and I am grateful to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), for being here to listen to my plea. I hope to be even more grateful when he acknowledges that plea and grants my heart's desire.

I have been campaigning for a bypass for Hazel Grove for more than 12 years. During that time, there have been petitions, debates in the House, questions to Ministers and deputations. I am a new hand compared to some residents of Hazel Grove, who tell me that they have been waiting 30 years. Indeed, some people who claim to have met Lloyd George say that they have been waiting 60 years. It is a long-standing and definite need, and from time to time it has been supported by all political parties. Indeed, my Labour opponent in the general election assured residents that he supported that plea.

The argument is not only about another bypass. We are also asking the Government to put their heart and their money into a comprehensive attack on pollution and congestion across a wide swathe of Greater Manchester. On top of the national traffic growth projections, which are horrific enough even on a modest estimate of 20 per cent. by 2010, my constituency has three specific local circumstances that aggravate the traffic and congestion problems.

The first problem is the opening of the final section of the M60 link road that circles Manchester. That has resulted in a great deal of additional traffic being directed into my constituency, filtering through the area and increasing congestion. The second problem is the opening of the second runway at Manchester airport, which has resulted in a rapid and large increase in the number of passengers travelling to and from the airport. The map shows the motorway is on one side of my constituency and the airport on the other—the congestion is in the middle.

As if those two problems were not enough, Greater Manchester is something of an economic hot spot in the north-west; and the south-eastern part of Greater Manchester is particularly so, as a result of the increased prosperity created by the airport. It is estimated that current traffic movements of about 18 million passengers a year will rise to 32 million a year by 2010 and to 42 million by 2015. There will be an additional 70,000 trips per day through my constituency to the airport.

At the heart of that economic hot spot, with the motorway on one side and the airport on the other, the community is in decline. I know that the Minister comes from Plymouth, which is rather a long way from Hazel Grove. Indeed, until this debate, he might not have known where Hazel Grove was. The heart of the issue is the A6 trunk road from Manchester down to Derby, which is straddled by my constituency. In the area that we are talking about, the A6 has two lanes running in each direction through an urban shopping centre. The road takes a great deal of heavy freight traffic to the

north-west, particularly transporting minerals from the Peak District. It carries a high load of commuter traffic, as well as traffic seeking access to the M60.

The public transport infrastructure in the area is not good. I have been a persistent critic of First North Western, with its 40-year-old rolling stock, its unreliable services and its overcrowded carriages. The stations have no access ramps, and sometimes no toilets. The alternatives are scarcely in place at the moment.

The road scheme has been a line on the map for many years. It has gone through what I would call engineering overkill. Each time a new group of engineers examined the plans from 10 years earlier they added a couple of lanes each way and a couple of interchanges, so that by 1995 the scheme had reached enormous proportions. It is not altogether surprising that it ran into trouble on cost and other grounds.

The Conservatives took the so-called Stepping Hill link out of the national road programme. They cancelled the Disley and High Lane bypass. In 1997, the new Government dropped the central part of the scheme—the so-called A6M. In the meantime, there has been a steady increase in traffic, congestion, pollution, noise and fatalities. There have been a number of tragic deaths on that length of road. If one examines a map of traffic accidents and incidents in the borough of Stockport, one finds that every junction of the A6 is clustered with accidents and fatalities. Having stood there a few times over the past couple of months, I can say that in wet conditions it is horrific for people standing on the pavements, who are sprayed by the vehicles that race through the town.

The Government established the south-east Manchester multi-modal study—SEMMS—and the transport consultants conducting it are due to report within the next few weeks. That report is eagerly awaited by my colleagues in Stockport, and by the residents of Hazel Grove in particular. We know from the preliminary report that the consultants will put great emphasis on deflection and diversion strategies. Those strategies have my complete support—I am not making a plea for a road at any cost or as the only solution. However, one of the diversion strategies being prayed in aid is the airport authority's intention that a quarter of all journeys to the airport should be made by public transport. That is an excellent aim, which I strongly support. However, even if that aim is achieved, 30 million such journeys will be made by road annually by 2015—double the number made today. When the diversion tactics are in place, road traffic levels will still significantly increase.

I hope that the SEMMS study will state that First North Western should be replaced and that we should have a franchise-holder that can deliver services properly for local commuters. I hope that the report will state that there should be a rail service introduced from Marple to Stockport. I also hope that it will argue that the Metrolink tram should be extended not just to Stockport but on to Bredbury, where it could join up with heavy rail routes. There are plans for quality bus routes along the A6, part of which is already in place. All those provisions will help to give people alternatives to using their cars.

However, even when all that has been done, road traffic congestion will increase. We still, therefore, need those missing road links. The first and highest priority is a link road round the Hazel Grove shopping centre. Stockport council was so concerned about the decline of that shopping centre that it commissioned shopping consultants to see what might be done to bring it back to life. The consultants, Drivers Jonas, produced a report that said that there were various ways in which the council could try to revive the centre, but that the fundamental problem was the traffic going through the centre. The report stated that until or unless that was got rid of, the centre would continue to die on its feet.

Getting the Stepping Hill link to bypass the shopping centre is a very high priority. We also need to ensure that we have a road that connects the M60 at Bredbury with the Manchester airport eastern link road at Woodford and on to the airport. It used to be called the A6M, but I do not argue that we need the heavily engineered motorway solution that was once on offer. We need a vehicle-only route that safeguards local communities and leaves the citizens of Bredbury, Romiley and Hazel Grove with a reasonable and peaceful environment in which to work.

I want the Minister first to acknowledge the severe problems that local residents and commuters face. Secondly, I want him to show some recognition of the exceptional levels of traffic growth that are starting and which are foreseeable with the expansion of the airport. Thirdly, I want him to put his weight behind the options to be published in the SEMMS report, which we know will be a mixture of public transport and road-based solutions. Their implementation as quickly as possible is essential for the well-being of my area, especially Hazel Grove. Fourthly, I want him to be ready to commit resources for the implementation of those transport solutions.

When I last spoke to the consultants—I am in frequent contact with them, as hon. Members will imagine—they told me that they planned to publish on a time scale that would allow the local authorities to incorporate their ideas in the integrated transport plans that they will propose to the Minister. The timetable is desperately short. Those submissions have to be made in the next six to eight weeks, and the report has still not been published. It is important for the Minister to signal to the local authorities that he will be ready to respond favourably when they include the ideas in their integrated transport plan submission.

In Hazel Grove, we have had plans for decades. Special extra pigeon holes have had to be built for them. Every time someone reconsiders them, they scratch their heads, say that the problem should have been dealt with and call for another plan. The residents of Hazel Grove have reservations and concerns about yet another plan. They do not want just a plan, but an implementation package. I ask the Minister to please accept the plan, provide the resources and give us an implementation package, so that the residents of Hazel Grove do not have to put up with the problem any longer.

1.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on securing the debate, on raising a subject that is important to his constituents, and also on his well-considered and thoughtful approach. He has been a tenacious advocate of the bypass on behalf of his constituents.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

I am not sure that I will be able to provide something today that will instantly meet the heart's desire of all the hon. Gentleman's constituents. However, I will try to outline the Government's position on bypasses and consider the context in which a decision will be made on the Manchester and Stockport area. I accept his points about pollution and congestion. Although I represent Plymouth, I assure him that the Government represent the United Kingdom. We have a broad brief and understand the issues. Even though I may not be familiar with every piece of gravel at the side of the road in his area, I am exceedingly well informed on the issues by officials.

The hon. Gentleman said that some of his constituents had waited a long time—some thought it 20 years, some 60 years—for the bypass. However, the subject is now being discussed in a different context. The road is no longer part of the major trunk road system, but part of the local road system and will be discussed as part of the local road strategy. There are some differences and, in that context, the Government's role has changed somewhat. He might consider that that is good news, in that the issues will be discussed locally, and local priorities will be brought to bear on the decisions that are made.

Mr. Stunell: The Minister is right about the transfer. I draw his attention to the fact that that will not happen until April next year—so there is plenty of time for him to chip in some money.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and for having raised this topic. It is both interesting and useful to hear at first hand about the impact that traffic congestion and pollution have on the economic, social and environmental well-being of Hazel Grove residents, and he has set out the case for transport improvements very clearly.

We recognise that both quality of life and the economy depend upon transport. Motor vehicles have revolutionised the way in which we live, bringing greater flexibility and widening people's horizons. However, the use of our vehicles has a price—for the economy, for our health and for the environment. That is particularly true in urban areas such as Hazel Grove, where the steady increase in traffic over many years has led to increased congestion and the negative effects on communities that the hon. Gentleman has so graphically described.

We made it clear in our White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" that we are committed to improving the environment in towns and cities. We want people to be able to move around easily and in safety. By removing a large proportion of the through traffic from a community, a bypass can certainly bring about an improvement in safety for residents. The severance effect of high traffic flows is reduced and accessibility is increased. Residents face fewer risks when crossing the road and, if the footway is inadequate, when simply walking on the pavement in close proximity to traffic. I am informed that that applies in the area that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned.

A bypass also improves the quality of the built environment. Noise levels are reduced and air quality is improved. The removal of heavy traffic allows communities to develop their opportunities to improve the reliability of public transport and to provide better facilities for cycling or walking. The removal of through traffic can also boost an area's commercial and retail vitality, providing a safer, cleaner and more attractive place in which to shop and to do business. That is also particularly relevant to today's debate.

However, it is also possible to make a harmful impact on the enviroment. People who formerly enjoyed a quiet environment might find themselves near a busy road that has become the bypass for another area. A bypass might adversely affect designated areas. Some of these consequences might be unavoidable, but they should be carefully considered when deciding whether or not to proceed. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that environmental and other matters should figure in our consideration of bypasses.

As the hon. Member for Hazel Grove said, there are proposals of between 20 and 60 years standing for a bypass of Hazel Grove as part of the larger north-south bypass of Stockport to relieve the A6. Some development work has been undertaken. There are now, as he mentioned, endless pigeonholes with plans in them. As he knows, a public inquiry was held in 1987-88, and orders were made in 1989 and 1990. Supplementary orders were published in 1991 and 1992. However, following a reappraisal of the scheme, the Conservative Administration decided to withdraw those orders.

At the time of this Government's 1997-98 roads review, the Stockport north-south bypass had not been sufficiently developed for us to consider it as a candidate for the targeted programme of trunk road improvements. In addition, the scheme was on a part of the trunk road network that we concluded was not of sufficient strategic national importance to justify its inclusion in the core trunk road network.

The core network will continue to be a direct central Government responsibility, with non-core routes being transferred to local highway authorities in accordance with the policy that was set out in "A New Deal for Transport", which was subsequently the subject of consultation. In all, we propose to de-trunk some 3,000 km—about 2,000 miles—of non-core routes. That will be done in a phased programme with the first tranche of 500 km due to be de-trunked in 2001-02. Non-core trunk roads, which include the A6 and A523 in Greater Manchester, mainly serve local and regional traffic. We concluded that those routes would be more appropriately managed by local highway authorities, to enable decisions about them to be taken locally, and better to integrate them with local transport and land use issues.

Nineteen schemes in the road programme that we inherited from the previous Administration were on non-core routes proposed for de-trunking. They were withdrawn from the national trunk road programme, and the relevant local highway authorities were invited to consider taking them forward as local road schemes within their local transport plans. Among those schemes were the A6 Stockport north-south bypass, the A555-A523 Poynton bypass and the A555 Manchester airport link west.

Rather than put forward immediate bids for the schemes, it was decided to look at the problems that they were designed to address. The south-east Manchester multimodal study is one of several multimodal studies dealing with particularly complex problems that can be tackled only by examining all forms of transport in the relevant area and seeking balanced solutions that will contribute to our integrated transport policy. In recognition of the importance of the problems in south-east Manchester, SEMMS was one of the first multimodalstudies to be commissioned.

It may be helpful to explain the process of the study. A consortium led by Steer Davies Gleave was appointed following competitive tender in December 1999. We are funding the study and the Government office for the north-west is leading, in partnership with key interested parties in the study area. As for all the multimodal studies, we have established a steering group that is responsible for its management and direction. Membership is wide and incorporates all district and county councils that are covered by the study, the Strategic Rail Authority, the Highways Agency and the regional development agency, together with other business interests including Manchester airport and a representative of local environmental and community groups.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove asked about implementation. Perhaps I can steer things his way a little, even if I cannot give him his heart's desire. The study is going through a well-structured process. Much time has been spent analysing in depth the transport, planning, social and economic issues within the study area. The work has confirmed many of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman about the adverse impact of congestion on parts of the study area, including Hazel Grove and the A6 corridor, and the lack of attractive, sustainable alternatives to the car. Problems have also been identified associated with long-term land use planning decisions and with the adverse impact that stone lorries can have, particularly in his constituency. There are also areas of significant deprivation within the study area, which have their own transport problems and needs.

The study, having produced recognition and understanding of the severity of the problems, is also developing solutions. Working with the steering group, the consultants have identified a range of possible measures to address the problems. Potential solutions being examined include the construction of bypasses; Metrolink extensions beyond those agreed by the Government in March last year; an extension of the Greater Manchester quality bus corridor programme;a significant enhancement of the quality and reliability of rail services, which has been developed in close co-operation with the Strategic Rail Authority's work in Greater Manchester; measures to assist cyclists and pedestrians; the better management of freight movements; and a significant intensification of efforts to promote a change in travel behaviour.

Those measures have been assembled into a number of strategies covering the full range of transport activity. Their potential impact has been appraised in detail to get a broad picture of the potential costs and benefits of the various options. The consultants and the steering group are now engaged—literally as we speak, for they are meeting in Manchester today—in putting together a recommended strategy based on the results of that work. I understand that the recommended strategy is expected to include proposals for bypasses to alleviate traffic for local communities, extensions to the Metrolink and an upgrade in the availability and quality of alternatives to the car.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove will be aware that consultation is playing a very important part in the study process. Emphasis has been placed from an early stage on giving people, their elected representatives and interested organisations the opportunity to participate in identifying problems, formulating strategy and deriving solutions. There have been regular newsletters, consultation meetings and briefing sessions, and I believe that on three occasions the hon. Gentleman has met with the Government office for the north west and its consultants. There will be a further opportunity for consultation offered shortly, once a recommended strategy has been developed, and officials will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman should he wish for further briefing.

We expect the final report on SEMMS to be made in August. The regional planning body will then make its recommendations to Ministers in the light of the report. If the case for an A6 by-pass to take traffic out of Hazel Grove is accepted, it will be for Stockport metropolitan borough council to take the lead in working up the scheme and to submit it for consideration for funding as part of the Greater Manchester local transport plan. In the 10-year plan, we have made a clear commitment to fund the outcomes of the multimodal study process. My officials are already discussing how major schemes proposed by SEMMS can be taken forward through the local transport plan system.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising those matters. I am sure that, like me, he is looking forward to seeing the results of the study. He can be assured that the issues that he has raised will be considered with great care at all levels. I thank him once again for raising those matters in such a measured way. I am sure that this will not be the last time that we hear from him; perhaps the heart's desires of his constituents will one day be achieved.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 11 July 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Asylum Seekers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Pearson.*]

9.30 am

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): May I say how pleased I am to have this debate in the closing weeks before the summer recess? The topic is important, so it is right that we should air it again. I am also pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), is present. I am sure that she will bring the same sympathy, compassion and dedication to her new role that she brought to her previous one.

Over the years, I have visited many refugee camps and prisons across the world. However, until I visited Cardiff prison two weeks ago with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), I had visited only one prison in the United Kingdom, which was a women's prison in Bristol. There are 44 asylum seekers in Cardiff prison of 20 different nationalities, including people from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kosovo, Albania and Zimbabwe. They have all been refused asylum by an immigration officer at a port or at their point of entry, and they have been refused bail while their appeal is under way. They usually have legal representation, but solicitors sometimes send agents, who are often inexperienced, to deal with bail applications.

The situation in Cardiff prison hit the press when asylum seekers were taken in handcuffs to a local hospital. That shocked many people in Cardiff and elsewhere. When we visited the prison, the authorities told us that asylum seekers were treated the same as other prisoners because they were in a prison regime.

Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North nor I have any criticism of the staff at Cardiff prison. We found them sympathetic, and they were both concerned and resentful at being asked to perform a duty that they felt they should not have to perform. A constituent of mine, who is a prison officer there, told me, "I think it's absolutely disgraceful. These people should not be in prison." All the prison officials with whom we spoke echoed that view.

Most of the staff who deal with the asylum seekers receive some training. One group had visited Belmarsh prison. As far as we could ascertain, no extra resources are given to the prison authorities to educate asylum seekers. The asylum seekers are held in cells, in which they are usually locked up for 12 hours a day. We managed to talk to a few of them, but communication proved difficult because no interpreter was available. It was, therefore, a halting conversation. One asylum seeker had kitchen skills, but the others' skills were not known to the prison authorities, which concerns me. The authorities know little about the asylum seekers' countries of origin. Although they provide special food and prayer facilities, they do not know the circumstances from which those people have fled.

The capacity of Cardiff prison is tight; there are about 640 inmates. At present, Welsh prisoners are sent to English prisons because there is not enough room for them in Cardiff prison. In one cell, we met a Pakistani—a very cultured man—who was a scholar, and the author of 37 books. He would have kept us there all morning if we could have spent that amount of time with him. He could not understand why he was being detained. We met a Tamil from Sri Lanka, who had left Sri Lanka because of the daily violence there. He had owned his own bakery. We met an Iranian who was a technician in an oil refinery. Due to language difficulties, it was not possible to find out why he had left his country.

One of the prison officers told us that the staff were concerned that the asylum seekers were mixing with other prisoners and were being introduced to drugs. In spite of the best efforts of the prison authorities, drugs are brought into prisons. It was also alleged that asylum seekers were being taught how to forge credit cards. Obviously, that skill may be useful to them in future, but they should not be learning it.

We met a man from Kosovo, whose father and brother had disappeared. He was frightened for his life so he decided to flee. Everyone understands why people fled Kosovo at the time that he did. He did not know the whereabouts of his father and brother; he believed that they were dead. The day before we arrived, he learned that his mother was in prison in Tirana, Albania. We asked whether he had managed to talk to anyone and he told us that access to the telephone was very limited—something that others have confirmed. There is one telephone per 50 of the prison population. Even when I visited refugee camps in Macedonia with the Select Committee on International Development, one of the points that we made to the authorities there, and to the Government when we returned, was that the first thing that people wanted to do when they fled their countries was to make contact with their family or friends. It is essential that they are able to do that. We managed to convince the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to arrange for mobile telephones to be brought into the refugee camps in Macedonia so that people could make those important telephone calls. The Kosovan man was ready to go back to Albania. He wanted to go to Tirana to see his mother. I hope that he will be able to do that soon.

The staff of Cardiff prison have been attacked in the press, and I repeat that those staff are doing the best that they can in the circumstances. I would not want anything that I say today to be considered as a criticism of their difficult work. If asylum seekers cannot speak English, it is important that interpreters are available. Similarly, if those seeking asylum want to learn English, those facilities should be available. That is a basic right.

This morning I received a letter that was handed to the Refugee Council on 2 May. It is from a Zimbabwean and others in Cardiff prison. There are a number of

[Ann Clwyd]

signatures attached. Obviously, in the light of what we saw there and the conversations that we had, we cannot verify the claims that he makes, but it is right that I place it on record. He said:

"As asylum seekers in this prison, we strongly object the inhuman treatment we are subjected to. We feel that there is a need for audience with both immigration and human rights support services within the country as we suspect that there is a conspiracy against us...Most of the detainees have relatives in England (London) but immigration have chosen to detain them in"

a Welsh prison. He continues:

"This is meant to deter you from seeking assistance from well-wishers/relatives and in London, some had personal solicitors in London of which they lost contact with, due to tricky unwarranted movements. During this period immigration expects you to source additional evidence to support your claim in court yet they are hampering all your access to information and you call this justice...Here at Cardiff prison we are treated like animals as compared to criminal remand prisoners and those serving sentences. Some of us we have never been arrested before, and just found ourselves in a prison cell sharing facilities with convicts of different crimes people committing suicide and unwarranted bullying from prison officers. You try and seek explanation from the local immigration officer, why you are in prison, 'the answer lies with immigration in London' all he is instructed to help you go back to your country if you are fed up...Association is divided between criminal remand prisoners and immigration detainees but you find that preferential treatment is given to the former evidenced by the following. From Mon 19/03/01 to Mon 02/04/01 we only got 2 hrs free from every 48 hrs, locked in the cells. From Tues 03/04 to Friday 06.04 we were locked up for more than 78 hours...no shower and no explanation, but fellow prisoners were allowed out all the time. Again this is not surprising cause we are not British.

We don't know the difference between us and other asylum seekers as these are not subjected to the same conditions ie Campsfield Detention Centre (Oxford) people are free to receive calls and interaction throughout the day until late, but here we are only allowed £16 worth of phone cards each week equivalent to 15 mins talking time when calling a mobile. You are expected to discuss with solicitors relatives both locally and internationally using just this...We used to think that Britain was the Cradle of Justice, human rights and equality the world over hence this level of abuse only prompts one to conclude that this is an epicentre of racism it only confirms that MPs statement which states 'Asylum seekers are compared to rats in a bucket who create social tension'. This is what we are fleeing from and we wouldn't expect this level of torture from a developed country, more-so a signatory of the 1951 Human Rights UN convention."

As I said, I have no way of checking that out.

Iraq, Sri Lanka, the Republic of Yugoslavia, Iran, Somalia and Afghanistan accounted for about half of all UK asylum applications last year. Serious human rights abuses, including torture, occur in all those countries, as even the British tabloids cannot deny. As Europe tightens its immigration controls, it is now virtually impossible for someone fleeing persecution to reach safety in the UK legally. Those asylum seekers who have entered Britain illegally may have had no other option.

Britain has signed the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees, which gives anyone the legal right to claim asylum. Anyone who has claimed asylum has a legal right to remain in the UK until the claim has been assessed.

The truth is that we do not bear the greatest asylum strain—the world's poorest countries do. Most refugees have always gone to neighbouring countries and will probably always do so. I want to put the problem in context. Iran currently has something like 1.8 million refugees from Afghanistan. Pakistan has 1.2 million refugees. Britain had just 76,000 new arrivals last year. Some of us have visited refugee camps and have seen, for example, Kurdish refugees fleeing over the mountains to Iran or Turkey. In 1991, the Turkish border came down pretty fast; the Iranians kept their borders open for much longer. When we see the plight of those people, we realise that they leave their homes not because they want to, but because of persecution.

At the end of May, about 1,787 refugees were detained in British prisons. Some 396 were detained in an immigration detention centre, 247 at Oakington detention centre and 1,144 in prisons. During the passage of the Immigration and Asylum Bill, the Leader of the House of Lords, Lord Williams of Mostyn, told the other place that he accepted, on the Government's behalf, the principle that

"no detainee ought to be kept in the prison regime. That cannot be brought about overnight, but we accepted the principle immediately...David Ramsbotham was absolutely right, and we said so at the time."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 July 1999; Vol. 604, c. 717.]

The Government's report "Fairer, Faster and Firmer" stated that we needed a statutory framework for detention centres. It proposed to seek the power to regulate the rights and responsibilities of detainees and detention centre managers. Those rules have been approved by Parliament, and reflect the fact that detention centres must account for the difference between asylum seekers and criminals. The Refugee Council believes that if the rules are to serve their purpose and protect detained asylum seekers, we should cease to use prisons for that group.

Amnesty International's 2001 report notes with concern that, at any given time, there are about 1,000 asylum seekers in detention. The British Medical Association's new handbook for doctors on human rights says that the routine use of prison detention is an abuse of asylum seekers' human rights. The UNHCR's detention guideline 10, "Conditions of Detention", says that asylum seekers should not be detained in prisons. The "Sanctuary in a Cell" report on the detention of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland has found that

"the moral and legal obligation to grant sanctuary to those fleeing persecution is being systematically undermined by the criminalisation of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland."

The chief inspector of prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, has on several occasions stated that he does not consider the detention of asylum seekers to be a fit and proper role for the Prison Service. In January he said:

"I don't think it's right to hold people who have not been accused of or committed a crime, in prison conditions...prison rules do not apply to those who are wholly innocent of any offence".

The chief executive of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders said that prisons

"are wholly inappropriate for people in a distressed and vulnerable state."

The UNHCR's United Kingdom representative, Hope Hanlan, has also attacked using prisons in such a way. She says:

"There is nothing to justify putting people in prison. Once you do that you raise all sorts of humanitarian issues."

She added that no other country in Europe did that. The Asylum Rights Campaign has produced a summary of its concerns about how asylum seekers are detained, particularly in prison. It makes the point that prisons are understaffed and overcrowded and that there are excessive lock-up times, sometimes between 16 and 18 hours a day.

On the possibility of applying detention centre rules in prison, governors said that it would be impossible to run separate regimes for convicted remand and immigration detainees in a single establishment. An old Victorian prison such as Cardiff is in much need of refurbishment. The conditions are pretty bad for people who are meant to be in prison. When we visited that prison on a very warm day, we found the conditions to be particularly oppressive.

At the end of last year, the Government announced that a further 500 places for asylum seekers had been secured from the Prison Service. Ministers in the previous Government claimed that that was a temporary measure. The previous Minister said that prison places would be used as an interim, short-term measure. In 1999, Sir David Ramsbotham said of Rochester prison:

"Most of all I must express my concern at the poor treatment and conditions of the numbers of asylum seekers, immigration detainees and other foreign nationals who form almost half the prison population.

Detainees were treated as if they were unconvicted prisoners. This approach seemed to be based on guidelines from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and was adopted by prison staff in their dealings with them."

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture sent me this week a study of Pakistani torture survivors who come to the UK that makes particularly disturbing reading. It has recorded 11 cases in which torture victims were detained in mainstream prisons instead of receiving temporary admission. I urge people to read the study. It states:

"Holding asylum seekers in prison, where they are forced to mix with people accused of serious criminal offences, conflicts with the Government's own policy as stated in the same White Paper. ...

In each of the eleven cases, the asylum seekers were imprisoned—on average for just over 9 months, but in one case for more than 20 months—despite giving evidence of torture during initial interviews with immigration officers about their reasons for fleeing into exile.

Medical examination by Foundation doctors found that each of those held had scars—some a dozen or more—and other marks on the body fully consistent with the account of torture. One man had 32 scars, although when he was screened on arrival in prison, the word 'Nil' was entered in the section headed 'Abnormalities, scars etc.'

In only one instance was an asylum seeker quickly freed after being examined by a Foundation doctor. The others remained in prison for months after a medical report from the Foundation had been prepared."

All the asylum seekers described in the study had endured various torture methods in Pakistan. I will not go through them, but one in five of the sample had suffered sexual torture, some of whom had been raped. In spite of all the evidence of torture in Pakistan that human rights observers have provided, the Home Office made a formal legal declaration in 1996 that, in its view, there was generally no serious risk of persecution in Pakistan. Earlier this year, however, the Appeal Court confirmed the ruling that to characterise Pakistan in that way was unlawful and irrational.

The study concludes that the Home Office hardly ever makes a proper evaluation of the evidence of torture from the individual's testimony, or from what is known of torture in Pakistan and from medical evidence. The Medical Foundation also found the same deficiencies when the Home Office examined asylum applications made by its clients from Turkey, India and Sri Lanka. The foundation maintains that such deficiencies lead to a systematic failure by the UK to honour its international obligations to protect asylum seekers with a history of torture.

Over the past couple of days, Asylum Link Merseyside, which the Minister may know of, has faxed me a petition with 1,700 signatures. It is headed "Free asylum seekers held without trial in Walton prison". It is addressed to the Home Secretary.

"As our newly appointed Home Secretary we the undersigned urge you to use your office to release asylum seekers held unjustly in Walton (Liverpool) prison and other high security prisons. This situation is an outrage and cannot be justified and we ask for immediate action to release all asylum seekers so that they can be given access to decent conditions whilst awaiting a review of their claims for refugee status. We know you are an advocate for human rights and request you give this matter your urgent attention."

I have had a letter from the Immigration Advisory Service. It refers to the use of vouchers, which is, of course, a contentious issue. The IAS says:

"We take the view that the system is so flawed and now so expensive in comparison with giving benefits to asylum seekers while their cases are being considered that it should be scrapped. ...the application of this system is causing widespread misery and has not had the intended effect of deterring asylum seekers from coming to the UK."

The Select Committee on International Development visited Montserrat in the early days of the volcano crisis and followed that up a year later with another visit. We discovered that the use of vouchers was one of the things that caused people on Montserrat the greatest concern. We managed to get the voucher system scrapped. If we can do that on Montserrat, we should also do so in the UK.

The Refugee Council has provided me with considerable briefing material, as have other organisations. It believes that asylum seekers should be detained only in exceptional circumstances and that they should not be detained in prison. It notes that something is seriously wrong if asylum seekers can be detained, sometimes in prisons, for long periods—sometimes approaching two years. The council calls for the Government to publish a regular breakdown by nationality, gender and so on of the number of asylum seekers detained under the Immigration Act 1988. I have tabled a question on that subject, which is awaiting a reply from the Minister. The council also believes that the bail provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 should be implemented as soon as possible.

[Ann Clwyd]

The Prime Minister wrote in *The Times* in May:

"we must never cease to be a country offering refuge to the genuinely persecuted. Never forget, in all this fuss about the false cases, that there are still many people fleeing racial, religious or political persecution, who without our help would face death or destitution. We have a proud history of helping such people and many of them, their children and grandchildren are pillars of our society today."

So I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bear in mind the points that I have made.

I visited a camp that the British Government in Hong Kong ran for the Vietnamese boat people. Those people were caged, and held in appalling conditions. That was some years ago, and I remember coming back to the House and saying that that was no way for the Government to treat people who were fleeing their country, for whatever reason. The vast majority of people flee for perfectly legitimate reasons.

During our visit to Cardiff prison, my hon. Friend and I again saw asylum seekers who were caged. It is simply not good enough, in 2001, to treat people like that when they are fleeing persecution and have left their own countries and families. It is not easy to flee one's country—talk to refugees in any country in the world. Most of them do not want to do it, except with very good reason. I am sure that we all recognise that. We should all be deeply ashamed of the appalling things that have been said during the past few months about asylum seekers in this country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With the winding-up speeches due to start no later than 10.30 am, I appeal to those hon. Members who seek to catch my eye to bear it in mind that four more Members wish to contribute to the debate.

10 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I shall be brief. I thank the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for raising this important issue, and particularly for focusing on the treatment of asylum seekers in our prisons. I shall speak briefly about the conditions for asylum seekers in Winchester prison in my constituency, and I shall focus on three matters—first, the pressure that holding asylum seekers puts on the Prison Service; secondly, the inappropriateness of holding asylum seekers in prison; thirdly, I shall ask the Minister to comment on some time scale questions about the use of prisons in general and particularly about Winchester prison.

First, I agree with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley about pressure in prisons. I have no criticism of the staff or the governor of Winchester prison. Publicly, they tell me that they can manage. However, some prison staff have told me privately that they find it extraordinarily difficult to do so, and that they feel extremely uncomfortable about it. They are not prepared to say that publicly, but I know that the prison authorities are worried that prison staff are finding it difficult to cope. Like many other prisons, Winchester is busy and it is under enormous pressure.

I do not make a direct connection between that pressure and the figure that I now cite; I raise the subject to point out the difficulties that the prison faces. During the past five years, Winchester prison has seen about five times more suicides than the average in prisons. Winchester clearly faces considerable difficulties and pressures and it can well manage without that additional burden. Will the Minister say what financial arrangements are made when prisons are used in that way? What sort of financial assessment is made of the difficulties that face prisons, and what additional financial resources do prisons have to help staff cope with the pressures involved?

The second issue is the appropriateness of holding asylum seekers in prison. When talking to folk in my constituency about that, I focus on the fact that putting such pressure on the Prison Service makes no sense. Asylum groups in Winchester have made public another important moral issue, which is that imprisonment is completely inhumane and inappropriate.

In informal conversation with those who have been held in prison and with those who have worked with them, I have heard concern expressed about asylum seekers' access to lawyers, and I have heard some pretty troubling stories about lawyers not being able to get through to them at the right time. It is worrying that many individuals who have been detained in prison are removed from prison late on a Friday evening, taken to centres near an airport on Saturday and have to leave the country on Sunday. As one of those trying to help, I have quite often found it difficult to challenge such decisions late on a Friday night or a Saturday. I know that lawyers can find it difficult to get into the prison on that final day in order to make what can often turn out to be a last-minute appeal. Access to lawyers for asylum seekers in prison troubles me greatly. I would appreciate it if the Minister were to give an absolute assurance that being held in prison was not a barrier to asylum seekers gaining access to the specific legal help that they need in such complex cases.

I am equally concerned about the language difficulties. Prison staff have pointed out the impracticability of moving asylum seekers around the prison from day to day because in some cases it is virtually impossible to communicate with them. Can the Minister say what kind of back-up and support there is for prisons in relation to language?

There are also simple things that would help. For example, can we do more to ensure that a range of newspapers is available? Such measures would make a great difference to the lives of individuals held at Winchester prison. Will the Minister talk about such pastoral issues, and what sort of financial support is available so that prisons can buy newspapers?

My final point is about time scale. When Winchester prison was being used towards the end of last year, I and others raised a number of issues with Ministers and with the prison. We were told that it was a short-term measure—a matter of five or six weeks—and that the individuals who were being kept at the prison had gone through every possible appeal process and were to be sent back to their countries. The position then changed. I received a ministerial response stating that it was the Government's intention that the use of remand accommodation at Winchester prison would cease by the end of October 2001. I probed again a couple of

weeks ago and received a slightly different ministerial response, implying that that October deadline would not be kept. I was told that

"even in the long term, for reasons of geography, security and control, there would continue to be a need to hold some detainees in prisons."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 100W.]

This is of concern, in that the goalposts seem to have moved every time that I have asked about the time scale. I hope that the Minister can today give an absolute assurance, first that the commitment given to me in a ministerial response on 8 February that Winchester prison will not be used beyond 31October remains and secondly, that the Government still intend that the use of prisons will end on the day when they open the detention centres, or at least within days of it. My worry is that prison use is now a long-term policy, that the detention centres will not meet the need and therefore, for reasons of geography and security, it will be necessary to continue to use prisons beyond 31 October. I shall be most grateful if the Minister will confirm that that is not accurate, and that the Government intend to end the use of prisons by 31October.

10.7 am

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): There is much about the treatment of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom that causes concern—the voucher system, which is being reviewed, some aspects of the dispersal policy, which has started well in Cardiff, and the care and welfare of asylum-seeking children, which has been raised by Save the Children and other voluntary organisations.

However, I want to concentrate on the policy of holding asylum seekers in prison and I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on securing the debate. As she has said, one of the impetuses for it was our recent joint visit to Cardiff prison. The policy of holding asylum seekers in prison is inappropriate. I welcome the presence of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and hope that she will be able to indicate when the policy will end.

During our visit to Cardiff prison we were told that the original intention had been that the asylum seekers would stay there until October, but that the prison staff had been told that they would be there until December. I hope that the Minister will cast some light on the policy and tell us when there is likely to be an end to holding asylum seekers in Cardiff prison. The policy has been strongly condemned in Wales. I have been inundated with representations from voluntary groups, the Refugee Council and the Churches. They all find it unimaginable that we are holding asylum seekers in Cardiff prison in the capital of Wales. The National Assembly for Wales, where all parties have condemned it, has come out against the policy and it is hard for people in Wales to understand that Welsh Members of Parliament have not been able to influence it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said, 44 asylum seekers were detained in Cardiff prison when we visited it. Since the policy started in February 2001, 78 detainees have been received at Cardiff prison, of which 27 have been bailed, seven deported and 44 held. As Cardiff solicitors have become more used to the circumstances, the number of cases in which bail has been granted has shot up, which shows that when asylum seekers have an opportunity to put their case they are granted bail.

Like my hon. Friend, I have no criticism of the prison staff. They were welcoming and open to us, allowing us to go anywhere and see anyone we wanted. They gave us a list of all 44 detainees, and we were able to pick whom we wanted to see. We saw people in cells, and went to the landing where the detainees stayed. It is not fair to make the prison staff responsible for looking after a group of people whom they were not employed to look after. They have not had training in such work and do not have background knowledge about the detainees' difficulties, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said.

The detainees have many needs that are different from those of the remand prisoners on whose wing they have been placed. Many of them have no or limited English. They have been transported from all parts of the United Kingdom and have no contacts in Cardiff at all. Many have families in other parts of the UK, and the fact that the detainees have been moved such a distance causes problems, as their original solicitors are based elsewhere in the country. They need access to telephones to find out information about their families and what is happening in their own countries, but their access is the same as that of the remand prisoners.

Above all, the detainees have not been charged with crimes. Most of them are awaiting appeal. They are not at the end of a long process, as I was given to understand when I was told that asylum seekers would be held in prison. They are not waiting to be deported. Since February, only seven have been deported and 27 have been bailed.

In Cardiff prison, the asylum seekers are on a separate landing on the remand wing, but they mix with the remand prisoners at association times. That has advantages and disadvantages. My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that prison is a learning ground for crime, as we all know, and that asylum seekers were being taught how to deal in drugs and forge credit cards, despite the efforts of the prison officers. However, one can understand why it is the policy that everyone on the same wing should mix at association times and not be kept apart.

The detainees are held under the same conditions as the remand prisoners, which means that they are handcuffed when they go out to have vaccinations, X-rays and other medical treatment. In the Welsh press, there has been outrage from all political parties in Wales about the fact that people not convicted of crime have been subject to that public humiliation. It has been hard for the Welsh public to understand why that happens. I do not criticise the prison staff, who are in an awkward situation. They have been told to treat asylum seekers as remand prisoners, so they use the same guidelines.

No additional money has been given to the prison to cope with the diverse demands of holding asylum seekers so it has not been possible, for example, for detainees to learn English as a second language, as asylum seekers in the community can at no charge. Only now has the Prison Service taken money out of its budget to ensure that asylum seekers in prison have that opportunity.

Now that local solicitors are geared up to what is happening, many more asylum seekers are granted bail. We ascertained reasons why the asylum seekers were in the prison, and some did not seem serious. One person

[Julie Morgan]

told us that under the dispersal scheme he had been sent to one address and then to another in a nearby block of flats. The letter asking him to report to the immigration authorities went to the first address, so he did not receive it and he was arrested and put in Cardiff jail. He was trying to contact a solicitor to establish what was happening. When he first went to Cardiff jail in February the service was not under pressure. Now, as we all know, the figures for people in prison have shot up. I was given anecdotal information yesterday by a Cardiff probation officer that all the Cardiff and valleys remand prisoners who would normally go to Cardiff jail are going to Park prison in Bridgend. There is not enough room in Cardiff prison, which already has a wing out of commission for refurbishment.

There is no logic, justice or point to the policy of keeping asylum seekers in prison. The practice of keeping them in Cardiff prison should stop for the sake of everyone involved—prison staff, remand prisoners who need local places and, above all, asylum seekers. The practice should stop throughout the United Kingdom. As my hon. Friend has said, on 31 May, under the immigration powers, 1,144 persons were detained. That included 428 people in dedicated detention facilities. We are not talking about vast numbers of people. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary should examine the policy seriously.

My visit to Cardiff prison had a profound effect on me, as I know that it did on my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley. Treating asylum seekers like criminals is bound to make the public believe that they are criminals. It is bound to exacerbate race relations problems and to make the dispersal system less likely to succeed. So far, that system has been going well in Cardiff.

As I stood on the third landing in a wing of that old Victorian prison, in hot sunshine, talking to people from all over the world who had come to this country seeking asylum, it seemed unimaginable that this was Britain in 2001, with its great human rights tradition. I hope that my hon. Friend will seriously reconsider the policy and reassure us about the time scale involved.

10.17 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): While the debate has focused mainly on prisons so far, I want briefly to raise some other issues.

I recall debates on the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. It struck me then, and still does, that the fundamental problem with our treatment of asylum seekers is that the system established by that Act was designed to be punitive. It was quite deliberate. The Act was about deterring people from making applications. To that end, a tough regime was introduced, which applies equally to every asylum applicant, whether genuine or not. What is happening now with the voucher system and detentions is an inevitable consequence of the Act.

I am glad that the Home Office is bringing the applications backlog down at long last, and making progress, but I have never changed my view that if we are serious about dealing with asylum applications we need to make decisions efficiently and quickly, and enforce them. I know that that means that some people must be removed. We must face that. However, it is far and away the best approach.

I would like to make some brief points on several separate issues. I apologise if I become a little disjointed, but there is not enough time to go into detail. First, I would like to deal with the operation of the National Asylum Support Service. I spent the best part of a day at NASS a few weeks ago and what struck me when I talked to people there and saw what they were doing was that there were a lot of people working hard to make an impossible system work. The voucher system has been reviewed, and I do not want to go into that this morning because I hope that when that review is published there will be some fundamental changes. However, there are still some problems that need to be tackled.

There are delays in processing applications at NASS. As a London Member of Parliament, I tend to see people who are not being dispersed but are applying for vouchers. I cannot understand why people who apply for vouchers only are waiting six, seven, eight, nine, or 10 weeks to get decisions on their applications. What on earth are they supposed to live on during that period? If they are applying for vouchers they are, by definition, claiming to be destitute and in most cases they genuinely are. The issue of how to deal more efficiently with applications for voucher support only must be tackled.

Then there is the question of who gets dispersed. There is an ongoing discussion about what happens to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children when they reach the age of 18. Before that age, they are in the care of local authorities, but when they turn 18 they become the responsibility of NASS. Just because they are asylum-seeking children does not mean that they are not covered by the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which refers to the continued responsibility of the local authority. Arguments seem to be going on between the Department of Health and NASS about how those children should be treated. NASS, having originally drafted some guidance that said that 18-year-olds would be treated as exceptional cases, now says that it will "consider" treating such children as exceptional cases. That needs resolving.

Another dispersal-related issue is that of people with health problems. I have been contacted more than once by medics in London who deal with people with HIV. Such people are dispersed and then find that they do not receive treatment. That raises serious public health concerns.

Figures have been quoted about detention. The figure of 1,800 people detained is a snapshot. The last set of figures that I saw for a complete year showed that something like 15,000 people had been detained at some point during the year. In the past couple of years the Home Office has said that it is unable to answer parliamentary questions on the matter and does not have the figures for people detained whose cases have not been determined. When those figures were supplied, a year or two ago, such people were in the majority.

How many of those people who are detained are then given refugee status or exceptional leave to remain? Some of them certainly are, but I suspect that the Home Office does not know how many. Probably, if one examined the figures, one would find that the rate of acceptance of those detained was not very different from

the rate for people who were not. Detention generally has no rational basis and is often more connected with the nationality of the person than with anything else. The bail provisions of the 1999 Act have already been mentioned. It is important that they should come into force.

My final point is on decision making. Huge numbers of people are now being refused asylum on grounds of non-compliance. All that we are doing is shifting many of those cases into the appeals queue instead of having a proper first look at their case. We must give people longer to put the forms in—or, at the very least, ensure that the forms are translated into appropriate languages. There are notes to go with the forms, but they do not always get to people when they have to fill them in.

The issues that I have highlighted in regard to the way in which the system is working—in the context of my fundamental disagreement with it—need serious attention.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Gentleman, I inform hon. Members that the winding-up speeches begin at 10.30.

10.25 am

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mrs. Roe. I shall be brief. First, we owe a great debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for raising the matter today and for visiting Cardiff prison with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan). That has given us the opportunity to highlight the treatment of asylum seekers in this country. I recall parliamentary answers from five years ago that stated that 700 or 800 asylum seekers were held in custody in prisons, police stations or detention centres at any one time. My latest information is that that figure is now more than 1,700 and rising. Not one of those people has been charged with any crime, anywhere, or had the opportunity of appearing before a court. They are held solely under immigration law. That means that 1,700 people are being held without charge or trial. We should be ashamed of that figure.

Anyone who has visited people detained under immigration law in prisons, detention centres or police stations finds a sense of incomprehension on the part of those people. I visited Rochester prison and several other prisons and detention centres last year. People look at me with pleading eyes and ask, "Why am I in prison, when I thought I was fleeing the regime in Afghanistan?"—or Iraq, or wherever it happens to be. When we condemn inadequate judicial systems in other parts of the world, we should reflect on our own.

Quite rightly, our attention has been drawn to the conditions under which people are held. I do not blame prison staff. I had long discussions with prison staff in Rochester and other prisons. They deal with the cases as sympathetically and decently as they can. However, such conditions as shared association time for asylum seekers and people charged with serious criminal offences are a recipe for long-term disaster. Similarly, the police do not want to hold asylum seekers in police stations. The immigration service is so inefficient in dealing with asylum cases that it often does not know exactly where asylum seekers are. Police officers have told me that they constantly phone the immigration service to say that they are not allowed to hold asylum seekers beyond a certain amount of time without putting themselves into an illegal situation; they ask the immigration service to come and do something about it. It is simply outrageous that we should detain asylum seekers in police stations. I hope that the Minister will address that in her reply.

Last year the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees criticised the British Government for their treatment of asylum seekers. We take pride in our ability to house asylum seekers and give people fleeing from fear of persecution some safety and security—yet the UNHCR has condemned our treatment of asylum seekers; we should think about that for a moment. Some of the rhetoric used in the election campaign by the Leader of the Opposition did much to stir up racism and, indeed, feeling against asylum seekers.

I ask the Minister for help on three issues. First, when does she expect the review on the voucher system to be completed? Many people feel that the voucher system is inadequate. It causes many asylum seekers who are not in custody to live in terrible poverty. It is also deeply disturbing and embarrassing for children whose parents receive the vouchers when their parents have no cash to pay for school trips and the small things that are so important in life and make a difference for children. Many teachers dip into their own pockets and handbags to help children out, because they cannot stand to see children living in such poverty.

My second point relates to housing, the dispersal policy and all the associated problems. Many private bed-and-breakfast landlords are ripping off the public with the amount that they charge for housing asylum seekers, often in disgraceful conditions, which leads to health problems. Constant changes of address mean that many asylum-seeking children drop out of the education system. They move from school to school so often that their parents cannot keep up and no schools are available for them.

Finally, I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to acknowledge, as I am sure that she will, that we understand the reasons why people seek political asylum—the horrors of the killings in Algeria, the civil war in Sri Lanka and all the problems with the Taliban in Afghanistan and so many other places around the world that we have a responsibility to consider in our foreign policy.

The previous Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), made noises about a new United Nations convention on refugees—that is, rewriting the 1951 Geneva convention. I become very nervous when I hear such remarks, as the 1951 convention is an important benchmark and the basis on which the world treats people who flee from oppression and violence for their own safety. If we rewrite it, put up borders around the wealthy countries and say, "It's nothing to do with us," we become part of the problem, not part of the solution.

10.31 am

Norman Baker (Lewes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on an excellent speech and on having initiated today's debate.

[Norman Baker]

I followed her when I made my maiden speech in 1997, and I came to the conclusion that perhaps I had been wrong and Parliament was full of people of integrity, compassion and dedication. I am not sure that that has always been borne out by events, but it has in her case. She always makes a useful contribution to debates in the House and has done so again today.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) referred to the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees. It is worth reflecting, 50 years on—we celebrate that anniversary this year—on the reason for that convention. After the second world war, the international community was determined that people would never again be unable to escape persecution such as Europe had just witnessed. The 1951 convention is an expression of what is best in international politics, and we tamper with it at our peril. Unfortunately, some people want to slip back from those high ideals and adopt what some people—not me—might call a pragmatic approach. One hundred and thirty-nine countries signed the convention. It is an important international document.

I, too, deplore the fact that before the last election a minority of people, including politicians, tried to exploit the asylum situation for narrow political benefit. That is disgraceful. It is worth remembering that in this country the number of asylum seekers is a pale shadow of that in other countries. It is not even the problem in number terms, if people want to view the matter in those terms, that applies elsewhere. For example, in the last decade of the 20th century, 424,000 asylum seekers came to the United Kingdom. The figure for Germany is 1,765,260, so refugees do not even necessarily come here. The big problem that some people perceive is a shadow of that in other countries.

I agree with the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) that the legislation introduced a couple of years ago was an attempt to deter asylum seekers, which is bound to fail. Asylum seekers do not look at the legislation in this country and ask themselves whether they will get slightly more for a voucher and whether they will be satisfactorily housed. They come here to escape treatment such as torture that endangers their lives and genuinely threatens them. The countries from which the UK receives the most asylum seeker applications have appalling human rights records—Iraq, Sri Lanka, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia and the like. The idea that they can be deterred by something that the House does about the voucher system is ludicrous and inhumane. We should not go down that road, and I am sorry that we have.

The Government are almost embarrassed about allowing asylum seekers into this country. Their policy is seen as weak by a sector of the electorate; it can be attacked by the Conservative press and is considered to be a vote loser. There is an idea that appearing tough will protect the Government's standing with elements of the population. Asylum seekers should not be used as pawns in that game when the Government deal with the press.

It is virtually impossible for asylum seekers to enter the country legally, which is contrary to the 1951 UN convention. Will the Minister spell out how it is possible for an asylum seeker to enter the country legally? I do not think that it is possible.

If asylum seekers come here illegally and are stigmatised by that, they are faced with considerable difficulties. They are given 14 days—10 working days—to complete the necessary paperwork to satisfy requirements on arrival. They must complete a 19-page statement of evidence form in which they outline their asylum claim. They must secure a legal representative within that short time scale even if they are dispersed around the country. Failure to submit the form in time or to complete it in English will be given as a reason to reject the asylum claim on grounds of non-compliance. Last year, more than 26,000 asylum claims were rejected for that reason alone. No consideration was given to whether the claims were genuine, or the claimants had been subjected to torture or intimidation in their own countries. The claims were ruled out of order because the claimant had failed to meet a very short deadline. I suppose that that appears tough, but it is not a sane, mature or compassionate way to deal with asylum seekers.

The voucher system is appalling and degrading, and it is an insult to a civilised country that people are expected to live on 70 per cent. of income support. The Minister will know, from her previous incarnation, that income support is defined as the minimum that a person can live on, yet asylum seekers are expected to be able to live on less. I do not believe that they can. To add insult to injury, the voucher system prevents the supermarkets giving change. Even the supermarkets object to that. Those bastions of freedom and civil liberty—Sainsburys and other supermarkets—say that the asylum system does not work and that they object to making profit at the expense of asylum seekers. Good heavens, do we want lessons in morality from Sainsburys—although in this case it is saying the right thing? Why do the Government not listen to Sainsburys when they normally listen to it and to their big business friends? They should listen to Sainsburys and change their policy. It is insulting that asylum seekers get only 70 per cent. of income support and cannot get change from vouchers.

The hon. Members for Cynon Valley and for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) rightly referred to detention. My hon. Friend quoted the written answer that he received on 3 July from the Minister, which said:

"even in the long term, for reasons of geography, security and control, there will continue to be a need to hold some detainees in prisons."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 100W.]

Why will there be a need to hold detainees in prison? There is no explanation for that. Is it beyond the wit of the Government to find an alternative solution that is humane and consistent with our requirements under the UN convention, or must people be in prison because someone at the Home Office says that that is more convenient?

I have two questions for the Government. On what date will the last asylum seeker be removed from prison and be dealt with humanely in this country, and when will the voucher system be abolished? I understand that the last Labour party conference—I was not there—said

that it did not want the system. We still have it, so when will the system disappear, or do the Government still think that it is appropriate?

There is also a wider question: will the Government stand up for the convention that they signed up to? Will they stop acting like a whisky priest, and start standing up for what I think that they believe in their heart? Will they stand up for what is right and moral, and stop kow-towing to the Tory press? In short, will they make their asylum policy more humane?

10.39 am

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I congratulate all the hon. Members who have participated in the debate, and I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). She spoke movingly and passionately about the asylum seekers whom she had encountered, and about their appalling incarceration in Cardiff prison.

I want to make two initial points. First, the criticism of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) was exaggerated and unwarranted. However, every politician has a duty to avoid using language that inflames or exacerbates tensions. I also want to point out that, although asylum policy is an important national issue that should be debated, I did not refer to it in any of my election leaflets, because it is by no means the biggest issue—other subjects were of far more importance to my Buckingham constituents, and I chose to focus on them.

I believe that there is a consensus that it is wrong to incarcerate asylum seekers in prison; it is chronically inhumane, and it constitutes a flagrant abuse of the purpose of the institution of the prison. The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) rightly pointed out that that consensus exists in the National Assembly for Wales.

I take as my starting point the statement that was made on 22 May 2001 in the National Assembly for Wales by the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities, Edwina Hart. On the strength of her discussions with the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche)—who was, at that time, the Minister with responsibility for immigration in the Home Office—she stated that it had been clarified that the policy of the Home Office was

"that only detainees who are at the end of their application for leave to remain should be detained at Cardiff prison."

She went on to say that she had been informed by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green that the

"period of detention should...be secure and for a short period".

However, I think that the Minister will acknowledge that, at present, those criteria are not always met.

Detainees have been taken for hospital treatment in handcuffs. We have been told that such incidents happen because prison staff have little or no discretion in implementing the Home Office guidance, and there is a consensus that prison staff are doing their best in difficult circumstances. The normal day for detainees on the remand wing includes only one hour of exercise, and two hours of association outside the cells, excluding meal breaks. Prison staff accept that it is not appropriate that detainees should spend 18 hours each day in their cells. I agree with the solicitor who represents those asylum seekers that the key issue is not whether handcuffs should have been used but whether such people should be in prison at all. They should not.

There is, however, scope for legitimate disagreement between Members of Parliament about the question whether the applications of a substantial number of asylum seekers are not genuine. I shall word what I say very carefully, because there was a recurrent theme in the contributions of the hon. Members for Lewes (Norman Baker), for Cynon Valley and for Islington, North that the great majority of asylum seekers are genuine. I presume that the implication of that contention is that those people should be entitled to stay in the country. I say to those hon. Members that there is a widely held view that, although substantial numbers of people are fleeing persecution and should, therefore, be granted asylum or exceptional leave to remain, substantial numbers of people have abused the system over a lengthy period. We must take account of, and reflect in our policy, that widespread perception, if we believe that it is true. I do believe that it is true, and the sincere contributions of those hon. Members who have spoken this morning have not dissuaded me from that belief.

We have a proud tradition of offering sanctuary to those fleeing persecution. I believe that it is incumbent on us to do so in a pluralist democracy and the faithful honouring of that tradition is a hallmark of a decent, civilised society. However, we know that the system is in crisis and there remains a massive backlog—applications in May were 290 up on April. We also know that the processing of applications is breathtakingly slow. In May, we discovered that the slow process of determination continued. In the first five months of 2001, there were 45,620 appeals, but only 19,030 went to the appeals authority to be heard.

We know—the Minister would be hard pressed to deny it—that the amnesty granted by the previous Labour Government assisted 21,000 people to remain in this country who had no justification to do so. An average time for decision making of 14 months is not acceptable. Nor is it acceptable that the Government were loth to implement the law against illegal working. They said that they would not do so, then did a U-turn and said that the extent of abuse was so considerable that they were obliged to reconsider their position. However, only eight prosecutions took place last year, and only one the year before. Serious problems exist. Notwithstanding the observations of hon. Members who spoke earlier, 78 per cent. of applicants are rejected for asylum or exceptional leave to remain.

I respect the sincerity of the hon. Member for Lewes, and it pains me to sidle up to the Government, but he is unjustified in suggesting that the Government are trying to curry favour with the Conservative press. That is an unworthy charge to level at them. We should work on the basis that all parties are pursuing policies and advocating measures that they believe are right, on principle and on grounds of pragmatism. For the hon. Gentleman to behave in that characteristically Liberal Democratic, sanctimonious, holier-than-thou fashion does not advance his cause.

[Mr. John Bercow]

I would like to say something about the dispersal policy, not least in the context of the Royal Institute for International Affairs report, which said this month that the policy is fuelling racial tension and that the "cluster areas" policy has not been implemented. It continues:

"In practice what has happened is that dispersal is very much determined by the availability of cheap accommodation...housing is contracted through private suppliers"—

a point made by the hon. Member for Islington, North—

"and this has led to many asylum seekers being sent to inappropriate accommodation in areas of high social tension without sufficient consultation with local authorities, and this has led to the sorts of problems we have been hearing about."

I regard that as disturbing. It is also disturbing to observe the verdict of the Asylum Education Legal Fund:

"People are just being shunted into places where there is no one qualified to help them."

We need to know how the Government intend to address those problems. With only 12 minutes of the debate left, I am happy to resume my seat and I await the Minister's response with eager anticipation, bated breath and beads of sweat on my brow.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on securing this debate and on her long-standing and doughty interest in human rights, which she pursues with determination everywhere she goes.

Hon. Members and others have many worries about the treatment of asylum seekers and the use of detention, especially when it is in prison accommodation. I share those worries. It is important to remember that few asylum seekers are detained. The power to detain, which is exercised by immigration officers, is used only sparingly and for the shortest necessary period. To put it in perspective, at any one time, only 1.5 per cent. of those who are liable to detention are detained. That said, depriving anyone of liberty, even for a short period, is a serious step, not to be taken lightly. A balance must be struck between recognition of the seriousness of any deprivation of liberty and the fact that effective enforcement of immigration control requires some immigration offenders to be detained.

A legitimate issue raised in this morning's debate is where such people are to be detained, and what regime is in force there. The Government have made it clear—this remains our position—that there is a presumption in favour of temporary admission or release. Detention must be justified in the case of the individual concerned and is normally justified only in these limited circumstances: first, when there is a reasonable belief that an individual will fail to keep the terms of temporary admission or release; secondly, when there is an initial need to clarify a person's identity as the basis of their claim to enter, or remain in, the UK, which applies because many people arrive with no papers or identification; and thirdly, when removal is imminent. In addition, a person whose asylum claim appears to be straightforward and can be decided quickly may be detained at Oakington reception centre.

As at 31 May, a total of 1,787 individuals were detained under Immigration Act 1988 powers. Of those, 1,237 were held in Prison Service establishments, including 428 in the dedicated immigration detention facilities at Haslar, Lindholme and Rochester. The figures do not distinguish between those who have applied for asylum and those who have not and many of them are clerically collected, which I am trying to do something about. However, it is likely that, on current trends, at least two thirds of those detained solely under Immigration Act powers have applied for asylum. No one is detained solely because they have applied for asylum. As I said, the overwhelming majority of those who apply for asylum in this country are not detained.

In addition to the three dedicated detention facilities, the Prison Service made available 500 places for immigration detainees in a small number of local prisons throughout the country: Cardiff, Elmley, Liverpool, Holme House, Winchester, Wandsworth and High Down. The total number of places available in those prisons is 445.

The regime in those local prisons is clearly very different from that which operates in the dedicated detention facilities. In my view, that is what we are talking about today. Immigration detainees in the prisons are held on unconvicted or remand wings and are kept separate from convicted prisoners as far as possible, although there is some unavoidable contact as my hon. Friends have mentioned. Many hon. Members who have contributed to the debate have commented that that is undesirable.

The use of local prison places began in November 2000 as a temporary measure to help make up the identified shortfall in immigration detention capacity while the immigration service detention estate is being expanded. It was designed to support our removals targets for those whose claims for asylum have failed. The places were offered by the Prison Service within what was, at that time, surplus remand accommodation in various parts of the country. Only men aged 21 or over can be allocated to them.

The Government are determined to pursue a strategy of detaining people in dedicated detention facilities and reducing reliance on Prison Service accommodation. We fully recognise that the use of dedicated detention facilities is preferable to prisons in the vast majority of cases. We shall be discussing the timing and arrangements for withdrawal from the prison places, which has to be planned properly, with the Prison Service as soon as it is practicable. I can tell my hon. Friend that we hope that Cardiff prison will be emptied of its asylum seekers by Christmas.

As hon. Members know, we are engaged in an ambitious expansion of the immigration service detention estate, which will enable us to move people from local prisons into much more suitable accommodation. New detention centres will open this year at Harmondsworth near Heathrow, Yarl's Wood

in Bedfordshire and Dungavel in Scotland, providing an additional 1,500 spaces. Overall detention places will have increased from 900 at the end of 2000 to 2,790 by the end of 2001.

On Cardiff prison, as at Friday 6 July 39 immigration detainees were held there, representing 21 different nationalities including Indian, Bangladeshi, Nigerian, Pakistani, Ukrainian and Kosovan. The majority are asylum seekers whose applications have been refused and who are awaiting the outcome of appeals or pending removal.

On the conditions at Cardiff prison, I understand that strenuous efforts have been made to accommodate the particular needs of detainees, within the constraints of a prison establishment. It is recognised that immigration detainees' needs differ from those of remand prisoners and where practicable such needs have been accommodated. However, it is true that the regime is much more restrictive than that of an immigration detention centre. That is why prisons are not the first choice for the detention of asylum seekers and why the Government wish to withdraw from those arrangements as soon as is practicable.

On telephone access and some of the practical, pastoral points that hon. Members raised, detainees in Cardiff prison have greater access to telephone cards than is the norm for remand prisoners, and rightly so. However, I acknowledge that problems might arise when accessing telephones during periods of heavy use. I have asked officials to look into the matter in conjunction with the prison authorities and to find out whether there is a particular problem that might be improved.

Detainees have free association periods, but they are kept in their cells for longer than is normal in a detention centre—nor do they have access to activities that are available in dedicated detention centres.

Immigration service staff visit the prison three times a week to give advice and serve papers. Local solicitors and legal advice agencies visit twice a week. Special arrangements have been made to enable legal advisers to use a converted cell for interviews with detainees. They are unsupervised, although the door is left open for security reasons. Legal representatives may also visit detainees under the usual legal visits arrangements.

A range of dietary needs, including halal, is catered for by the prison's catering service, and menus are supplied in eight languages. Information on other matters is also available in different languages. Where translation is required, immigration staff use a telephone translation facility known as the language line. An interpreter is used for longer or more formal interviews and is paid for by the immigration service.

Mr. Oaten: As time is running out, may I ask now whether the Minister can give for other prisons the commitment that she gave for Cardiff? Will other prisons not be used for asylum seekers by Christmas?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman should listen carefully to what I am about to say. The Government intend to withdraw from those allocated spaces as soon as is practicable. It has been said that we will be able to fill up the new detainee estate in a day, but that cannot be done—one must fill up detained spaces gradually. Certain practical steps must be taken to ensure that the regime does not break down. Within those constraints, we will do our best to withdraw from the arrangements as quickly as is practicable. I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman greater satisfaction, but I do not want to give a date that I am not certain we can keep to. I hope that he will appreciate the way in which I have attempted to answer his question.

Although it is important to realise that these practical issues are important and that those concerned find their situation distressing, we should remember that the number of people involved is small. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and others have noted, the answer is for the determination system to operate much more efficiently. We are dealing with that, although there is a legacy of backlogs. The most important thing is to ensure that we have an efficient and sensible way of dealing with asylum applications. It is also important to recognise that there are people who claim asylum in this country who are economic migrants. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is initiating a debate on how we might more effectively balance a migration policy with an asylum policy.

I reiterate that the Government are determined to pursue the strategy of holding people in dedicated detention facilities, not prisons, and that we will work hard to achieve that aim as quickly as is practicable.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley for raising an extremely important issue.

Norman Baker *rose—*

Angela Eagle: I would normally give way to the hon. Gentleman, but we are near the end of the debate.

Norman Baker: Will the Minister say something about vouchers?

Angela Eagle: The fieldwork on the voucher review has been done and we are considering it. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will make an announcement when we are in a position to do so.

Global Warming

11 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I start with a small apology. It appears that the purpose of the debate was not made entirely clear, and there have been discussions among Departments about which of them should respond. If it is not possible for the Minister to answer some of my questions directly himself, I hope that he will at least seek responses from the Department of Trade and Industry.

My first point concerns transparency. One of the major issues that I came across in my research is the lack of easily available statistical data about the sustainable nature, or otherwise, of the projects that are supported by the Export Credits Guarantee Department, and their impact on global warming. That lack of transparency and readily available information is a problem that we cannot ignore. The discussions and outcomes of negotiations on projects are kept confidential: there is almost an institutional paranoia about the public disclosure of any information about their impacts.

Most export credit agencies—I shall refer briefly to others, not only our own—do not conduct environmental impact assessments that are publicly disclosed in accordance with international norms. Most do not disclose the name, nature or location of projects that they back until they are well under way. In some respects, export credit agencies are the most opaque of any Government agencies, placing the needs of private corporations above the rights of citizens to protect their lives and environments and to ensure that their Government's objectives are being applied in countries abroad that are receiving financial support from that Government.

In the UK, the public have no idea whether the screening process for new projects that is used by the ECGD follows the guidelines or objectives that the Government have set in relation to sustainability and tackling climate change. As with any public body, citizens have a fundamental right to scrutinise the activities of the ECGD. Not only should the Government be notified about those activities, and the information be made publicly available, but other organisations, such as the Environment Agency, may have a role to play in advising on the effects of such projects. How do the Minister and his colleagues in other Departments propose to combat that lack of transparency?

What is the reasoning behind the reluctance to release relevant environmental and developmental documents to associated agencies for review? Does the Minister believe that the UK should issue a public international strategy on sustainability and climate change, similar to that which was issued on conflict prevention, to ensure that our international partners, business and non-governmental organisations precisely understand the UK's stance?

The lack of accountability is reinforced by the lack of expertise in the ECGD's council. It has ties with many Departments, and it is clear that cross-departmental activity is needed. It should not only be down to the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure that sustainability issues are reflected in other Departments, and in particular the Department responsible for the ECGD. I hope that the Minister can clarify which cross-departmental activity considers not only the foreign and trade effects of the ECGD's activities, but their environmental and sustainability impact. With the coming G8 conference this is a good time for the Government to clarify their views on the issue so that the role of export credit agencies can be discussed in those negotiations, with the UK Government having a clear internal position on what the ECGD should be promoting.

I hope that the Minister will be able either to say something today or to write to me about the progress that has been made among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries on drawing up common standards for export credit agencies on the way in which they seek to promote sustainability in developing countries. When will such standards be in force? Will progress on those common standards be reported at the Johannesburg conference, which would be an excellent opportunity to make such a report? Furthermore, is he willing to work with his departmental colleagues to give the ECGD an explicit requirement to promote sustainability? It should be not only in the business of screening, but in the business of promoting the UK's policy agenda on sustainability, climate change and preventing global warming.

Export credit agencies such as the ECGD that are funded by Governments carry many responsibilities. The ECGD is in place to further British exports and businesses, and because of its nature as a public body it must take into account the Government's policies and goals. It must promote the human rights and social issues that surround the projects that it is undertaking while considering the sustainability implications of its actions. Greening of government, which is part of any modern institution, is something that we would all support, but it must be carried through in all Departments. The ECGD's mission and strategy should be convergent with the Government's aims in relation to debt relief, poverty alleviation, ethical foreign policy, compliance with multinational environmental agreements and sustainable development.

The ECGD should be supporting productive investments focused on the development of sustainable energy in the way in which the American export credit agency promotes projects that contain sustainable measures. There is a further conference—the G8 conference—at which there will be an opportunity, of which I hope that the Government will make good use, to raise these issues.

I shall highlight an area of perverse policy: if we scrutinise ECA-funded projects across the globe, we discover that many of them are unsustainable and have serious effects on climate change and global warming. From 1994 to 1999, $216 billion out of $376 billion of global expenditure by ECAs was spent on supporting energy-intensive projects, which included financing more oil and gas development and fossil-fuelled power generation. If that process continues, during the next 30 to 50 years the developing countries' annual and total contribution to CO_2 emissions will achieve parity with those of industrialised countries. The top destinations for these projects include leading sources of CO_2 emissions such as Indonesia, China, India, Mexico and Brazil. It would be better if the work were done now—as the Americans are doing—in terms of

promoting sustainable projects through the ECGD as opposed to promoting projects that are heavily dependent on fossil-fuelled power generation, for example. Such projects, as part of a discussion subsequent to Kyoto, will inevitably be revisited. We may find that, within a matter of years, they must be re-examined and less energy-intensive projects substituted. What activities have been undertaken by the Minister's or other Departments to ensure that, here and abroad, there is a stricter policy of environmental reform for the export credit agencies?

On the recognition of the importance of the Kyoto agreement and of helping developing countries grow while minimising the emissions that they release, it will not be the OECD countries that will have the most effect on climate change in the foreseeable future, but many of the countries in which the United Kingdom is providing support. Given the size of the sums involved, if we can shift even a small proportion of that financing toward more environmentally friendly technologies, that could have a significant impact on the economies of developing countries and their carbon dioxide emissions.

Will the Minister confirm that the Government recognise that the ECGD can have a heavy impact on the environment and play a positive role in helping both the United Kingdom and developing countries achieve globally the targets that we must achieve in relation to carbon dioxide emissions? I support the Government's manifesto pledge to reduce such emissions by 20 per cent. Would the Minister like to see that reflected in the policies adopted by the ECGD? Is there not a case for ensuring that, over a period, the projects that are supported and funded seek to achieve the targets that we have set? Perhaps we could ensure that for each kilowatt of power that is generated, there is a similar reduction. I would like to see the Government act on that.

Should the ECGD have a role in promoting sustainability? Should it switch focus to take a more proactive role in so doing?

With regard to United Kingdom objectives being reflected abroad, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that our target for renewable energy generation of 10 per cent. by 2010 will be reflected in a similar target being set for the ECGD? That would make sense in developing countries where there is often enormous potential for renewable energy. In many cases, such countries do not have a grid and self-supporting renewable energy projects such as solar power can be competitive with traditional forms of power generation. The review of the ECGD issued by the Government concluded that

"in relation to issues such as sustainable development...the ECGD should align itself with the best of the other ECDs".

I would welcome that.

The Government have also agreed that the ECGD should aim to promote their wider objectives, which could and should include sustainable development. What concrete steps have been made to follow through on them since the report? There has been additional support for activity on sustainability from the Trade and Industry Select Committee's 10th special report, with which the Minister may be familiar. The report recommended that the ECGD reassess the weak stance that was taken by the environmental questionnaire used to determine whether a project was sustainable. Some projects spring to mind where a tougher policy might have stopped them from coming forward.

The ECGD has stated that

"there is no scope for agreeing more favourable credit terms for renewable energy as compared to conventional power plant".

Although I understand that that may make sense from a business perspective, it is an alarming statement from a sustainability viewpoint. Many companies shy away from more renewable energy because of the current additional cost, but considering the environmental implications and the cost reductions that can occur if more investment is made, the ECGD should re-examine the matter. As I said about fossil fuel power generation projects, what is a good investment today might not be tomorrow, particularly if we make progress on climate change and Kyoto.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): In the United States, the Export-Import bank has a different approach to renewable energy projects and gives out loans at a preferential rate. As a result, environmental industries, which are creating jobs in the United States, benefit to the tune of exports worth about £1 billion whereas the figures in the United Kingdom are so negligible that we do not even know them. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that manufacturers in the UK would benefit if we took advantage of selling our renewables technology resources and technology to developing countries?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and agree entirely with his point. The work of the US export credit agency on renewable energy is a welcome initiative and goes some way towards offsetting President Bush's activities in pulling out of the Kyoto protocol.

The ECGD states that it has an obligation to compare the projects against international standards such as those of the World Bank, which has much stronger investment safety clauses on renewable energy. If such comparison or benchmarking takes place, where is the evidence that the ECGD has revised its procedure to remain comparable with large organisations such as the World Bank?

I have raised many questions, to which I hope that the Minister will respond. As I said at the beginning, it is possible that some are not his responsibility and I hope that other Departments follow the debate closely and will respond to some of them.

11.18 am

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on securing this timely debate and on his exposition of the key concerns. I congratulate also the Minister on his outstanding support for all methods of tackling global warming. His presence is an example of joined-up government and the links that the debate has between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry.

I should declare a constituency interest. The World Coal Institute and the IEA Coal Research centre for clean coal technology are both based in Putney. I should also add that my hot interest in the subject comes from attending a GLOBE International conference in New

[Mr. Tony Colman]

York last month. I have consulted the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and believe that it does not need to be registered.

The conference, which was on export credit agencies and global warming, brought together parliamentarians from Europe and the United States, non-governmental organisations such as World Wildlife Fund Belgium, Friends of the Earth from Japan and the United States, Pacific Environment, Environmental Defense and the World Resources Institute. There were representatives of the Export-Import Bank of the United States and the Japan Bank for International Co-operation. Also present were private sector representatives from GE Capital and from Green Mountain Energy. The conference was a good example of GLOBE at work, and I urge all UK parliamentarians to join GLOBE UK and to use its facilities to learn about the issues and campaign for a better future.

The New York conference was timed to predate the 7 July deadline, which has now passed, for signing revision 6 of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development draft recommendation on common approaches to the environment and officially supported export credits. That, in turn, is due to go to the G7/G8 Genoa summit later this month. I understand that, as of yesterday, the UK had not signed; I hope that the Minister will explain the UK's position on the document. The OECD approach was supported by about 300 NGOs that met in May 2000 in Jakarta at an international export credit agency reform strategy session. The Jakarta declaration for the reform of official export credit and investment insurance agencies was a global call for reform that included: first, transparency—the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington mentioned that—public access to information and consultation by ECAs and the OECD ECA working party; secondly, binding common environmental and social guidelines and standards that are no lower and less rigorous than the existing international procedures and standards for public international finance, such as those of the World Bank group and the OECD development assistance committee; thirdly, the adoption of explicit human rights criteria to guide the operations of ECAs; fourthly, the adoption of binding criteria and guidelines to end ECA abetting of corruption; fifthly, the adoption of a commitment to finance only economically productive investments; and lastly, the adoption of comprehensive relief for developing countries for ECA debt.

I am concerned that the latest consensus draft, which is potentially revision 7, does not contain credible commitments of ECAs to two key points. The first, which was mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, is to disclose to interested parties the environmental impact assessments for review and comment prior to the finalising of the decision on financing—that is, transparency of decision making at all times. The second is to apply World Bank standards to all the projects that ECAs support. The draft is discretionary rather than mandatory on those two points. That is worrying, as these loopholes are possibly large enough to destroy the reasoning behind the document as a whole. I noted that a further review is due in 2003, but these points could be nailed down now.

What was interesting at the New York conference was the perception that, in its commitment to high environmental impact assessments, the United States was ahead of the rest of the world, including the UK. I was interested to see that the ECGD environmental impact assessment report on the Ilisu dam, which was published this week, made the point in its executive summary that

"environmental procedures and guidelines of the Ex-Im Bank of the US were used as the main reference."

The commitment of the United States comes from the United Nations framework convention on climate change to help developing countries mitigate future emission increases by enabling the transfer of environmentally sustainable technologies and providing the necessary financial resources to support such transfers. The convention was signed by the 41st President of the United States in 1992.

I congratulate the Government on the moves that they have made so far in changing the ECGD work programme and culture. The reports from the Trade and Industry and International Development Select Committees informed the decisions last July of the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers). The January 2001 ECGD impact screening and analysis procedures are a great improvement on the past, and I congratulate David Allwood of the ECGD and his team on their work on the new environmental guidelines. The impact questionnaire asks for specific information about a project's potential impact on the global climate, including quantification of carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases from projects involving power generation from fossil fuels, and details of use of ozone depleting substances. The ECGD states:

"Through its process of constructive engagement, it promotes the use of high efficiency technology for power generation and supports the use of renewable sources of energy, wherever appropriate."

Members may say that we have not yet seen much action on that. I am sure that the Minister will be able to reassure us that the UK Government have allied themselves to the United States Government in their commitment to the greatest reform of ECA use.

The Genoa G8 summit will receive reports not only on OECD recommendations on common approaches to the environment and officially supported export credits, but from the task force set up at Okinawa last year on the development of renewable energy sources, which is, of course, headed up by the chief executive officer of Shell UK. The use of ECAs to provide finance to developing countries for renewable power will enable a billion people who are currently unable to access power to do so in future. Power markets fall into three broad categories: first, on-grid in OECD countries; secondly, on-grid in developing countries; and, thirdly, as the hon. Gentleman said, off-grid in developing countries. It is difficult for renewables to compete with conventional fossil fuels in on-grid markets. Capital costs are higher and the payback period is longer, and the per unit costs of power are therefore generally greater. Their output is dependent on variable or seasonal environmental conditions. Much greater potential exists for renewables to serve off-grid markets to reach 2 billion people in rural or isolated areas who cannot currently access power. Lower population densities and higher per unit

costs mean that renewables are much more competitive versus conventional power sources. Renewable power sources tend to offer lower long-term costs.

To make renewables attractive to commercial funding, concessional and non-concessional funding need to be blended in a way that does not distort funding overall. At the same time, we must increase the market share of renewables to reduce their long-term financing costs. In short, ECAs can put in place—or, in the case of the US and UK, improve on—regular greenhouse gas accounting for all projects, financed or co-financed. ECAs should ensure that their staff understand renewable technologies to facilitate project assessment and underwriting. ECAs could put greater investment in business development to support renewables, working especially with small and medium-sized enterprises, which are often best placed for such projects. How many SMEs, which form the bulk of the companies in the "Guide to UK Renewable Energy Companies 2001" have been contacted by the ECGD? I fear that not many have. Could they be contacted in the next 12 months?

In the longer term, ECAs should develop a greenhouse gas accounting standard that facilitates the development of carbon markets. They should assess the feasibility of developing financial services tailored to small-scale renewable projects. Opportunities also exist for ECAs to explore non-energy projects in developing countries, with high potential to contribute to greenhouse gas reductions. These could include carbon sink or land use projects, transportation, infrastructure and equipment, and improvements in efficiency.

Given the few UK companies specialising in renewable energy technologies so far, the impact of the ECGD taking a strong line and supporting such technologies is hypothetical. Let me therefore propose actions for the UK Government to make the hypothetical real in export potential for the UK renewables industry. First, I sounded out senior management at BP Solar as to the impact of such support through the ECGD. BP Solar has factories in the United States, Germany and Spain. Last week, it announced an expansion of the existing 15 MW production factory in Spain by a further 60 MW—the biggest in Europe. I understand that Sir John Brown met the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry last night, at the latter's request, to discuss the establishment of similar manufacturing facilities for solar power equipment here. Given the weather conditions in the UK, as in Germany, the vast majority of the output of such a UK factory would be for exports to developing countries—countries dependent on ECGD ECA cover.

Has the Secretary of State offered preferential ECGD cover rates for such exports if a solar power factory was built here? Will the same apply to the product of the Vesta wind power factory that is shortly to open in the United Kingdom, and to all other solar and wind power factories in this country? I am sure that hon. Members would support such preferential cover. Such support is needed not only for the basic technology but to cover the set-up on the ground and enable it to continue to deliver for some years. The long repayment period available for thermal energy—that is, fossil-fuel power stations—should be available for renewable energy installations too.

The IEA Coal Research centre for clean-coal technology, which is based in my constituency, has put forward proposals for what it calls zero-emission coal-fired stations. They would produce zero emissions in that the excess CO_2 above the 70 per cent. efficiency levels achievable in clean-coal technology power stations would be injected into carbon sinks, perhaps using the depleted geological seams for gas and oil in the north sea and elsewhere. Could the ECGD provide concessional finance over and above that available for non-zero emission thermal power stations? Will the Minister confirm that he is talking to his colleagues within the G7-G8 about such an approach for thermal power stations?

Will the Minister phase out support for ECGD cover for thermal power stations that do not seek to achieve zero emissions? The argument may be given that it is inappropriate for the ECGD to seek such an approach. I understand that the French and German governments, while espousing the Kyoto protocol, are opposed to the US proposals for concessional finance and to a playing field tipped in favour of renewal energy. As a business man—that was my profession before entering the House—the only role that I see for government as opposed to commercial finance is to provide such a rigging of the market. Indeed, the study by National Economic Research Associates on the ECGD, published last July, was entitled "The Economic Rationale for the Public Provision of Export Credit Insurance by ECGD". Clearly a choice must be made of projects that are soundly financeable, and I do not suggest that the ECGD should back power projects that are not sound. However, it should not finance projects that have a greater CO_2 greenhouse gas impact than those that do not.

So far, I have covered only the role of the ECA in encouraging sustainable energy technologies. Almost as important is the measurement of reduction in greenhouse gas and CO_2 emissions resulting from all other ECA capital financing, which was touched upon by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. Two separate cases should be mentioned in that respect: high-energy consumption industries and aircraft emissions.

In the former case, investments determine emission trajectories over a long period—25 to 50 years. ECAs are big investors in oil and gas development, transport equipment and manufacturing industries such as chemicals, cement, pulp and paper. There must be a veto within ECA procedures to ensure minimising of CO_2 emissions. We must not export old technology high carbon burn techniques. The latest technology, with maximum combined heat and power for manufacturing processes, must be the norm.

In the latter case, aircraft emissions appear to have been omitted from the OECD agreement. The Americans will not accept ECA aircraft financing as needing to come within the new proposed restrictions. However, aircraft emissions represent 5 per cent. of greenhouse gases, and many are worried that their impact may be the equivalent of 15 to 20 per cent. of greenhouse gas emissions. Aircraft emissions are of course increasing with the growth of air traffic. Our gift to the world through Airbus would be a low or zero-emission aircraft. Boeing in the US would have to follow suit. Will the Minister talk to his colleagues in the

[Mr. Tony Colman]

Department of Trade and Industry on the specification of the new Airbus? The Government have provided over £400 million in launch aid and the ECGD will be used to help to sell the new planes around the world.

What is the Minister able to do to ensure that those two areas—high-energy consumption industries and aircraft emissions—are dealt with by the OECD ECA agreement and by the taskforce on renewable energy at the G7-G8 Genoa summit?

So far, I have not mentioned the need for ECA countries—the G8 countries, one might say—to adapt their economies to avoid global warming. I am glad to say that the UK is committed to the Kyoto protocol. Last week, two books were published on the issue: "The UK Transition to a Low Carbon Economy" by Paul Ekins of Forum for the Future and "At the Energy Crossroads: Polices for a Low Carbon Economy" by Steward Boyle and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas). They provide a blueprint for the review by the Minister for Industry and Energy of UK energy needs for the next 50 years and a basis for the UK's 60 per cent. reduction in greenhouse gases.

From our commitment, there comes a new industry that will be producing renewable energy for export. That will, I hope, be based on the environmentally friendly ECA policies that will be ushered in at the Genoa summit.

I hope that the United States will still commit itself to the Kyoto protocol. In early-day motion 94, on global warming, I publicised the 43rd President's reconfirmation of the 42nd President's executive order of 3 June 1999. Independent advice leads me to believe that the United States could, by at least 2010, reduce its greenhouse gas total by 5 per cent. on 1990 levels. I hope that that American commitment can be used at the seventh conference of the contracting parties—COP7—in Bonn later this month to reopen the way to American ratification. United States support for dealing with global warming through changed ECA methods is also on the record.

American legislators believe that the Kyoto protocol is fundamentally anti-American and that there is little commitment to change on the part of EU industries. The American proposals for the use of the Ex-Im bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation—the United States Government reinsurance company—to deliver renewable energy to developing countries and the President's recommitment to his predecessor's executive order clearly show that there is a wish, certainly in Congress, to do a deal that is not anti-American.

I hope that Japan will reconsider its position, too. It could sign with the EU. The position of the Japanese Government and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation—Japan's ECA bank—on the use of ECAs to combat global warming has changed significantly in the past few weeks.

To summarise, in 1998, all 36 OECD Governments agreed to negotiate common environmental approaches for their ECAs. At the 1999 G8 summit in Cologne, the leading industrial countries went a step further and agreed to adopt common environmental guidelines by 2001. That was confirmed at Okinawa by the addition of the sustainable energy task force.

This July, in Genoa, the UK can work with the United States to persuade their G8 partners that ECAs can be a key weapon in dealing with global warming through sustainable energy technology transfer across the world. There can be a step change in thinking about what goods developed and developing countries want for their common future.

All the G8 countries still need to sign the Kyoto protocol. Alongside it, however, OECD recommendations can reinforce the message that global warming must be stopped and can be with the will of the world.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that the winding-up speeches are due to begin at 12 noon.

11.38 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Although this seems to be an extremely esoteric subject, there could be no better day on which to have this debate. Today is "Stop Exxon Day", which is better known as "Stop Esso Day" in this country. The debate gives us a way of underlining the responsibility of international corporations on global climate change. We know that Exxon unfortunately joined the Global Climate Coalition in America, was a key funder of President Bush's campaign and has ended up as the bad boy of global warming. If we as parliamentarians can put pressure on Exxon/Esso to change its attitude, we might be able to approach President Bush, too.

The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) made it clear in his comprehensive remarks that, although this is a complex and esoteric subject, it has a real impact on the way in which we do business in the United Kingdom. He also made it clear that we can support measures to mitigate climate change through the actions of our own Export Credits Guarantee Department. I want to concentrate my remarks on our ECA.

The Environmental Audit Committee recognised the importance of the issue when it began an investigation into the Export Credits Guarantee Department and its relationship with sustainable development in the last Session of Parliament. Unfortunately, the small matter of the general election cut across what the Environmental Audit Committee was undertaking at that stage, but some of the initial information that came out of it underlined the evidence that has been given by the hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and for Putney.

There are difficulties with export credit agencies. The first, as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington made clear, is transparency. The second concerns what an ECGD supports. Does it, for example, support effective protection of the environment? We should look at projects such as the Sual plant in the Philippines—a coal power plant, and not a clean one—or the Mossel Bay gas fields development in South Africa, and we should consider the prudent use of natural resources. For example, the Alumbrera copper and gold mine project in Argentina contributes to the global over-supply of that metal; that is not a prudent use of natural resources. Historically, our export credit

agency has supported the accelerated use of fossil fuels, flying in the face of what we say we want to achieve in the Kyoto protocol.

It is a matter of concern that our ECGD does not commit to international best practice. As the hon. Member for Putney has pointed out, the United States has higher standards in this area. They might not be as high as the World Bank group or non-governmental organisations would like, but they are higher than ours. Is it not a paradox that we support Kyoto—we shall be in negotiations with Japan next week in Bonn about saving it, and about ensuring that America somehow comes into the Kyoto fold—yet in daily dealings the United States has higher environmental standards? I hope that the Minister, whom I welcome to his well-deserved continuation in the post, will want to get rid of that anomaly, perhaps through the Green Ministers Committee.

The ECGD says that it wants to meet the Government's environmental objectives; it says that it works with other Departments; it says that it is part of the greening government initiative—in particular, it has put sustainable development in its guidelines. For example, it says that it provides credit support for the most heavily indebted countries only if it will benefit the country's economic and social development. It also says that its criteria for granting export credit to the 63 poorest countries are those that assist social and economic development, that give maximum benefit to areas most in poverty, that tackle problem areas where private investment is not available, and that encourage viable self-financing projects. Those are important principles, but there is no reference to environmental benefit in the guidelines.

Historically, export credit agencies have been concerned about environmental impact locally, but not about the global situation. That is why this debate, concentrating on global warming and export credit agencies, is valuable. It focuses our scrutiny on what is being done in the name of greening government and I hope that it will help Ministers to think again about how we might achieve the objectives that we have set out for ourselves as a nation.

We are missing a trick. Through different use of our export credit agency, we could support our indigenous businesses. A memorandum from the Environmental Industries Commission, which was submitted to the Environmental Audit Committee, made clear how great the gap is at the moment. The ECGD focuses so much on the defence, aerospace and power industries that in 1997 less than 1 per cent. of its £3.7 billion business related to the export of environmental protection technologies. In fact, the level of support was so small that the ECGD did not keep figures on it. Yet that is a massive opportunity. The worldwide market is worth something like £330 billion a year and is set to go up to £600 billion by 2010. It would be the same size as the aeronautical industry, and the Government have accepted that. In 1999, the Department of Trade and Industry stated that

"the UK's performance in environmental technology industries has been disappointing relative to European competitors...the UK appears to have lost ground in key export markets over recent years."

Where do we get the support to win back that ground? Is it not a key task of an export credit agency to support our industries in doing that?

In October 2000, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry called for a 20 per cent. increase in our world market share of these technologies. One of the key reasons why we have not been able to achieve that is that our own package of export support measures such as export credit does not match those of our competitor countries in America and in the European Union. For example, the USA is the world's largest exporter of environmental technologies, to the value of $14 billion a year. More than $1 billion of that sum is supported through its export credit agency. In this country, we do not know the figures—they are negligible—but in the USA they are $1 billion and $14 billion. We are wasting our huge potential, as well as failing to get the best deal for developing countries.

There is a way forward, because the international discussions to which the hon. Member for Putney referred have involved these issues, and there are key ways in which we can advance matters. In June 1999, the G8 countries met in Cologne to discuss the environmental guidelines for ECAs. The communiqué from the summit mentioned climate change but did not include it in the environmental guidelines. Until comparatively recently, environmental issues were approached through export credit agencies by considering carefully the local, but not the global, impact. That is reflected in the current guidelines, but I understand that doors are opening and that some time this year—the hon. Gentleman referred to it—there will be an opportunity to consider how we might strengthen the guidelines.

We should ensure that export credit agencies encourage investment in energy efficiency, shifts to less energy-intensive products and switches in fuel. Our export credit agency is undermining our Government's climate commitments. An example of that is the global environment facility, where we have gone in with other countries to help transfer technologies to assess climate risks in developing countries, and to remove barriers to the development of renewable energy. That is not growing in the way that it should be.

How have we avoided this for so long? Why has it not been a feature of the debate on climate change? One of the reasons is the lack of public scrutiny. For example, in February 2000—these are the latest figures that I could get—only four out of 12 of the leading OECD countries' export credit agencies actually published their environmental guidelines. That is transparency gone mad—if we cannot even get the figures, how can the debate advance? Of those four countries, only two routinely shared the figures, solicited public comment and reported CO_2 emissions. That is the key. If we can get our export credit agency to report on its effect on global CO_2 emissions, we will have taken a great step forward and so will the Government.

Environmental guidelines do not consider climate change, but I hope that the G8 countries will re-examine that in their meeting this year. I understand that there is a working party on export credits and credit guarantees. We need to institutionalise consultation and information disclosure within our export credit agencies. We need to get them to report on greenhouse gas emissions and open up their decision-making processes. That could eventually become part of common environmental guidelines.

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

Adoption of export credit agency environmental guidelines that conform to international best practice for environmental assessment and evaluate potential climate impact will not be an easy task because, as we saw in the case of the Ilisu dam, these matters are very complicated. That dam might, for example, pass one threshold—it could be said to be environmentally beneficial as it is hydro-electric and a positive step forward. However, in terms of the wider social and environmental impact and of sustainable development, perhaps the dam will not be seen as so positive.

Although I recently read the report, I did not pick up on what the hon. Member for Putney pointed out about the guidelines used for the analysis of the Ilisu dam being not our own, but those of the Ex-Im bank in America. Why do we not have our own export credit agency, with sufficient guidelines for us to deal with complex matters such as the Ilisu dam? Why do we use environmental guidelines from America? Have we not done enough in this country to develop our own environmental standards for our own export credit agency? Until we do so, we are not putting our export money where our mouth is.

11.50 am

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on securing the debate. It may be esoteric and it has not packed the Chamber, but it is pretty central to our survival as a trading nation and as a planet. I appreciate the fact that the Minister has responsibility for the environment, and that the Export Credits Guarantee Department effectively comes under the auspices of the Department of Trade and Industry. Nevertheless, we must examine the ECGD's impact on the environment, and I hope that there is enough joined-up government to recognise that.

Although we welcome the fact that the ECGD's mission statement has been specifically revised to accord with the Government's objectives on sustainability, we need to monitor what the ECGD does to determine whether that makes any difference. Perhaps the mission statement should be more proactive. The agency underwrites in excess of £3 billion of business a year, and its fundamental aim remains the promotion of British trade rather than the promotion of sustainability.

The American credit agency appears to have a more proactive environmental stance, which is interesting. One only hopes that it will survive the current Administration far. President Bush is passing through the country and meeting Ministers next week. The Minister may not be able to suggest it, so we can suggest to him that it would be surprising if, at the heart of their discussions, there was not pressure to rethink the inconsistencies in American policy. If America benefits substantially from exporting sustainable trade and products, why is it not in America's interests to encourage more of that by signing up to the Kyoto protocol or some development of it? I do not have a problem with the Americans arguing that what they have been presented with is unsuitable, but we all have a problem with them walking away from the process. The British Government have a responsibility to try to persuade them to recognise the inconsistency.

Let us think in terms of pure economics. The oil price is approximately $25 a barrel. Compared with previous cheaper prices, is it sensible for America to concentrate on increasing oil and gas production in its environmentally volatile backyard, rather than to reduce wasteful energy use, promote alternative energy and develop or strengthen its export business on the back of that? The rationale is to persuade President Bush or his advisers that they are mistaken in their analysis of American self-interest. I hope that there will be some discussion with Mr. Bush when he is here next year to persuade him in that direction.

I am grateful to the Library for a useful note that it provided to me before the debate. It contains some basic facts that are worth recording about the importance of export credit agencies to world trade, and their potential for good or evil. For instance, 8 per cent. of world trade is underwritten by export credit agencies—that is $400 billion of trade a year. Of that, $50 billion goes into infrastructure developments, many of which have been rejected by international environment agencies.

I am pleased to say that in most cases Britain has not been party to that rather disgraceful scramble. However, it underlines the need for international agreement on the operation of export credit agencies, which the OECD has been trying to achieve, to ensure that international environmental objectives are not undermined or destroyed by Government agencies. Nevertheless, it is clearly happening. The Three Gorges dam and the Ilisu dam are two classic projects that either should not have gone ahead—if the ECAs not been prepared to underwrite them, they may not have been built—or they should not have been guaranteed and underwritten in such a way.

We have some reason to be satisfied that the mission statement and the Government's review of the ECGD has moved the organisation at least to acknowledge its role in considering the sustainability of the projects that it supports. However, I suggest that it should have a more proactive role, making a detailed analysis to ascertain the extent to which the balance is shifting. Given the hot competition for trade, many of us feel that the tendency is to think first of jobs, and Britain's balance of payments. The sustainability criteria come under severe pressure when such choices have to be made.

To use a mixed metaphor, we cannot be fair-weather environmentalists. If the clear objective is to ensure that sustainability is at the heart of the policy, we cannot bury it just because times are hard, even though we may need the exports and the jobs. Principles are principles, and they have to withstand the fluctuations of the trade cycle and must not be knocked off course.

It is useful, courtesy of the Library, to see the ebb and flow of this debate. We in the Chamber are expressing our desire for environmental criteria to be central to the operation of organisations such as the ECGD, whereas businesses seeking trade complain that the parameters have been drawn in a way that could compromise potential exports. That difference can be resolved by making a clear public statement of the policy objectives. Some businesses obviously think that the objective of the ECGD is to underwrite what they regard as risky exports because it is in the British national interest to secure business that might otherwise not be secured.

That is the simple economic case; that is why the ECGD and all other ECAs exist. Businesses must understand that we have an ethical foreign policy, and that an increasingly important environmental strategy lies at the heart of it. They must be part of it, and should not waste their time chasing business that does not meet those criteria. The EGCD can do still more to explain that.

In one or two recent newspaper articles, some business men have complained that they do not understand the rules. They feel that the rules are working against them. To be fair, the previous Minister for Trade said that he thinks that the new strategy is clear and that it will not lead to a loss of business, but there is clearly a difference of view between the Department and those businesses that are actively seeking trade. If they understood our objectives, it would save everyone a lot of time and heartache.

The United Kingdom cannot yet claim to be anywhere near the sharp end of the green revolution. Many of our continental partners are way ahead of us in several ways. The Americans seem to be far ahead of us in technology and their awareness of it, even if they remain the world's greatest polluters and reluctant to apply joined-up thinking.

We have four or five years of this Parliament in which to look to the Government to raise our environmental standards. I accord with the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) in welcoming the Minister back to his post. He knows how widely welcomed his reinstatement was among many of the organisations that deal with environmental issues, because they recognise his commitment. A Minister with his sort of commitment is extremely important for the new Department, and the appointment sends a positive signal, which I welcome. I am sure, nevertheless, that he will not mind my saying that we need to move forward.

A new super-Department, which is what I hope we have, brings the need to review all our targets. The Minister could, if that were done, relate to the Department of Trade and Industry and the ECGD in a way that would make sustainability more than something to take on board from their mission statements—it could be made a key objective for them to market proactively. It could be viewed as a development export opportunity on the back of a much invigorated environmental policy, from which British companies at the front end of environmental development could benefit. That would give us both an environmental and a business objective. The United Kingdom would be determined to secure its own place in the world in establishing improved environmental targets, and the place of its businesses in helping other countries to act accordingly. The right role for the ECGD would be providing guarantees for the countries that really needed the technology, to ensure that the business could be done.

If that is the outcome of debates such as this one, I hope that the participants will agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington has put down a timely marker. I hope also that the Minister's reply will reveal a positive dynamic behind the policy, not just a statement of good intent.

12.2 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on securing the debate, and I thank his office for explaining to me what he was driving at. The title was sufficiently opaque to leave ambiguities, which his office cleared up. I was relieved to hear from his opening remarks that those ambiguities affected the Government as well, when they were deciding which Minister should respond.

I add my congratulations to the Minister for the Environment on retaining his position while moving sideways to a new Department. I am sure that he welcomes the opportunity to reply this morning, not least because, given that the issue falls neatly into two halves—the environmental issues and the performance of the Export Credits Guarantee Department—he will show himself to be better than anyone at replying on the former aspect, while happily referring all the difficult questions about the ECGD's performance to his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Most of what I say will take the form of probing questions. Given the current excitement in my party it would clearly be foolish to propagate any detailed policy. The policy—and, even more likely, its propagator—might prove temporary. I shall concentrate on asking the Minister to clarify the many ambiguities that have been pointed out by hon. Members. Those ambiguities fall into two broad sections: first, what the ECGD's strategy should be in this important area and secondly, how practical it is to move towards the changes that hon. Members have suggested in this debate.

I start with what the strategy should be, perhaps for export credit agencies generally. The debate raises a wider point about the usefulness of Westminster Hall and where it should concentrate its fire. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington said that he wished to improve standards across the export credit agencies of all OECD countries, but concentrated most of his fire on our own ECGD's performance. That was sensible, because I suspect that the extent to which debates such as this are useful is in direct proportion to how narrowly focused they are. If they explore part of the Government's performance, they can be useful, but the more they become simple, moral lectures to the world at large and to other Governments about how they should perform, the less useful they are. The more we stick to our domestic performance, the greater service we give to the Government and to Parliament's reputation.

Following my rubric, I will stick to the ECGD's performance in this part of my speech. I echo comments made by several hon. Members about the ambiguity and opaqueness of the guidelines in the environmental sector of the ECGD's performance. Its objectives put sustainable development up front, stating:

"ECGD will press for reform on sustainable development and human rights issues in relation to export credits."

Its policies state that the ECGD will

"increase its awareness and understanding of project impacts...screen applications for cover to identify and thereafter analyse, any adverse or beneficial environmental, social or human rights aspects of relevant projects."

Such policies are laudable, but will the Minister address what they mean in practice? We have heard specific examples of projects that have been environmentally controversial. The very good point has been made that while local environmental impact is

[Mr. Damian Green]

often studied carefully, there is much less assessment of wider environmental impact. Are the ECGD's current objectives effective in their own terms?

Does the Minister wish to extend the ECGD in a more proactive direction as advocated by the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats? Should the ECGD actively seek out environmentally beneficial projects, rather than simply not supporting, as I hope is the case at present, those that are environmentally damaging? There are two separate questions on that topic for the Government to address: first, whether it is desirable for the ECGD to move in that more proactive direction and secondly, whether it is practical for it to do so.

Last year's review of the ECGD's mission and status, which has been mentioned, sought to delve into that matter. It said:

"ECGD's initial environmental screening process helps identify whether a particular project on which cover is sought may raise sensitive issues. When such projects are identified, they go through a second stage process of 'due diligence'—in which ECGD and the project lenders find out more, taking independent advice as necessary—to help assess project risks and related issues and determine how to take matters forward."

Is that enough? What happens after that process seems slightly fuzzy round the edges? That raises questions about whether the Government wish the ECGD simply to avoid damaging projects or to spread its remit to encourage—perhaps only to encourage—certain approved types of development. The Minister will be aware of the pitfalls in that approach. If he is saying that the proactive stance is not only desirable but practical, and it is the direction in which the Government want the ECGD to move, has he straightforwardly calculated the effect of that on exports? It would not necessarily be damaging in the long term.

The Minister is aware, as I am, that the environmental industries in the UK sometimes feel that they are treated too much as the Cinderella sector, when in fact they are one of the growth industries of the 21st century. They feel that Britain is not punching its national weight in their field compared with other sectors. In the long term, moving the ECGD further in that direction may be beneficial. In the short term, however, it would be likely to cut out some projects that would be otherwise approved and cause damage to existing British companies that provide jobs. That would be a bad thing.

I have been unable to find some hard numbers, which would enable us to make the assessment of the balance—from contributions to the debate, it is clear that other Members have had the same problem. I will be interested to hear whether the Minister can provide those numbers. In practice, would there be an increase in exports of renewable energy projects, and in the promotion of such projects, and would that compensate, or more than compensate, for the existing projects that would presumably be excluded?

The second broad area that raises questions relates to practicality. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised issues about energy-intensive projects. Besides anything that the Government may be doing to change the ECGD's focus, what are they doing to change the focus of exports? I was fascinated to hear the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) refer to clean coal technology, as based in his constituency, because one of our leading renewable energy companies told me of its despair when, during a delegation to China a few years ago—they were a mixed crew of businesses and officials—the Chinese asked, "What do you do in the renewable field?" The Chinese were clearly interested in renewable technology, but the only thing that the official element of the British delegation wanted to talk about was clean coal technology. That may be gratifying to hear for the hon. Member for Putney. No, he is shaking his head, so even he, as the constituency representative of the clean coal industry, feels that that was too narrow a focus.

Clean coal technology is better than dirty coal technology. However, if Government delegations abroad are referring only to clean coal technology, we have some way to go. The Minister also has some way to go to influence his colleagues and promote joined-up green government in this area. Perhaps he will tell us what are the limits of his ambition. Does he think that he is having an impact on his colleagues and does he think that it is right and practical to use the ECGD as a moral example to other countries? He knows that Britain's record in renewable energy is generally not the best—we are behind other European countries. Does he agree that until we show a better national performance, attempting to use the ECGD as a stick—or perhaps rather as a carrot—to give as an example to other countries will be impractical? It cannot be a battering ram that gets us through to countries, the performance of which we wish to improve.

Another specific question is where does nuclear technology fit in? The Government have announced their review, which has not come up in this debate, but it does have a wider impact. It would be helpful if the Minister clarifies whether the Government regard nuclear technology as having anything to do with this debate.

I suspect that it is not a matter of dispute in the Chamber that we want this country to have a better national performance in terms of the percentage of renewable energy that we produce. If we could create prosperous industries that, with the backing of the ECGD, could become world leaders that promote projects around the world, it would be hugely desirable as both an economic and environmental objective. I am aware that the ECGD is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but he is aware that important issues are at stake. I hope that he will use this morning to clear up some of the many ambiguities.

12.15 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): It is, of course, protocol on these occasions to congratulate the opening speaker on his or her choice of debate. I do so with real sincerity and feeling because far from regarding this matter as esoteric, which it may be to some, I regard it as essential. If we are looking for drivers to push forward sustainable development and environmental considerations in both this country and abroad, export credit agencies have some of the most important roles to play. Until recently we have underplayed the issue but that is changing dramatically.

I am grateful that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) referred to the Department of Trade and Industry. I shall try to answer

all the questions that I possibly can, but it is important that all Departments take the message on board and reflect it in their policies. This is not only a matter for my Ministry, regardless of which Department it may happen to be in. I take the view that was put forward by all hon. Members that the ECGD needs to be more proactive. I am sure that the DTI and my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who is the Minister responsible for these matters, will take that on board. I also take the point, which was made in a rather nice phrase by the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), that we want to see a positive dynamic, not merely a mission statement. That is what the Government are trying to do, but it is fair that hon. Members are looking for that to be fully reflected in policy.

Export credit agencies play a significant environmental role by ensuring that the exports that they support do not make unacceptable contributions to global warming and by actively promoting the use of sustainable technology. The OECD agreement on common approaches to the environment that my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) discussed at length will be a big step towards ensuring that all ECAs take account of the environmental impacts of the projects that they support, thereby contributing to a reduction in the rate of increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

Export credit agencies' attitude to the environment has tended primarily to focus on trade promotion objectives. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) is right to say that we shall not abandon those, but it is a question of better integration. Until the last few years, the main consideration was whether the financial risk was acceptable. Much less emphasis was given to the nature of the export, the project to which the export was destined or the impact that it may have on the environment. Thankfully, all that is changing. All OECD country ECAs now recognise the need to consider the environmental impacts of the exports that they are supporting, and they are working to promote environmental sustainability. That is demonstrated by the fact that in the past couple of years many OECD country ECAs have recruited professional environmental advisers. The majority of them now have systems in place to determine the environmental impact of the projects that they are supporting.

I am slightly surprised that no one has mentioned the Ilisu dam—

Mr. Colman: I did.

Mr. Meacher: I failed to take account of that. Of course, this provision is one of the ways in which that contentious project is being professionally and formally assessed.

Several hon. Members referred to US standards and performance, and it is certainly true that the US wants a common standard. The Export-Import Bank of the United States and domestic companies have a competitive disadvantage, in that they must meet America's own environmental test before lending can proceed. The US wants other countries to fall into line, but in that regard I rather take the view of the hon. Member for Gordon. We fully expect America to take account of its own interests, but it would help if it took on board that other countries want it to fall into line with our views on the Kyoto protocol. A massive internal expansion of oil and gas production is understandable, given that the lights keep on going out in California, but it must be reconciled with attitudes to the Kyoto protocol.

I accept that the Export-Import Bank of the United States has high standards, but they apply only to large projects. Only about10 per cent. of exports are supported by those standards, whereas the ECGD's environmental assessment applies to all civil exports. The ECGD can, and does, offer the same terms to renewable energy exports as the Export-Import Bank of the United States; better still, it offers them to all exporters. That is an important consideration.

Several hon. Members mentioned transparency, and my hon. Friend the Member for Putney talked about better disclosure of the environmental impact assessment in particular. An important point is that it is now ECGD policy to make publicly available what information it can—subject to issues of commercial confidentiality and ownership—and that ought to include the environmental impact assessment. The Department is looking to expand the information provided on its website, and will provide briefings on issues of public concern relating to export credit guarantees. We are trying to be transparent.

The Export Guarantees Advisory Council is now responsible for ensuring that the ECGD complies with its business principles. To reflect that broadened remit, the council's membership has recently been extended. Seven new appointments reflect expertise in small and medium-sized enterprises, corporate responsibility, the environment and sustainable development.

The hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington, for Gordon and for Ashford—indeed, probably everyone—mentioned proactive measures. So far, I have talked about systems that the ECGD has put in place to ensure that it does not support exports that damage the environment. At the same time, it is attempting to be more proactive, particularly in its support of SMEs, including manufacturers of environmentally beneficial equipment. Several regional presentations have been made to SME audiences this year, and more are planned for the autumn.

As part of that initiative, ECGD officials have already met representatives of the Environment Industries Commission, as have I on several occasions. They made presentations at last month's environment technology 2001 exhibition. As well as making available to UK manufacturers of renewable energy equipment its normal range of assistance, the ECGD is trying to identify some targeted measures—within the scope of the OECD arrangement, it must be said—that will meet the needs of SMEs.

Several points were made about that. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) cited several power projects that were supported by the ECGD. Let me mention four that come into that category: the Oman liquefied natural gas plant, 1997; Shandong coal-fired power station in China, 1998; Manjung power station in Malaysia, 1999; and the Ho Ping coal-fired power plant in Taiwan, 1999. The point about those projects is that they predate the introduction of the

[Mr. Meacher]

ECGD's environmental assessment system. Although I am not prejudging what would have happened under the new system, they would have been assessed on entirely different criteria, and I suspect that in several instances there would have been a different result.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington referred to support for the 10 per cent. renewable energy target and asked whether the ECGD could be more helpful in trying to promote it. The Government are trying to promote it most of all through the clean development mechanism of the Kyoto protocol, specifically to favour smaller-scale renewable energy projects. Many countries are seeking to exclude larger-scale hydro projects, and especially nuclear projects—a highly contentious issue to which the hon. Member for Ashford referred. In our opinion, it is all very well for the exporting countries to take a view on such matters, but we must take account also of what the developing countries want within their own territories. That is a significant factor. As those countries have been the first to tell us in the course of many negotiations—no doubt they will do so in Bonn next week—they have a right to decide what they want to take. Nevertheless, I take the point, and the ECGD is actively seeking to promote its facilities to manufacturers of environmentally sustainable equipment.

Mr. Colman: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I am reluctant to do so. I was about to mention my hon. Friend, who asked about preferential financing for renewable energy exports.

The OECD rules that allow a maximum of 12 years' repayment terms for conventional energy projects apply also to renewable energy projects. The OECD consensus arrangement would prevent the ECGD offering preferential rates to BP or to any other exporter of renewable energy technology. Unless the arrangement rules are changed, it has to be done in that way. The alternative that my hon. Friend proposed—refusing ECGD support for low-efficiency fossil fuel technology—would be contrary to the ECGD's current mission of supporting the UK economy by supporting UK exporters. That leads to the conflict that the hon. Member for Ashford mentioned. His principle of promoting the UK economy is perfectly proper, but it is a question of finding a way that can reconcile the two objectives.

Mr. Colman: Is my right hon. Friend able to comment on the signing of the OECD consensus guidelines, which will go before the Genoa summit later this month?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is telepathic, because I was about to come to that.

The change in attitude that I have been talking about can be most clearly seen in the OECD negotiations on common approaches to the environment and officially supported export credits. Over the past few years, the OECD's export credit group has been working towards an agreed system for assessing and controlling environmental impacts of the exports that all ECAs support. We are not in a position to sign anything, because the negotiations are still going on, but we hope that they will be concluded by the end of this year. That should provide a unified framework that ensures that all ECAs take proper account of environmental impacts, resettlement, other effects on vulnerable groups and cultural heritage—all of which are important in the case of the Ilisu dam—and supports exports to projects that comply with acceptable standards.

I have one minute to explain the problem that we are encountering. The United States rejected the OECD agreement because it does not commit to the use of a single set of World Bank standards that projects should adhere to and does not require, as opposed to encourage, the publication of the environmental impact assessments and standards to which my hon. Friend referred.

We sympathise with the position of the USA. We would also like the agreement strengthened but with this, as in regard to Kyoto, the USA is alone in arguing that all projects should meet the standards of the World Bank. The problem is that if one insists on that, it is more likely to provoke a negative reaction from other OECD and G8 members.

Further Education Teachers (Gloucestershire)

12.30 pm

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): I am pleased to be able to deal with pay in the further education sector and the concerns and challenges facing that sector in Gloucestershire.

Education is a priority for the Government. They have made clear through their vision for lifelong learning that they want high-quality education to be made available to all who want it. Lifelong learning recognises the need for individuals to develop their potential, tackle social exclusion and equip local economies with the skills necessary to compete globally. A national framework has been put in place with the learning and skills councils working with the learning partnerships to provide diversity and the necessary provision to meet the needs of the customer.

The key provider in the agenda is the FE sector, which has 4 million students in 271 colleges—the numbers have more than doubled since 1992. If the sector is not properly resourced, funded and rewarded, we will not be able to deliver the Government's agenda and vision. For too long, further education has been the Cinderella of education. It is now time for her to have the dress and carriage and go to the ball. In the past four years, the Government have put resources into the schools sector through initiatives such as nursery funding, the new deal for schools, money for books, the pay awards, the standards boards, the new threshold for teachers, the laptops for teachers and money going direct to head teachers. That has all had a major beneficial impact on raising standards.

There is more to education than school provision, however. Now in their second term, the Government must match that provision for the FE sector. Indeed, the funding and resources invested in the schools sector have only exacerbated the destructive differential between the two. The Government are aware of the serious long-term underfunding of the FE sector, which has affected levels of pay and rewards of college staff. They demonstrated that by awarding £300 million over three years for college lecturers' pay, which is the first time that colleges have had earmarked funding for pay. As I shall explain, however, that is not the solution to the problem.

Lecturers and staff in the FE sector deserve recognition and respect for their achievements. Pay is crucial for colleges to be able to recruit, reward and retain staff. The poor comparison between pay in the FE sector and schools damages morale in the sector. That has led to a recent national day of action by members of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education on 22 May and a lobby of Parliament on 3 July. During the day of action in May, I met local staff from the Royal Forest of Dean college. In June, I organised a meeting with Gloucestershire principals, chairs of governors, other Members of Parliament, trade unions such as UNISON and NATFHE—bodies from across the county—so that I could hear their concerns. Three Labour Members of Parliament attended and the Liberal Democrats sent a representative; the Tories are not interested.

Most of the points that I make today arise from those two meetings. The picture that was presented at them to me was not a good one. It is clear that the demand for a fully funded flat-rate increase of £3,000 for all lecturers and managers is a valid start to closing the gap between lecturers and school teachers. College lecturers' pay is around 10 per cent. below that of a school teacher. Even if a lecturer in an FE college had received every pay increase agreed at national level since incorporation in 1993, that difference would still exist.

Many colleges have not received all the nationally agreed increases, however. Since 1993, colleges have been responsible for setting their own pay levels and awards, in line with local conditions, need and affordability. Unlike schools, colleges have to meet the cost of pay awards from existing resources. It is clear from data from the Department for Education and Skills that colleges' resources have been significantly reduced in the past five years and that the unit of resource will not be restored to the 1995-96 levels until next year. In fact, the money available per student in further education is actually expected to decrease by 4 per cent next year.

In the case of the Royal Forest of Dean college, lecturers have not received all the nationally agreed increases and their pay is now a further 5.8 per cent. behind. Yet the college is the local sixth form for the Forest of Dean and its teachers do the same work as sixth form teachers in other schools. Its results are excellent, placing it in the top 10 colleges nationally for A-level passes and making it the top non-selective sixth form A-level provider in Gloucestershire. At the Royal Forest of Dean college, a newly appointed, fully qualified teacher with a degree earns £16,423; that compares with nearly £18,000 for most new school teachers. The maximum that a fully qualified, experienced lecturer can earn at the college is £24,459—that is reached after 10 years—but teachers in local schools after nine years' experience can apply to cross the threshold and, if successful, gain access to a nine-point scale that exceeds £30,000.

The pay differential affects recruitment and retention of staff. Greg Smith, the principal of Gloucestershire college of arts and technology, said that there have been recruitment problems, particularly in maths, science, computing and engineering. Gloucestershire's economy is based on aerospace, engineering and manufacturing, with 23 per cent. of employment based on manufacturing and 35 per cent. in the forest. We face major skills shortages in those areas yet, only last year, a maths lecturer with 20 years' experience left the Royal Forest of Dean college to take up a post in a local school. His pay is higher, he has less responsibility, and he no longer has to teach evening sessions. Clearly, the pay discrepancies cannot continue.

There has not been a fully funded pay award to further education since incorporation in 1993. The teachers' pay initiative suggested by the Government is not the solution, as it represents only a 2 per cent. increase in the college pay bill for this year. The competition between schools and colleges was intense before the new system allowed so many school teachers to go through the threshold, and now it is even worse. The equivalent offer to the FE sector does nothing to bridge the gap: the money is guaranteed for only three

[Diana Organ]

years and is allocated to colleges in relation to student numbers and not the number of fully qualified, experienced staff who could stand to benefit.

The TPI provision allocation to the Royal Forest of Dean college for the first year is £73,000, which is less than £700 for every full-time member of staff who qualifies. There was a strong feeling at my meetings with the Gloucestershire colleges that TPI is not the solution as it is divisive, and that was deeply regretted by all.

Another way out of the problem is to go for growth. The amount of money per student, however, has not increased but gone down and is expected to fall by another 4 per cent. next year. In addition, Gloucestershire might not be able to attain growth. Participation is already high, and the county enjoys very low levels of unemployment, so it will be difficult to grow quickly to get extra money. The high participation rates achieved in Gloucestershire and the good state of the local economy are testimonies to the success of the FE sector. Surely, we should not penalise that success.

A representative of Stroud college told me that the number of full-time students drops year after year because so many young people are able to find work. They do not wish to do long courses but instead want to earn money and learn skills while working. What they demand are part-time vocational courses, which cost more to deliver than courses in the sixth form sector. In addition, it is difficult to recruit and retain lecturers with vocational experience in a rural area, and the possibility of growth in 16-to-19-year units is particularly difficult to achieve in Gloucestershire because there is a substantial competitive sixth form sector with a very high stay-on rate. It is estimated that only Cirencester college will be able to grow in the sector.

Many further education colleges in Gloucester serve wide, dispersed rural areas and that gives rise to particular problems of transport and access. Vocational courses and the upskilling of the work force must be done throughout the county and in small classes. Those classes are expensive and difficult to organise and deliver in rural colleges that are often small, as Stroud and the Royal Forest of Dean colleges are. Gloucestershire does not qualify for the educational maintenance allowance, which is only at the pilot stage in places such as Hereford, Devon and Cornwall. There is a case for Gloucestershire to receive it as well. Gloucestershire does not qualify for any special postcode funding either, but a special case should be made because of the sparsity of our large rural areas, our pockets of deprivation and the need to skill an engineering and manufacturing work force.

Further education colleges can draw down extra money, such as money for staff development and training, only by matched funding from challenge funds. That system is inflexible and Gloucestershire colleges do not believe that it is the answer, because they do not have many unqualified staff. The colleges recognise that the standards fund is useful and flexible in schools, but they regret that nothing comparable is available for FE colleges.

There are problems in recruiting and retaining support and administration staff, who are so vital to FE colleges. Colleges are unlike schools because they have a mix of students with a wide age range and deliver many different courses. Teaching times are not set between 9 am and 4 pm, but go on into the evening and Saturdays. That means that there is a bigger burden in further education than in schools on departments such as administration. We face double jeopardy, however. As we have low unemployment, colleges face intense competition from district and county councils and the public and private sectors for quality administration and support staff. In some colleges, it was reported that staff turnover in those departments was as high as 33 per cent. The other competitors can raise salaries—Cotswold district council talked about raising administration staff pay by 15 per cent. and then putting up the council tax. FE colleges cannot match such salary increases because they do not have the funding, so they lose out to other sectors on vital staff.

The colleges in Gloucestershire are proud of their achievements, and rightly so. They believe in and want to meet the Government's agenda, and work in partnership. They have confidence in the national Learning and Skills Council and are wholly supportive of the vision for lifelong learning. They want to demonstrate and deliver quality value-added post-16 education and will continue to work to achieve that. However, for too long the sector has not been flexibly and adequately funded. Staff pay has fallen behind and is uncompetitive and the solutions being offered will not close the gap.

The cost of further education is the same as in 1995, but the sector's productivity has increased by 40 per cent. It is successful and meets the targets set by Governments. Colleges in Gloucestershire have examined everything to reduce overheads and costs, including the sale of buildings, and making redundancies is now the only way to meet their budgets. The Government's vision and priority for education must address the fact that the FE sector has a recruitment, reward and retention problem. They must ensure that highly valued staff do not walk out the door and prevent us from delivering the vision of high quality education for all who want it. The Minister should come to Gloucestershire to listen to the concerns of the people I met in my June meeting. He should meet the principals, heads, staff and trade unions of all colleges in Gloucestershire to find a way forward out of their present difficulties.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): I listened with interest and empathy to the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ). I warmly congratulate her on securing the debate about matters that she, the Government and I feel strongly about. I listened with empathy because, similarly to my hon. Friend's constituency, my constituency had a long—though now sadly past—association with the coal industry and my constituents, like hers, still cherish the opportunities that further education and training can bring.

I am pleased to respond because I have an early opportunity in my new post to place on record my appreciation of the work that teachers in further education colleges—not only in my hon. Friend's area of Gloucestershire but throughout the country—are

doing to open up opportunities for people in the communities that they serve. As my hon. Friend said, further education colleges are key providers in that field.

I also pay tribute to the manner in which my hon. Friend champions her constituents and, especially, to the detailed work that she has done on the matter, which strikes me as an exemplar of how good constituency Members should operate. She has pulled together the principals, chairs, unions and the learning and skills council in Gloucester. I am glad that they welcome the Government's vision of lifelong learning and that they want to play a part in realising that vision. I will be pleased to meet my hon. Friend's delegation, either in Gloucestershire or in my Department, to do justice to the detail of her case.

I want to ensure that my hon. Friend understands the context in which we must view the concerns that colleges have raised with her, and I shall touch on the most relevant Government policy that is being put in place.

More than 4 million people are learning via further education and the Government recognise the commitment and dedication of the staff who deliver education and training. However, too much of the provision is patchy and the levels of learner recruitment, retention and achievement are too low in many areas. That is why we are committed to raising standards. Colleges have responded well. Standards of teaching and levels of achievement have substantially improved, although we must build on that improvement. Colleges will continue to be challenged and supported by the Government, the Learning and Skills Council and the independent inspection carried out by the Office for Standards in Education and the new adult learning inspectorate. We have charged the LSC with developing a strategy to raise standards. This year, that is backed with funding of £160 million in the new standards fund, which is double the sum that we invested last year.

On pay, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 established an independent further education sector through the creation of independent corporations to provide further education and training. The governing bodies and principals of colleges are required to secure efficient and effective management of all their college's resources, expenditure, capital assets, equipment and staff. They are also required to conduct academic and financial affairs to balance their budgets. The appointment of local governors means that the needs of local people, local employers, the local community and the local economy can be better met.

Each college must settle the annual pay and conditions of its staff in the context of the overall resources that are available and, as my hon. Friend rightly said, local need and local conditions. Those are matters between employers and staff within the broad parameters of public sector pay policy.

To help colleges solve the retention and recruitment problems mentioned by my hon. Friend, to reward high calibre teaching staff and support the restoration of proper career development within the sector, starting this year and running over the next three years, we have made an additional £300 million available in the FE teaching pay initiative. I am disappointed to hear my hon. Friend describe that as divisive and not the answer to the sector's problems.

I am also disappointed that the local colleges that she has spoken to dismiss the initiative. We expect more than two thirds of teachers in general FE colleges to qualify for payments of at least £1,000—in many cases, up to £2,000 a year. In addition, we expect 10 per cent. of such staff to secure the restored principal lecturer grade, which will carry an additional payment of up to £4,000 a year.

Alongside that initiative, sixth form colleges are offering a professional standards scheme with payments to experienced teachers. Both schemes are designed to encourage and reward eligible teachers on a par with the threshold payment scheme for school teachers. From April this year, all payments can be backdated to 1 April. No college need lose out even if it is slow off the mark in submitting a declaration of intent to the local LSC.

Colleges should be examining ways to restructure their pay systems to base promotion and rewards on competence, professional development and high quality teaching. The sector must seize both the opportunity and the extra funds that we have provided to improve staff pay. It has been wrongly suggested that there is a bureaucratic delay in getting the new money for pay to colleges, so I will make the position clear: colleges received their provisional allocations for this year's funding for pay in April.

Our discussions on implementation are continuing separately with sixth form colleges. The onus has been on all the other colleges to submit to the LSC a brief summary of their implementation plan for the FE teaching pay initiative. Three months on, less than 10 per cent. of colleges have done that. None of the five colleges mentioned by my hon. Friend that serve her county have done so either. Once colleges have sent in the information, they will receive their funding. I urge colleges to get on and complete their summaries, so that their lecturers can benefit from the extra funding that we are providing to reward their work.

My hon. Friend pointed out that the teacher's pay initiative funds have been spread across the FE sector this year in line with the allocation of core funding to colleges, or, as my hon. Friend described it, in line with student numbers. Our purpose, however, is to recognise the different retention and achievement rates in different colleges. Let me be clear: I will press ahead with plans to examine the scope for refining the TPI arrangements for next year in discussion with the learning and skills council and representatives of the colleges.

My hon. Friend made great play of the comparison between schools and the FE sector. Work is under way to ensure that the FE sector benefits from some of the initiatives already proposed for schools, such as golden hellos and help for new teachers working in shortage subjects to pay off their student loans. I am also conscious of the high proportion of part-time staff in the FE sector and I am considering ways to strengthen the teaching delivered by and support available to such staff.

Qualifications and training are as important as pay. I do not know whether my hon. Friend appreciates that, in many respects, an equivalent of the standards fund exists in the FE sector and I hope that it will have an impact similar to that which she acknowledged it had in schools. Of the £160 million that would be in the

[John Healey]

standards fund, £80 million will help new FE teachers to gain teaching qualifications and support existing college lecturers and teachers with continuous professional development. The extra money for standards is part of an increase of £527 million for FE in this year alone—a 12 per cent. real terms increase on the money available last year—and next year it will increase by a further 3 per cent., not decrease, as my hon. Friend suggested. That funding includes support for the introduction of the new FE pay arrangements, for new centres of vocational excellence in FE, for higher standards of teaching and learning and for a step change in capital investment, including in IT infrastructure.

Further education has been crying out for such resources after years of neglect. I am certain that the proposal will enable further education to support the extra students that we all want. During the debate, my hon. Friend forcefully pointed out the disparity in pay between some FE lecturers and teachers in schools. We are all well aware of the historic funding gap between schools and FE and how it opened even wider during the 1990s. We are pledged to increase funding and ensure upwards convergence. However, being realistic and honest, that can be achieved only in time. With the TPI for FE colleges and the professional standards payments scheme in sixth form colleges, we have made a start. I understand that the association colleges have offered a 3.7 per cent. general pay increase this year. I am bound to say that that, in combination with new schemes such as TPI, is one of the best outcomes in FE for years.

My hon. Friend also referred to individual colleges where nationally negotiated pay increases are not implemented in full. As I explained, it is for colleges to make such decisions in discussions and negotiations with their local work force representatives. They must operate within their budgets and make what I appreciate can be difficult decisions. As my hon. Friend said, those decisions are for her five local colleges. I understand the uncertainty that that can cause members of staff and students, especially in rural areas such as the Forest of Dean.

I end on a positive note about a powerful new player that the FE sector should regard as its ally, not its administrator. My hon. Friend paid tribute to the new Learning and Skills Council. Its creation in April is one of the most significant and far-reaching reforms ever enacted in the post-16 learning sector. For the first time in 100 years, the planning and funding of all post-compulsory learning outside higher education will be integrated. The local learning and skills council in my hon. Friend's constituency, in Gloucester, is central to our purpose and to ensuring that the needs of local learners, lecturers, staff, employers and communities are properly met.

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. As the Minister and the hon. Member concerned are present, we may start the next debate.

Transport (South-West Bedfordshire)

12.58 pm

Mr. Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss several transport issues that are of huge importance to my constituents.

I begin with the urgent need for a full north-south bypass for Dunstable. The residents of Dunstable have been asking for a bypass since 1936, and this morning I read with some disappointment an Adjournment debate initiated by my distinguished predecessor, Sir David Madel, on 8 November 1972, in which he asked

"when will construction work begin on the A5 north-south bypass?"—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1972; Vol. 845, c. 1154.]

It is depressing to be here as a Member of Parliament for South-West Bedfordshire asking the same question 19 years later.

As one travels up the A5, it seems that every town and village apart from Dunstable has been successful in getting a bypass. Travelling through the village of Markyate this morning, I noticed that the A5 goes around the village, which has reclaimed its high street. The traffic that wants to go to the village flows smoothly and the community is able to enjoy its high street environment. The same thing has happened in Redbourn.

The need for the bypass is overwhelming, and undisputed except by a few per cent. of the people in the town. The overwhelming need is environmental, as the quality of life in the town centre is abysmal for those who have to work and live there. There are 11 schools very close to the route of the A5. On a daily basis, the children in those schools have to endure the fumes produced by almost stationary traffic. As any automotive engineer will confirm, traffic that flows freely produces less pollution than traffic that is nearly at a standstill. The proposed A5 bypass would skirt round the foot of Blows downs—it would not go across them—and, with screening, an environmentally acceptable solution could be found for Blows downs and the Houghton quarry.

There is also an economic need. From an industrial point of view, I have to tell the Minister that Dunstable lost 1,500 jobs in the 12 months up to July this year. I hope that he does not respond by saying that unemployment has fallen in South-West Bedfordshire, so there is no problem. Unemployment has fallen, but where are the jobs? I want local jobs in my constituency. If my constituents must travel out of the area to Stevenage, Luton, Watford, Milton Keynes or London to get jobs, that adds to the severe transport difficulties.

Next to the proposed route of the north-south bypass are 80 acres of brownfield sites that are ripe for regeneration and to which the bypass would give access. They include the old AWD site, the Woodside industrial estate in Houghton Regis and the Renault buildings. From an economic standpoint, the retail centre of the town is in a distressed state. Some 25 per cent. of the shop frontage in Dunstable is vacant because people cannot easily get in and out of the town to do their shopping. Therefore, most people avoid it.

We are told that the north-south bypass is being considered in the multimodal study for the south midlands. I am somewhat cynical about that, and the

people of Dunstable view it as a stalling mechanism to delay giving them the bypass. How is it that a full western bypass for Bedford, which was also supposed to be considered in the multimodal study, has been granted? A similar process has taken place in Great Barford. Furthermore, I understand that the Government Office for the East of England is pushing for a Luton eastern bypass. If Luton were to get a bypass before Dunstable, there would be an outcry, considering the length of time that we have been pushing for one.

Last year, my hon. Friend, the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) visited my constituency and called for an immediate public inquiry. I hope that, as a minimum, the Minister will announce a public inquiry today to get some progress on the Dunstable bypass. When my distinguished predecessor spoke in another Adjournment debate on this subject last year, he said:

"I very much hope that, by December, the Government will agree to a public inquiry in Dunstable and that a bypass will be constructed."—[*Official Report*, 27 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 1386.]

It is now July 2001 and we are no further forward. The matter is urgent and I beseech the Minister to make some progress. I invite him to visit my constituency to see the situation for himself.

An extension of the Leighton Buzzard southern bypass is also needed from the Thorn turn, where it meets the A5, to the M1. A huge volume of traffic uses that bypass, which has successfully taken much of the through traffic out of Leighton Buzzard to that town's advantage. However, the bypass ends short of the M1. Therefore, when traffic meets the A5, much of it turns right and goes straight through Dunstable, which adds to the 3,000 heavy goods vehicles that go through the town every day. That traffic wants to go through, not to, Dunstable. I hope, therefore, that the extension of the Leighton Buzzard southern bypass to the M1 will be forthcoming. Traffic also passes through other villages, such as Toddington, which are highly unsuitable for HGV traffic en route to the M1. Both bypasses are needed to relieve traffic congestion and to contribute to the urgently required economic regeneration.

There is a feeling that the Government are blackmailing us by holding a gun to our heads. We have been told that we have no prospect of getting a bypass unless we accept the green wave of co-ordinated traffic flows from the A5. However, if that is merely a sop and the Government are saying, "Make do with the green wave because that will alleviate the need for a bypass", that simply will not do.

The Government have also told us that, unless we co-operate with their Translink proposals for a guided busway from Luton to Dunstable, our chances of a bypass will similarly diminish. That is an unacceptable way to treat people in my constituency. I have nothing against guided busways: in many parts of the world they can be advantageous to the people whom they serve, as they greatly ease traffic flows. However, I strongly object to the establishment of a guided busway on the site of the existing railway line from Luton to Dunstable. Anyone who drives on the roads in the south-east of England will know that they are becoming more congested daily. Surely many of the branch lines that Dr. Beeching axed should now be brought back into use.

I hope that the Government will not only open the branch line from Luton to Dunstable, but, in time, will connect that line with Leighton Buzzard, to where it used to run. It is true that part of the track that runs from Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard no longer exists, but it would not be difficult to route a track alongside the Leighton Buzzard southern bypass, which could join the main line to London near Cheddington.

If that were done, the possibilities for economic regeneration for the region would be tremendous. Birmingham, Milton Keynes, Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, Luton and Luton airport could all be linked and that means that the many people who travel to the airport from the midlands could reach it in comfort by rail. At the moment, the Strategic Rail Authority has reserved the line between Luton and Dunstable for rail use. An over-enthusiastic local group wanted to run a railway carriage up and down the track, and some of the sleepers were removed. I understand all that, but I beseech the Minister not to proceed with Translink on the existing route at the expense of restoring rail links to our towns. As I said, I am not against guided busways per se, but I would prefer a rail link.

Leighton Buzzard is a major commuter town to which many people have moved because of its supposedly good rail links to London. It is vital that Silverlink trains retains full access to the fast rail line to London and that neither Virgin nor any other rail company is allowed to elbow Silverlink aside so that it is unable to provide an acceptable commuter or other regular service to London.

In addition, there are no lifts at Leighton Buzzard station. That means that people who are disabled, who are in wheelchairs, who are carrying luggage, or who are mothers with young children have difficulty reaching the platforms. Silverlink was wrong not to have installed a lift in the first place, but it now says that it would not be economic to do so, as the franchise has only two years to run. Given that franchises have only two years to run and that companies do not know whether they will have them renewed, will the Minister consider telling them that if, say, they install a lift, they will receive a credit for it if they do not win their franchise next time? Is there no mechanism for encouraging such important capital improvements that allow access for disabled people and others to our railway network? It is not good enough for the remaining years of the franchise to be years in which capital investment stops altogether. Will the Minister consider whether there is any way in which Silverlink can proceed with lift installations, without it being penalised in the final years of its franchise?

My final point—the debate may be coming to resemble the film "Planes, Trains and Automobiles"—concerns Luton airport. I am delighted that the airport is so close to my constituency. It provides ample and welcome opportunity for my constituents to travel abroad at reasonable prices. It is also a great advantage for any region, both economically and as far as jobs are concerned, to be close to an airport, and I welcome it unreservedly.

That said, however, the airport consultative committees are something of a joke. There is no worthwhile accountability to the people over whose homes the aircraft fly from Luton or from many other airports in the United Kingdom. Time and again, sensible-looking approved routes are shown to members of the consultative committees. Aircraft are not scheduled to fly over people's homes on a regular basis,

[Mr. Andrew Selous]

but are subsequently regularly vectored off. They are taken off the approved routes merely to save the passengers a couple of minutes' journey time.

That is wholly unacceptable. As I said in my maiden speech, it would be the equivalent of a bus driving across a village green to save two or three minutes. There would, quite rightly, be outrage if that happened. Why do we allow aircraft to fly wherever they want over people's homes when that could and should be easily avoided? With the increase in flights predicted for Luton airport— possibly 30 million passenger flights a year rather than the 7 million or so at the moment—the issue will become more and more serious and will relate not just to Luton airport, but to airports all over the country. Will the Minister urgently consider giving real teeth to the consultative committees to which the airports are responsible? I am not anti-airport, but we must strike the right balance between the economic advantages and jobs that airports bring, and the environmental impact on people over whose homes aircraft fly.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Mr. Selous) on securing this debate and on the delivery of his well researched speech. I knew his predecessor, Sir David Madel, extremely well; he was an Opposition Whip when I was a Government Whip and we frequently haggled behind the scenes about Bills. Perhaps I will come to know the hon. Gentleman just as well. His predecessor was a courteous, well informed and witty man, who acted as a vigorous advocate for his constituents, particularly on the issue of transport. The hon. Gentleman has shown that he will follow in his predecessor's footsteps in that respect.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned how transport policy affects the quality of life and liveability issues are at the heart of our transport policy. He mentioned the importance of economic regeneration and prosperity in South-West Bedfordshire, and such considerations are in our minds when we formulate policy. We are mindful of the substantial job losses in his constituency. The unemployment rate is still below the national average, although that is no satisfaction to those who have recently lost their jobs. I assure him that every effort will be made on behalf of his constituents, even when the matter extends beyond my remit. I am sure that he will lobby hard to secure greater employment in his area. The current economic climate favours regeneration and the creation of new jobs; we must be pleased about that.

I hope that I have enough time to deal with all the h G's points. Some general comments on policy will show how South-West Bedfordshire fits into a wider framework. Debate on transport in the area is controversial. It has gone on for at least 29 years; the hon. Gentleman's predecessor held an Adjournment debate on the subject in 1972. I expect that other hon. Members can go back still further. The other day, someone told me that it was 60 years since a particular bypass was first considered.

We have established an integrated transport policy and a 10-year transport plan to provide resources for improvements to our transport system. It is widely acknowledged that we have inherited a legacy of under-investment and it will take years to put that right. For the last two years, we have increased the resources available for all forms of transport and, along with local authorities and transport providers, we have committed ourselves to a major sustained investment programme. We established the Strategic Rail Authority, which has a mission to develop the railways as a positive national asset, rather than as a service run at minimal cost to the Exchequer.

The long-term franchises that the hon. Gentleman mentioned will provide the requisite major investment in rail services. I have taken on board his comments about disabled access at stations and will take that message back to the Department. The Strategic Rail Authority is working on a strategy for the whole network and that is due to be published later this year. I accept that the railways have had major problems, but that will not deflect us from our long-term aims.

The motorway and trunk road networks are important to South-West Bedfordshire, which is at the hub of many major networks. We have established, and are committed to delivering, a targeted programme of about 40 schemes for improvement. Many of those are under construction, but others will start in the next few years. We are a long way from the time when people made wish lists, which often promised very little. We have established a programme of multimodal studies that examine comprehensive proposals for dealing with our transport system's most intractable problems.

We have initiated five-year local transport plans to enable local authorities, such as those in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and their partners to decide what must be done in their areas and to have the confidence to take their plans forward. The thrust of his argument is that there has not been enough local determination or ability to be able to carry out those plans. The whole transport network plan process is a major step forward and has been widely welcomed.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the integrated transport policy in South-West Bedfordshire, and how solutions are being developed. He described in some detail the need for improvements in safety and in environmental and economic redevelopment. As he described so graphically, congestion is, without doubt, endemic in Dunstable. Diversions from incidents on the M1 can also make that congestion much worse. Bus services cannot run on schedule and timetables have to be adjusted to cope with the regular disruption.

Those problems are not new and we seek to tackle them with the main players in the locality. It is accepted that some of our major projects could take time to be implemented, but the whole approach involves systematic development rather than a series of wish lists.

With regard to the railways, the west coast main line through Leighton Buzzard is being upgraded and new trains are already operating on the midland main line through Luton. The public inquiry for the Thameslink 2000 project is finished and the inspector is working on his report. The Queen opened Luton Airport Parkway station in November 1999. About 30 per cent. of the

airport's passengers use public transport—a figure up with the best. The hon. Gentleman will agree that that also contributes to reducing congestion on the roads.

The hon. Gentleman raised the possibility that Silverlink services on the west coast main line might suffer as a result of restrictions on the use of fast trains. At the west coast forum on Monday, the consultants issued a report that set out actions to deal with that problem. The Strategic Rail Authority will consider the report and decide what action to take in consultation with other interested parties.

South-West Bedfordshire is covered by two local transport plans. Leighton Buzzard and the more rural areas fall within the Bedfordshire plan. The Dunstable and Houghton Regis area has combined with Luton to produce a single transport plan for the conurbation. We are delighted that the Luton, Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire councils have come together to work on a comprehensive transport strategy, as that is the best way to deal with the area's substantial problems.

We have already provisionally accepted the joint Bedfordshire-Buckinghamshire A4146 Stoke Hammond and Linslade western bypass major scheme. That will complement the southern bypass by removing further through traffic from the urban area of Leighton Linslade. Bedfordshire council is also developing local programmes for market towns, such as Leighton Buzzard, and the rural areas of the county.

The authorities propose two major schemes in the joint plan. The hon. Gentleman referred to Translink—the guided busway—a major project that links Dunstable and Houghton Regis with Luton and the airport. All the authorities have identified the scheme as being of the highest priority and are now firmly behind the busway project. He described the huge problems of congestion that prevent reliable bus operations. The authorities consider that Translink will create the required sea change in bus operations for that conurbation.

If the hon. Gentleman has any doubts, he should enter into discussions—if he has not done so already—with those local bodies that have shown themselves to be so much in favour of the project. He will understand that we will listen to the local bodies and those responsible for views on local matters. It is not for us to make a decision from Westminster, but to listen to the local decisions and recommendations.

I am aware of the controversy surrounding the scheme and the alternative ideas for the heavy rail use of the old Luton-Dunstable line. However, the local authorities and local partners must decide which scheme to promote. We expect to receive the full appraisal of Translink at the end of July, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that it will receive careful attention.

The east Luton south corridor improvement, between junction 10 of the M1 and the airport, is the second major scheme. We recognise the project's importance in respect of regeneration, and its appraisal is expected soon. My officials have visited both major schemes to ensure that we are fully aware of the details of the projects.

In addition to such major schemes, we have substantially increased funds for maintenance and integrated transport in the Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis area. The figure for 1999-2000 was £1.544 million, rising to £2.574 million for 2000-01, and to £4.919 million for 2001-02. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the area that he represents has received substantial increases, and we have indicated that similar funding will be made available for subsequent years.

The plan identifies public transport as the highest priority, followed by walking, cycling and freight access. Those priorities are determined locally, and they will form the basis of the implementation programmes that are developed by the authorities. Local authorities, in conjunction with their partners and transport operators, must decide which programmes to pursue, and they are keen to take up the challenges that are offered by the substantial extra resources that we have made available for transport projects in urban and rural areas.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the London to south midlands multimodal study. We are conducting multimodal studies to deal with the most difficult transport problems. The widening of the M1 and the A5 Dunstable bypass has been referred to the London to south midlands study. Work is under way to develop broad strategies for the first round of consultation with the major players and that will take place in the autumn. More detailed consultation on the proposals for the main corridors, such as the M1, the A5 and the west coast and midland main lines, will take place early in summer 2002. Those consultations will allow for full discussion of the strategic options for South-West Bedfordshire, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to contribute to them.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman's predecessor contributed to the planning conference on the Dunstable bypass that was held in 1996. There was disappointment that no serious action was taken following that conference. The plans for the A5 bypass propose to construct a major grade separated dual carriageway through the urban area. Such a scheme would have a great impact on the urban area, and surrounding open land and sites of special scientific interest. As the h G will be aware, the project is still very controversial.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I am grateful to the newly dapper Minister for allowing me to intervene. Before he reaches his peroration, I want him to explain the thinking behind the Government's decision to detrunk major A roads in Bedfordshire, which means that now the county council, rather than the Government, will foot the bill for maintenance.

Mr. Jamieson: If I address that matter in detail, there will not be enough time to deal with other issues raised in the debate. However, we feel that decisions on the 30 per cent. of the roads that are trunk roads would be better made locally. We have put in place the funding for that and we have transferred it to the local highway authorities to enable them to manage those roads. The major trunk roads will, however, continue to be managed through the Highways Agency.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire made several points about Luton airport, and I have some complex arguments that I would like to present to him. However, we might not have sufficient time to discuss them, so I hope that he will find it acceptable if I promise

[Mr. Jamieson]

to write to him about Luton airport and vectoring off. If he wishes to discuss the matter further, I will be happy to do that.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this subject and for the way that he has conducted the debate. I look forward to debating with him in the future. I also thank him for giving me the opportunity to explain the Government's position on the important matter of transport in South-West Bedfordshire.

Whaling

1.30 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): It is no pleasure to raise the issue of whaling in the House. I have done it on many occasions, but I am grateful for the opportunity to ask questions of the Government. It might not be a pleasure to raise this issue, but it is a pleasure to see the Under-Secretary of State in his place. He is held in high esteem in the animal welfare movement, and he is trusted.

Slaughter of the great whales was and remains one of the greatest crimes ever perpetrated by human beings against our own or another species. For 50 million years, the great whales lived in perfect balance with nature, the seas teemed with whales and fish were in super-abundance. However, within the space of 200 years or so, we all but wiped out some of the most magnificent creatures ever to have inhabited our planet, and brought many of those fish stocks to crisis levels. Human beings did that—we cannot blame others—yet we continually blame other species for problems that are entirely created by our own selfishness and venality.

One can say a great deal about whales as a species—although there is not enough time—but certain points need to be made to put the matter into context. Eighty species of whales exist. The blue whale, for example, is the largest living creature to have existed on the planet—even larger than the most massive of the dinosaurs. The sperm whale has the largest brain of any living creature, including that of human beings. The song of the humpback whale is evocative, intricate and capable of being heard by other humpback whales over hundreds of miles of open ocean. The toothed whales have natural sonar echo location equipment, which is 95 per cent. more accurate than the most sophisticated equipment developed by man.

Whales great and small are highly intelligent, communal, warm-blooded mammals with complex social behaviour patterns. They deserve to be studied and held in awe. There is so much that we need to know about them, and perhaps even learn from them. Over the centuries, however, we have slaughtered these gentle, social, harmless creatures, for such prosaic purposes as pet food, candles and perfume. I am reliably informed that, in Japan, one can buy whale ice cream. I can think of few worse insults than that—the great whales turned into a confection for fat kids.

The danger that we might wipe out the whales caused the International Whaling Commission to effect a moratorium in 1986 on commercial whaling. Despite the moratorium, 21,000 whales have been killed since 1986, either in defiance of the moratorium or in the name of so-called scientific whaling. The countries that have primarily defied the IWC in world opinion are not dirt-poor countries or bandit states, but among the most economically prosperous countries in the world—Japan, Norway and Iceland. Japan and Norway together kill more than 1,000 whales every year—mostly minke whales, but last year I understand that the Japanese Government added sperm and Bryde's whales to the list. Every year, Japan kills more than 500 whales using the loophole of scientific whaling. Japan has the audacity to claim that it is killing in the name of science. All I can say—I know that I can get emotional about this—is that that is exactly the same sort of claim that was made by the Nazis when they were killing people in the name of science in the concentration camps.

Meat from the so-called scientific slaughter ends up, unsurprisingly, in markets or on plates in Japanese restaurants. The Norwegians use the same loophole and export the product of scientific whaling as food to other countries. I have noticed, over the years, that the Japanese are especially touchy when confronted on this matter. They tend to accuse those of us who are trying to end the slaughter of being cultural imperialists, or, at times, downright racists. They say that it is an attempt by the European meat-eating cultures to impose their will on Asian fish eaters. It always seems perverse to me that with all the so-called scientific whaling, we are still unable to show the Japanese or, apparently, the Norwegians, that whales are not fish but mammals. So much for scientific whaling.

The Japanese, in particular, say that whales are taking too many fish. How often have we heard that before? Industrial fishing has depleted fishing stocks around the world. Nature has its own balance—it is only human beings that have affected that balance. We have caused stocks to fall, so we turn around and blame other species such as whales or seals for depletion. That argument is as absurd as blaming woodpeckers for deforestation.

On the "Today" programme recently, someone from the Japanese embassy compared the hunting of whales with the hunting of deer. When I raised the issue with the then Norwegian Prime Minister, Mrs. Brundtland, she went further and compared whaling with fox hunting. Those comparisons are grotesque, odious and totally irrelevant, but they reveal the bankruptcy of those who try to defend their arrogant defiance of world opinion. We should remember, when we talk about hunting, that there are those outside this country who use our hunting issue to undermine our stance on wider, more significant animal welfare issues.

Whaling is an animal welfare issue, because we inflict terrible pain and suffering on warm-blooded mammals when the harpoon is fired into them. The time it takes for a whale to die often exceeds one hour; it is estimated that on average 50 per cent. of whales are not killed by the first weapon impact. An independent study financed by Her Majesty's Government showed that some whales were still alive when the whalers cut them up. There is no way of finding a painless way to kill a great whale. Not only is organised whaling economically unnecessary and ecologically unacceptable, it is also extremely cruel.

The attitude of countries such as Japan and Norway is breathtaking in its arrogance and defiance of world opinion. It is sometimes difficult to understand how such economically powerful and supposedly civilised countries can continue such offensive and cruel slaughter of the great whales. In so far as the whales are owned by anyone, they are owned by all of us.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I agree absolutely with everything that he said. Would he care to comment on the falsification of figures in the past in returns to the International Whaling Commission by countries that have taken up so-called scientific whaling? Would he also like to comment on the number of massive fishing fleets, especially in the Pacific and the south Atlantic, that have taken and sold whales illegally and not reported the fact to anyone? Does he not think that there should be a much better surveillance system on all fishing fleets to protect what remains of the great whales?

Mr. Banks: I absolutely agree. I want to ask the Minister about our involvement in the revised management scheme and the DNA records. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) has worked with me on this issue in all the years we have been in Parliament and knows the matter as well, if not better, than I do.

The moratorium has worked more or less and certain populations of whales can be argued to have reached healthier levels. It is at this point that we are told that they can survive being harvested—a horrible euphemism for slaughtering that ignores the cruelty. We brought whales back from the brink of extinction and yet there are countries, including some of those that brought that crisis about, that now want to reintroduce commercial whaling. They must not be allowed to succeed.

One of the most contemptible practices employed by the Japanese is the buying of votes in the IWC—providing development and fisheries aid to a number of countries on condition that they will vote with Japan at the IWC. I have a list here: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Morocco, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada and Guinea. Two more countries—Panama and Peru—are likely to join the IWC this year as part of the Japanese vote-buying strategy. Namibia and Togo are rumoured to be potential IWC members, having signed fisheries agreements with the Japanese.

The Government must challenge Japan on that vote buying, because if it is allowed to succeed at the IWC it will, in effect, buy a return to whaling. Most of the countries that I listed are members of the Commonwealth. Has the issue been raised at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, or will it be raised at them in the future? The Minister or the Foreign Office should call in the high commissioners of each of those countries and tell them that if they accept conditional aid from the Japanese, the British Government will withdraw development aid from them. We must impose appropriate sanctions on countries that continue to whale or to allow whaling in their territorial waters.

The plenary meetings of the IWC will begin in London on 23 July. We Londoners must let the whaling nations and their vassal states know how this country feels about what they are doing. At the meetings in Hammersmith, there will be discussions about the revised management scheme that has been mentioned. By definition, we cannot accept a revised management scheme if we oppose the idea of whaling, but it is essential for us to be involved in the discussions. No mechanism has yet been proposed for the enforcement of the rules and for the penalisation of those who infringe them.

Whaling nations oppose any advancement of the RMS because they object to international observation and inspection. They say that that is on the ground of cost, but we know what it is really about: they do not want the world to bear witness to what they are doing. Similarly, they oppose the establishment of an

[Mr. Banks]

international DNA database to track legal and illegal whale products. Of course, they also oppose any discussion of the humane considerations surrounding whale killing.

I would like the Minister to spell out the position that the Government will adopt at the IWC, and I shall ask him a few specific questions. First, will he insist that humane considerations be given priority? Whales are slaughtered without any legislative framework to provide standards or even recommendations about methods of killing. In Monaco in February, a large number of countries spoke in support of the UK's data collection protocol and we must build on that.

Secondly, the scientific committee does not have sufficient expertise on welfare matters. What proposals do the Government have to provide such expertise? Thirdly, what resolution will the Minister propose on the ethical considerations associated with the whale kill? Fourthly, will the Government support an independent DNA database? Fifthly, will he do what he can to ensure that Iceland is not permitted to rejoin the IWC while it maintains its reservations to the moratorium?

This House is united in the objective of ending whaling completely. In the meantime, however, we must put in place the most rigorous rules to try to mitigate the damage being done by countries such as Japan and Norway. Ultimately, the so-called civilised nations that continue to slaughter whales must be forced to acknowledge that what they are doing is not pursuing cultural or historical activities, but perpetrating crimes against the planet and world opinion. No country, however big and powerful, should be allowed to get away with that.

I thank the Government for their refusal to allow Norway to count minke whales in our waters. I tabled an early-day motion on that matter and it is attracting considerable support from hon. Members in all parties. I wish the Minister well in his efforts to control and ultimately ban all forms of whaling. When he goes to the IWC, he will take the support of all parties in the House. I feel strongly, and I think that world public opinion does too, that whaling must be brought to an end. I wish the Minister well in his deliberations to achieve that objective.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) on initiating the debate. He has articulated strong views, which a majority in this country share and which are also held internationally. He has been a longstanding campaigner on the issue and can speak on whaling with authority and knowledge. I hope that the countries that are still involved in it will take note of his comments because he is articulating an important strand of thought.

My hon. Friend is right that the International Whaling Commission will be holding its third annual meeting in London between 23 and 27 July. I can confirm that the UK delegation will oppose all forms of whaling, other than some subsistence whaling by indigenous people, which is insignificant in comparison with the whaling carried out by Japan and Norway. We strongly support the IWC moratorium on commercial whaling and will robustly resist any attempt by other countries to weaken or reverse it.

My hon. Friend is right that there will be further detailed discussions on the revised management scheme that is being developed to regulate all aspects of commercial whaling. We are totally opposed to any return of commercial whaling. We recognise that whaling has been going on and that there is a need for proper regulation. We have participated constructively in work on that to ensure that our voice and scientific expertise are involved.

I should make it clear that we are in no way satisfied with the current content of the RMS. As it stands, it provides insufficient safeguards. Like many like-minded countries, the UK is seeking a comprehensive RMS that would ensure that no form of whaling was a threat to whale conservation and that catch limits and other rules were strictly observed.

One key aspect of any RMS—this is one of the points that my hon. Friend outlined—is that there must be an effective and robust DNA database. There must also be provision for international observers on whaling vessels. Without those two key elements, the RMS will be completely ineffective. We are not satisfied with the procedures that have been agreed so far and we will not compromise on the points that I mentioned.

Jeremy Corbyn: I welcome the Minister's remarks. What plans does he hope the International Whaling Commission will produce for the observation of illegal whaling in the Pacific and south Atlantic and of massive over-fishing and over-catching? What does he hope that the IWC will do about the use of long nets, which catch many smaller mammals in addition to the fish that they are designed to catch, resulting in the loss of the food source of many whales? Does the Minister accept that a comprehensive strategy is needed, as well as the strongest possible intervention against illegal fishing?

Mr. Morley: I certainly accept my hon. Friend's points. Indeed, an observer programme might well be part of an international approach to the problems of cetacean bycatch, which involve both great whales and small cetaceans. One of a number of fundamental disagreements that the UK has with the pro-whaling lobby in the IWC is that we believe that the IWC has competence on issues such as small cetaceans. We also believe that it should have an evolving role—it should evolve away from regulating the commercial exploitation of whales, which it was originally set up to do, towards dealing with environmental threats to whales, which come from several sources, including pollution, over-fishing and a range of other issues that it is important for the IWC to note. The IWC has a good scientific base and the UK plays a full role in that regard, along with other countries. We should use that scientific base to tackle the issues that I have mentioned.

International over-fishing goes beyond the competence of the IWC. However, the UK takes the matter seriously and has raised it with UN organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation to ensure that there is international action on regulating the illegal fishing that has been taking place on the high seas.

I echo my hon. Friend's argument that, scientifically, it is ludicrous to try to hold whales responsible for the perilous state of many international fish stocks. Whales are an integral part of the marine ecology and the state of whale stocks is a biological indicator of the ecological health of our seas. The fact that many species have not recovered well suggests that all is not right in relation to the exploitation of our seas. We must tackle that internationally. Speaking as a Minister with responsibility for fisheries, I know only too well that the impact of modern fishing fleets on fish stocks all over the world is much more detrimental than that of any whale. I made that point forcefully to the Japanese commissioner and scientists who gave an unimpressive presentation on the subject at the most recent IWC.

We are disappointed with the lack of compromise demonstrated by the pro-whaling countries. Nevertheless, we shall continue to take part in discussions, as it is important that we have input on issues such as the revised management scheme. We will make it clear that our participation in that work is without prejudice to our declared opposition to any form of commercial whaling. There should be no misunderstanding about that.

A key element of conservation of whales that will arise in the IWC is the creation of regional whale sanctuaries. We strongly supported the initiative proposed last year by Australia and New Zealand to create a south Pacific whale sanctuary. This year, Brazil will propose a south Atlantic whale sanctuary. Those sanctuaries will afford greater protection to whales in areas that are highly important for their breeding and feeding and are on their migration routes. It would be irresponsible to oppose those sanctuaries, which would be an important step for conservation, on the grounds that they might interfere with commercial exploitation. We will support the proposals strongly and argue for them robustly.

With the majority of IWC members, we have also consistently criticised Japan for its whaling operations authorised under special permits—the so-called scientific whaling to which my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham referred. Like him, we were appalled last year when Japan extended those whaling operations to cover two further species, sperm and Bryde's whales. Under the IWC's parent convention, IWC approval for those proposals is not needed and it is for Japan to authorise whaling under special permit. However, we expected Japan to take note of the IWC's views and those of its scientific committee. We will again register the Government's strong objection to the activity and urge Japan to restructure the research so that its objectives are achieved by non-lethal means. Whales need not be killed to be studied.

We also intend to ask Norway to reconsider its whaling activities, because we believe that they are contrary to the IWC moratorium. Iceland has no case to rejoin the IWC with a reservation on the moratorium. A country cannot set out its reservations to an international organisation before it has joined it. We are taking legal advice on Iceland's position. We are especially disappointed that Norway, which generally has a good environmental record, has disregarded the decisions of the IWC and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species by deciding to export whale products. That is a principal reason why we have refused permission for its whale count in United Kingdom waters this year.

We will also raise the argument about cruelty that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I think that it is on the record that I have had a financial relationship with the International Fund for Animal Welfare in the past.

I congratulate the Minister on his radio broadcast of a couple of days ago. It probably reached a bigger audience than the debate will, and made many of the same points effectively. He said that the Government had blocked the Norwegian survey in our waters this year. How will he come to a judgment on future years? Is that matter still open, or is it likely that the Norwegian survey will continue to be blocked?

Mr. Morley: Generally speaking, it is important to have good science and to co-operate internationally on collecting and sharing data. That is the fundamental basis for a sound scientific approach. Our objection to Norway is that it has ignored international conventions, and CITES in particular, by trying to restart the export of whale products.

We object to the Norwegian method of calculating its self-imposed quota for taking minke whales. We do not think that the survey makes sound science or that it helps whale conservation. Of course, if Norway changes its stance and the criteria that it applies in its approach to whales and its study of them, we shall reconsider our decision in future years, but we are not prepared to assist Norway in the matter of information relating to the quotas it has set itself for the slaughter of whales, particularly given that country's behaviour internationally.

The UK will express its concern about the cruelty involved in whaling and about inhumane methods and lack of regulation in the hunting of not only great whales but small cetaceans. Video evidence from the Environmental Investigation Agency showed appalling scenes of the slaughter of small cetaceans. We raised that matter at the IWC last year. We shall also promote the practice of whale watching, which is a way for many countries to benefit from whales without killing them. Even whale watching needs regulation and management and that is an important function of the IWC.

Jeremy Corbyn: I endorse what my hon. Friend has said about whale watching and whale tourism. I understand that that could be a way to change the mind of some of the smaller countries whose votes have been bought by Japan. They may be persuaded that there is more in it for them in the future if they pursue ecological tourism and whale observation than there would be in accepting gifts from Japan in a trade-off for votes to permit the continuation of scientific whaling. Are the Government prepared to think further about that?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I am pleased to reassure my hon. Friend. We have been actively involved in that approach and sponsored a study of the benefits of whale watching in the Caribbean. I am glad to say that we received

[Mr. Morley]

support from several Caribbean countries. At this year's IWC we shall present a properly researched analysis of the benefits of whale watching off the west of Scotland, so that small countries can see that there is an economic return from whale watching—perhaps a greater one than can be had from the sort of commercial exploitation that is now taking place.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham will know that Japan strongly denies vote buying, but it is accepted that there has been, shall we say, recruitment. It is for the Governments concerned to answer for themselves on those issues, but there is strong public opinion about whaling in the countries involved. The relevant Governments are democratically accountable and I hope that they will account for their actions. They are individual delegates to the IWC. They do not have to follow a given line; they can listen to the arguments. We shall be arguing strongly on issues such as whale sanctuaries, which are important.

I should be disappointed to be given evidence that Japan, for the sake of argument, had tried to use whatever influence it had to persuade delegates to vote in a certain way. That would ultimately rebound strongly on the Governments concerned and it is one reason for our intention to resist moves for voting in secret at the IWC. We are all accountable to our electorates and Parliaments. People should be able to witness a transparent, open process at the IWC.

Our Commonwealth links are strong and I set great store by them. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been active in its contacts with our Commonwealth partners and other countries, in raising international and conservation issues in both the IWC and CITES contexts. I pay tribute to what the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has done. It has managed to air the arguments in a way that is not patronising or threatening to the countries concerned; it has simply put the case for whale conservation and explained what would be at stake if commercial whaling returned or CITES were relaxed. It has outlined the risks—not only the prospect of cruelty, but the risk to many whale species that are still on the brink of extinction.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham that I know the views of the House very well and he has put them forcibly and strongly. We will ensure that they are articulated firmly at the forthcoming IWC.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 12 July 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Organic Farming

[Relevant documents: Eighth Report from the Agriculture Committee Session 2000-01 HC 149-1 and the Government's response thereto HC 410.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Angela Smith.*]

2.30 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I am delighted that the report by the Select Committee on Agriculture is the first to be selected for debate in the new Session of Parliament. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is beginning to know the architecture of the Room quite well—no doubt he will know it even better by the end of the debate.

As there is a debate on agriculture in the House, I am sure that you will understand Madam Deputy Speaker, if hon. Members pay some attention to that as well as to this debate, particularly given recent cases of serious foot and mouth disease in our constituencies, which is clearly a major preoccupation. As Shakespeare might have put it, there are also things happening in another part of the Palace.

The Agriculture Committee report was preceded by bovine spongiform encephalopathy and followed by foot and mouth disease. In the light of two such terrible experiences, there has been a lot of reflection about the nature and the direction of modern farming, some of which has been fairly far-fetched, some more realistic. People have occasionally forgotten that European policy remains the main framework for agriculture, and have spoken as if there is enormous national discretion. Devolution will, I suspect, give more national discretion within the framework of the common agricultural policy, as consumers in different countries react differently to their priorities. BSE will probably be more of a determining factor in the long-term shaping of agricultural policy than foot and mouth disease, because it is more clearly associated with problems of food as opposed to problems of farming, and has had a wider effect in the European Union.

There has been general reflection on modern farming and on the mechanisms and direction of support. Over the past 10 years or so, there have been attempts to introduce more environmental elements into farming—the countryside stewardship scheme, for example, has been expanded by the Minister, but it originated under the previous Government. There have also been attempts to crystallise the value and the product that we want from farming. Elements remain of a policy that is driving output up while trying to get other assets out of the system. The relationship between agriculture and the environment has again been brought into focus, above all as regards the demands and aversions of the consumer. The supermarket has done more to change agricultural policy than all the politicians of Europe put together. A consumer-led policy is both likely and desirable.

The Agriculture Committee looked at organic farming not unsympathetically, but in a fairly hard-headed and unsentimental way. Most of us were sympathetic to those who were pushing towards organic farming and who will be the pace makers. We felt that we should look at organic farming increasingly as a business, rather than as a religion. It was understandable that organic farming in its early stage was evangelised. I have no objection to people who wish to cast their farming experience in that light. The Committee felt, however, that as organic farming becomes more and more a part of mainstream agriculture, evangelism should be supplanted by marketing. It felt that as organic farming became an increasingly mature part of the agricultural economy, it should be based on sustainable economics as well as being ecologically sustainable. No matter how many other claims are made, organic farming cannot be sustained if there is no marketplace.

We recognised that there is a temptation to categorise different agricultural systems in language that is too clear cut and exclusive, as if each sort of agriculture had exclusive attributes that were not shared by any other system. Practical experience on the ground suggests that the opposite is true. "Conventional" farming can be very environmentally friendly, and organic farming can be very intensive. Integrated farming—in a sense, a minimum input system—can be highly profitable. No system trails behind it exclusive attributes. We felt that a great deal was happening in so-called conventional farming that was moving it towards greater sustainability, just as organic farming has moved out of the "three acres and a cow" period of its development and is becoming a more mainstream part of production.

We recognised that some claims for organic production, including that it has health benefits, could not be scientifically proven. However, we felt that the claim that organic production was environmentally friendly was the easiest to maintain, even if the categorical scientific evidence did not support it.

Our belief in the need for sustainable systems led us to a set of assertions. There is a need to recognise the danger that farmers may convert to organic production because of financial inducement and not because a marketplace has been identified. We all know that agriculture has suffered very difficult economic conditions and that farmers have been desperate to find a way to maintain their businesses. Inevitably, some will look towards organic farming as an escape from the financial imprisonment of present economic circumstances. We wanted to ensure that those who did convert had drawn up their business plans, were confident that they could sustain them and would not abandon them if economic circumstances became more favourable in broadly conventional farming.

We expressed a distaste for setting targets for organic production, which we felt could lead to distortions and prescriptions. Nevertheless, one should be aware of erecting a counter-CAP that, in practice, depends on the same mechanisms as the CAP.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): The Select Committee found interesting evidence that the organic movement itself is far from united on the idea of targets for organic farming. Much of the organic movement

[Mr. Mark Todd]

expressed considerable doubts, as did a substantial part of the retail sector. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Curry: That is true. A few days ago, I discovered, somewhat to my alarm, that I had drawn fifth place in the private Members' ballot. I immediately demanded a recount, but that made no difference. I have since been inundated with demands that I put forward an organic targets Bill. I do not want to make a public announcement that would disappoint many people, although it would have the effect, I hope, of clearing the e-mail on my computer. I am, however, sorry to say that I am not disposed to put forward that Bill. I may, inescapably, have to espouse many other meritorious causes because of the error of listening to the Whips and signing for the blessed thing in the first place.

We question whether a buoyant market sector needs conversion grants. A Select Committee must sometimes question basic assumptions, one of which is that organic farming is increasing. Everyone told us that there was increasing demand for organic products, that supermarkets could not get enough of them and that we spent too much on organic imports. If that is the case, would the public subsidise the opposite of market failure: market success? At the end of the day, we thought that there was a case for Government support, if it were directed at clear market opportunities and given on the basis of clear measurable objectives. We certainly thought that supermarkets had a role in procuring supplies, but doubted whether the public purse was required to subsidise the commercial activities of major supermarket groups.

Mr. Todd: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that a strand of policy that one would like to see developed is supermarkets sharing the cost of conversion for organic farmers? After all, they are recruiting people to supply their customers. Simply turning to the state for automatic support would seem inappropriate when we seek a market-led solution.

Mr. Curry: We agree, which is why we decided that we should examine that proposition. It is true that the supermarkets are important forces in determining consumer preference. They respond quickly to consumer taste; the whole experience with genetically modified crops demonstrated the speed with which they react to consumer sensitivities. We thought that, if they are anxious to procure more organic product, they should play a part in commissioning it. Such relationships between the farmer and the retailer are necessary and helpful throughout the food chain. In the agricultural sector there is too great a tendency to regard the supermarkets as ogreish enemies. Some very senior people in the Government have occasionally succumbed to the temptation to subscribe to that thesis.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Why should British supermarkets become involved in that exercise, perhaps to the extent of subsidising a British farmer, if they can import organic food from other countries that has been subsidised by the Governments of those countries?

Mr. Curry: There are two reasons why. First, the supermarkets believe that there is an argument for security of supply. Secondly, the consumer demands reassurance about origin and quality. One of the things that concerned us while compiling the report was the variety of certification procedures. We were concerned about how the consumer could be assured that the stated quality was genuine in cases of procurement from a diverse range of countries.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Farmers say to me that they are under extreme pressure in dealing with the supermarkets, particularly on price and quality of goods. If the supermarkets were to become too involved in organic production, would not the suppliers suffer quickly due to the disappearance of an organic premium from the supermarkets? Moreover, the supermarkets tend to demand uniform produce. Could that be supplied at reasonable costs through an organic production scheme?

Mr. Curry: We must be careful about the notion of an organic premium. Organic products have a price, as do so-called conventional products. We would all like the price for conventional products to be better. For example, the price of milk has been low for a long time and that has caused serious difficulties to milk producers. Organic milk is probably fetching about 30p or 31p a litre for farmers. That is a good 10p to 12p above the price of other milk. I would not object if dairy farmers—those who are left—were getting 24p a litre for their milk. That may influence some who would otherwise convert to organic production, but I am concerned that farmers should undertake those activities for which there is a market so that they can sustain their production at a profitable level.

The role of the supermarkets is to offer an assurance of outlet in return for an assurance of supply. We have seen that increasing significantly. It may be that, as part of the aftermath of foot and mouth disease, we will have to look at the future of the live auction marts, which will be one of the inescapable issues that emerges from the experience of the disease. Long-term contracting between supermarkets and producers may become more common, and we may see a more broadly established pattern of interdependence between those two parts of agriculture, which would be helpful.

Mr. Weir: Is that not part of the problem? Farmers tell me that long-term contracts mean that the supermarkets can put too much pressure on them. If markets change, the supermarkets press down the price as an insurance of supply. That is one of the problems of long-term financing for conventional farmers at the moment, and I am worried that if we go down that route, those problems might extend to the organic sector.

Mr. Curry: We have to decide that the organic sector will either remain a boutique sector of agriculture that has a completely separate pricing structure, or become more mainstream. Iceland Frozen Foods tried to introduce organic produce at a conventional price. That was a mistake, because the public wanted a choice. Iceland fell on its face because the public did not wish to have that choice made for them. It is inescapable that supermarkets' contracts will not specify a constant price; price will vary according to demand and economic

conditions. However, an assurance of quality supplies can be much more long term, which would benefit the sector.

Mr. Todd: One way to correct the market imbalance to which the right hon. Gentleman refers is to use co-operatives to bring together farmers' interests to support a particular objective. That idea is well developed in the organic sector. The Agriculture Committee heard evidence of both successful processing co-operative activity and successful farming co-operation, particularly in the dairy sector.

Mr. Curry: That is certainly the case. A totally fragmented farming sector does not need to face that great corporate power, the supermarket. That would be possible if farmers were more organised and could more effectively deliver the quantity of supplies required. Moreover, supermarkets would probably support the idea. We should encourage the co-operative movement in agriculture, which is more developed on the continent than in the United Kingdom. Great benefits would accrue from that, not least that the co-operatives could manage some of the schemes themselves—a proper form of devolution.

We recommended that the Government devise proposals for an organic stewardship scheme as the centrepiece of their review of organic farming support, which forms part of the 2003 review of the English rural development programme. That would enable farmers to receive payments that recognise the benefits that they bring to the environment, which is relevant. However, the stewardship scheme would also mean that all the various schemes could be integrated more easily. Farmers could be monitored for stewardship, for adhering to various support schemes and for their organic qualifications in the same inspections.

The organic stewardship scheme is commendable and is becoming one of the Government's flagship programmes. I commend the recent trials to try to get more benefit out of some of the arable areas and to develop the environmental experience. That development has been extremely positive, and I am glad that the Minister plans to expand that, although I have no doubt that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will describe it as being "rolled out". Everything appears to be "rolled out" these days. I have noticed that even seminars on the aftermath of foot and mouth disease will be "rolled out" by Lord Whitty, which makes the mind boggle. "Rolling out" is clearly part of the Government's modern jargon, about which an article will no doubt appear at some stage.

I look forward to the expansion of those programmes. It makes sense to bring the various schemes within as limited a framework as possible, provided that administrative convenience does not overtake the need to ensure that local particularities and conditions are recognised.

We were concerned about a number of certifying bodies and the different standards that they set. We recommended that the Government ensure that standard-setting procedures in the organic sector were harmonious and rigorous, and that the Government encourage a streamlining of certification and inspection processes. At first, we were tempted to say, "These schemes are barmy. Why don't we tell the Government that there should be fewer of them?" However, the sensible thing was not to question the number of schemes, but to ensure that we understood what they told us and that they served a purpose. Organic farming is essentially a process. Certification involves certifying that process, not its output. Therefore, it is a guarantee not of qualitative objectives, but of a process. There can be a number of schemes as long as people are clear about what they stand for and the differences between them. We should not be tempted by the administrative convenience of the elimination of schemes.

Clear information for the consumer is what is important. The qualities that the consumer may attribute to organic production may be different to the quality that is certified. As I said, certification relates to process. A consumer may attribute all sorts of things to a product: he or she may think that the food tastes better, is healthier or is environmentally friendly. Some of those attributes may be true, but we have no scientific basis on which to assess those claims, although we may eventually be able to do so. It is important that the information that arises from certification be made available to the consumer. The consumer may attribute other properties to organic food but that is a matter for his or her perception.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned heavy dependence on imports. It is important that consumers are not led to believe that organic products guarantee absolutes—of environment, husbandry or quality—wherever they may come from. We must be vigilant and ensure that products from Mexico or Paraguay are subjected to the same rigorous examination of their use of the word "organic" as those from Shropshire or Worcestershire.

The report made a common-sense contribution to the debate on organic food. It was well timed. The sector began as a small, peasant—I use the word in its continental, non-pejorative sense—industry, delivering to the same market as do the French with their designated products of local origin. Business grew rapidly, and the sector gained a larger market share, serving considerable consumer demand. It was sensible to write a report that treated organic farming as an important economic sector that would be significant in the future, rather than as a picturesque element of agriculture.

We wish to support and promote organic farming to aid diversity in agriculture, for its qualities and for the choice it provides to the consumer. Organic farming shows that innovation is important to the mechanisms of agriculture, and will increasingly be a hallmark of policy in the aftermath of the diseases that we have mentioned. We commend the report to the Government and are pleased to find that they broadly support our views.

2.51 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I congratulate the Select Committee and its Chairman on the report, which is timely. His presentation has been interesting.

There was some consensus on what was said and given as evidence. The Government have responded positively to many of the report's recommendations. As the Labour party frequently says, a lot has been done

[Joan Ruddock]

but there is much more to do. I refer primarily to recommendations 23 to 37, based on paragraphs 69 to 91.

I take issue with the opening paragraphs of the report. Paragraph 5 states:

"We have seen no evidence to enable us to state unequivocally that any of these claims are always and invariably true."

The report attempts to apply stricter criteria to the sector than to others. Tests such as that one at the beginning of the report are detrimental to the rest of the document, which is written more moderately.

It is over the top to characterise the organic industry as messianic. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred to religious fervour, and said that he did not mind too much about that. The hard-nosed men and women of the marketing teams at Waitrose, Sainsbury's and Tesco would not say that they were messianic. However, I can understand such passion from the farmers themselves, who may feel that they have something wonderful to offer in a sector where there has been so much distress and despair.

We should bear it in mind that the organic sector delivers on all the major United Kingdom agriculture policy objectives outlined by the Government. Those include greatly reduced use of pesticides and veterinary medicines in food production; greatly reduced environmental pollution; and protecting the UK's soil and water resources. There is evidence that organic farming offers improved food quality and safety, high standards of animal welfare, rural regeneration, including increased rural employment, reduced cost to the state of agricultural support through market contribution, and a market-oriented farming system.

Mr. Todd: Has my hon. Friend seen evidence that casts doubt on the points that were made about veterinary medicines? The worry is that, in certain sectors and particularly in upland areas, the controls for which the organic sector is looking might not benefit animal welfare.

Joan Ruddock: There are some differences, and I am aware of such evidence. However, other reports make it clear that there are real benefits, as I said at the outset. The temptation is to say that the organic sector must be perfect, otherwise we cannot support it. Of course, not everything is perfect, but there is much that is problematic in the conventional farming sector. When considering the balance in such matters, we should recognise that organic farming is ahead.

The evidence in respect of organic farming is growing. I doubt whether any hon. Member present would disagree with its biodiversity benefits, and good data are already emerging from other European countries. Last year's review of European Community literature made it clear that organic farming brings benefits in terms of not only biodiversity but nitrate leeching: compared with conventional farming, nitrate leeching is 40 to 57 per cent. lower per hectare, and CO_2 production is 40 to 60 per cent. lower. In the light of such evidence, we should be careful not to apply tests that are so difficult that the sector is given less recognition than it properly deserves.

There is evidence that the health benefits are becoming clearer. The Soil Association will shortly publish a new review of a small number of valid comparisons of organic and non-organic food, suggesting that, on average, there are nutritional and health benefits in consuming organic food. However, I wholly acknowledge that, as the Select Committee said, there is a need for much more research in this area. Let us get on with it, ensure that the Government listen to the report and that such research is undertaken.

Currently, only about 2 per cent. of agricultural research funds, which total more than £100 million, is invested in the organic farming sector. That is not good enough. It is far less than the organic sector's projected share of United Kingdom agriculture, which, as the Government acknowledge, could be as much as 6 per cent. by 2006.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I hope to deal with that point in more detail in my reply, but as one is always pressed for time I should perhaps emphasise now that it is a mistake to regard the percentage of research and development devoted to the organic sector as 2 per cent. of the total budget. We are paying for an enormous range of research and development that directly benefits the organic sector. The benefit to it is much greater than the 2 per cent figure suggests.

Joan Ruddock: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I look forward to further discussions with him on the subject. Despite what he says, those of us who argue with some enthusiasm for the organic sector believe that there is much to be gained from it. However, the Government and the Select Committee say that the current evidence is not clear. If so, we need to get clear evidence. If necessary, more money must be put into the pot so that research can be done. The questions can be answered, and they need to be answered urgently.

There is no doubt that, in the wake of the successive crises in United Kingdom agriculture to which the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon has already alluded, public and political support for the development of organic farming and food is very high. According to an NOP poll conducted in March, 86 per cent. of the public feel that the Government should be doing more to develop the sector in the United Kingdom. Two thirds of the public would like 10 per cent. of the country's farming to be organic—greater than the Government's target for organic agriculture—and more than half of the public would like that figure to be more than 30 per cent.

Mr. Todd: I share many of my hon. Friend's views and agree entirely with the content of the report. However, bearing in mind the figures that she has quoted, can she explain the difficulties that Iceland Frozen Foods had in converting wholesale to organic food, and in persuading its customers to accept that change? She implies that there is widespread, committed and money-led enthusiasm for organic produce.

Joan Ruddock: Iceland Frozen Foods may be a special case because of the particular market with which it deals. Some of us, although greatly approving of its

desire to promote organic farming, felt that to offer all the organic produce as frozen food was not entirely consistent with the philosophy of many of us who want fresh, quality food.

Iceland Frozen Foods was dealing with a special market. In other retail outlets, demand cannot be met. Imports have risen from 70 to 75 per cent. during the past year, and there is considerable growth in the market for organic foods. Iceland Frozen Foods cannot be the yardstick by which we measure public desire for organic produce. Fresh organic produce is tremendously popular and there are shortages of it. I try to buy only organic food. On many occasions, I have been unable to get the food that I required from local supermarkets.

There is both public and political support for organic farming. I cannot participate in the debate without mentioning the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill, given that I first presented it to Parliament. I must tell the Chamber that the early-day motion tabled in support of that Bill was the second most popular early-day motion during the previous Parliament: it was signed by 268 MPs, representing all parties in the House. Despite what has been said, targets represent an argument for significant growth in the organic sector, and there is a lot of public and political support for that.

Since the Select Committee report was compiled, my hon. Friend the Minister has signed the Copenhagen declaration calling for a Europe-wide effort to develop organic farming. There is huge impetus behind growth in the sector.

The Select Committee made some specific and constructive recommendations, primarily in paragraphs 69 to 91 of its report. It recommends

"that the Government devise proposals for an organic stewardship scheme as the centrepiece of its review of organic farming support."

That would be tremendously welcome. Nearly all other European Union countries provide on-going payments for organic farming after conversion. Those who have embarked on such enterprises gave consistent evidence that there was a need for continuing support. Given the huge benefits for the public domain of organic farming—they range from the reduction in pesticide run-off into water supplies to environmental and biodiversity benefits—there is every reason why proper public support for the sector should be extended beyond simple conversion.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Lady. Why was it appropriate for the organic sector to embrace the use of copper sulphate as a treatment for disease—for example, blight in potato crops—when that substance is known to be one of the most toxic available?

Joan Ruddock: The right hon. Gentleman will know that copper sulphate is being phased out, and his point is not relevant to my argument for continuing support through organic stewardship payments. I hope that the Minister will give a positive response on that issue.

Mr. Todd: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Joan Ruddock: I give way. I seem to have become the target of every member of the Select Committee.

Mr. Todd: At least those who are not prepared to write a speech for themselves.

Another idea that the Committee entertained, at my suggestion, was that water companies should give a commitment to reduce charges to organic farmers who are able to demonstrate that, by their particular form of cultivation, they are reducing the amount of pesticides and other pollutants going into the water system. Does my hon. Friend agree with that sort of continuing support?

Joan Ruddock: I concur with that imaginative proposal, which is clearly linked to public benefit. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is asking for my constituency: it is Lewisham, Deptford.

The Select Committee made several positive recommendations, including the proposal that the Government should consider increasing their R and D budget. The Minister has alluded to that, and I hope that we shall hear more good news when he winds up the debate. The Select Committee also recommended that the Government scrutinise the organic supply chain for bottlenecks and imbalances and devise ways to remedy them; that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—now DEFRA—review the conversion costs and aid rates of the different sectors and consider targeting aid at the sectors that were lagging; that the advice to producers be reviewed to ensure that it was adequate; and that the Government ensure that rural development plans are channelled into organic marketing and training initiatives. Those proposals are much to be applauded. It is intriguing that when they are put together, they begin to look like the basis of a strategy, yet we do not have such a strategy from the Government. That may be a failure of the report and—although I hope that officials may be working on it—of Government policy.

Despite everything that has been said about targets, they are a means of focusing the attention of a variety of sectors and operators—Government, farmers, whoever—so that it is possible to pull together and to define clear policy aims. It is no coincidence that the four countries in Europe with the highest levels of organic farming—Denmark, Austria, Finland and Sweden—have all adopted targets for the sector. That is significant. Whether we should accept targets is another matter, but it has concentrated minds elsewhere. We need a coherent strategy, which is lacking.

Help is on the way. The Soil Association has been working in the broad coalition that brought together the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill and plans shortly to produce an outline organic action plan, which I am sure the Minister looks forward to with great enthusiasm. It will argue that six areas—information, the supply chain, market development, financial support for production, standards and social and institutional issues—must be dealt with simultaneously to bring about a co-ordinated approach to driving forward the sector. That is vital, because there is huge potential there.

My final point—it may have been mentioned in the report, but I could not find it—concerns the Government's public purchasing strategy. The Government are currently greening public purchasing policy, but I do not think that they have yet addressed public purchasing policy in the catering sector. The European Commission has clarified that it is legal for public bodies to specify organic food in their contracts.

[Joan Ruddock]

The Government may find through their research, or by reviewing the research of others that health benefits exist. I hope that the Government will consider whether there is a role for specifying some organic content in our public purchasing policies: for example, organic fruit to schoolchildren. That would respond to public demand and assist the market; I believe that there needs to be a market-led approach to the sector.

The public benefits are such that there should be continuing and increased Government support for many of the proposals in the Select Committee report. I hope that the Minister will give us more comfort in his winding-up speech, so that those of us who are enthusiastic about the sector can continue to express our enthusiasm in the House.

3.11 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) because, last year, I also followed her in promoting the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill. I shall say something about the targets issue, but I hope to get away from that because it is rather narrow. Although I agree with the hon. Lady that many countries have found targets a useful tool, targets are not the only way forward. We must recognise that.

It is true that we have a target in this country. We now seem to live in a prime ministerial or presidential country. On 1 February, the Prime Minister went to the National Farmers Union and committed the Government to a target of trebling the amount of organic food produced in this country by 2006. I do not know if the target was for the beginning or end of 2006, but it has been set. I therefore welcome the fact that the Minister is attending this debate; he has a long-standing commitment to helping the sector, which he has displayed in opposition and in office. Such commitment is not maintained by everyone who is transferred from one to the other. I congratulate him on that.

I agree with much in the Select Committee report, but I want to identify one or two issues on which I think it is lacking. That is meant as no disrespect to the Select Committee—or to Committee members present—as I think that it has done a wonderful job. I pay tribute to it and particularly to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) who led it so effectively. I hope that he will not suffer at the hands of those nameless people in the usual channels who are doing such dirty work at the crossroads at the moment.

The issue of trade imbalance, to which the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford referred, is important. Although I listened with interest to what the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said, I do not think that the Select Committee gave the issue sufficient attention. With organic food, as with everything, the proof or the pudding is in the eating. We have had an increase in expenditure and research, but we have not increased the percentage of organic food from home-grown producers that reaches the shelves of supermarkets and other shops. Quite the opposite has happened, as three quarters of the organic food that is produced for the very demanding consumer now comes from abroad. Indeed, the import figure has increased from 70 per cent., when I was promoting the Bill, to 75 per cent. now.

There is something basically, intrinsically and philosophically mad about bringing organic food across the world to our shores when so much can be produced in our own climate and soil by our own skilled farmers and market gardeners using their excellent farming practices. Perhaps too much attention has been paid to the agriculture sector and not enough to the horticulture sector. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) will agree that there is probably greater scope for expansion, and for rapid expansion, in the horticulture sector than there is in agriculture. I therefore hope that more attention will be paid to horticulture.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Does my hon. Friend accept that the climate change levy may be restricting organic production in horticulture?

Mr. Tyler: I think that it is and that we shall encounter consequent difficulties. Although many market gardeners can operate competitively now that our climate is, supposedly, warming up, there are others who will find the going extremely difficult. That will be a problem if—as seems still to be the case even within the European Union–other countries are enabling their horticultural sectors to compete more effectively on cost, particularly on energy cost.

Although the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon about trying to sustain the level of certification and public confidence in the criteria that we are applying are, of course, perfectly true, we can be confident that there are standard certification levels within the European Union. What there are not are standard levels of support, and that is something that must concentrate our minds.

I hope that the Minister will respond to this point when he replies to the debate. Despite the Copenhagen declaration, we cannot claim to have harmonised the support that we provide with the best-practice support provided to the organic sector in other EU member states. That is critical because we shall not make progress until our main European Union competitors are unable to undercut us with the supermarkets. If supermarkets do not have an assurance, which they can pass on to their consumers, that they can obtain products with certainty and confidence at a subsidised price, they will surely continue to buy from abroad, especially within the European Union, rather than buying from British producers. That is the central point, which brings us to the nature of the support that we shall give.

I welcome the consensus which seems to be developing that the way forward is an organic stewardship scheme. The Select Committee recommended such a scheme, and the Government have made encouraging noises about the operation of one. I am sure that that is a good way forward as the issue is not only about product, as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon said, but about process and continuing process. It is about ensuring that the way in which food is produced meets certain standards, so that those standards can be maintained in the longer term. We do not want a hit and run arrangement, trying to take advantage of a quick conversion, that we would slide out of when market conditions change.

It is important and helpful that we are moving towards such a scheme, which I hope will be linked to some form of targeting. I do not care how that is done, but as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford said—she has argued this case eloquently both in this Chamber and on the Floor of the House—we must establish a competitive framework so that those who want to go into the sector know that there is a long-term advantage in doing so. Farmers in their current state will not have the confidence to enter the sector. They certainly will not have the deep pockets to do so, and they will be unable to persuade their bankers to help them unless there is a long-term commitment.

I agree with much of what has already been said, but I should like to touch on a couple of other issues. I am unconvinced by the argument that the research budget is relevant to the organic sector. It is unnecessary to increase the budget, which is, after all, very small. We know from other walks of life that if it is left to the market to determine where research should take place, research will be undertaken by organisations with deep pockets rather than on behalf of the consumer or the public purse.

Under the Thatcher regime, the Government pulled back from near-market research. That was a mistaken policy. Indeed, there would be a different attitude to many current food and farming issues if the position had not been changed. It provides a classic example of why it is sometimes better to maintain a public interest in research, rather than to leave it to the vagaries of the free market. Supermarkets should not be allowed to determine on their own the sources of their organic food supplies. If we allow them to do so, British farmers and consumers will suffer. That is why the research and development budget is so important.

Finally, I turn to the issue of consumer reaction. When I was promoting my Bill, I was amazed at the extent of public interest in the matter. The amount of coverage that the subject receives in the press and the broadcast media shows that there is huge public interest in where food comes from. That is the sole encouraging consequence of the BSE and foot and mouth disasters. Who is most sensitive to that public interest? The answer to that question is not, I fear, Members of Parliament, let alone Ministers. Retailers are most sensitive to the public's interest in that matter, and they rapidly responded to it. However, they responded not by trying to improve the standard of British produce, but by sourcing their produce from abroad. They did that for a variety of reasons, many of which have been mentioned.

The Government have a responsibility, particularly in the aftermath of the BSE and foot and mouth crises, to try to ensure that the important interests of consumers and of primary producers in horticulture and agriculture hold sway over those of the huge international and multinational giants of food processing and retailing. I do not believe that it is at all inevitable that those giants will deliver the goods to the people of our country.

Mr. Jack: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I am about to finish my speech. As the newly re-elected Government are so focused on delivery, I hope that they will consider delivering to consumers, who want better, British organic products on their shelves.

3.21 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), and also my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), who convinced me of the benefits of the Organic Targets Bill—but I shall say no more about that, as there were jousts among various Committee members, and although I was in the minority I tried to fight my corner, and shall continue to do so.

I welcome the Minister to his new position. I am unsure whether there is a term for someone who has spent four years as a Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—although someone has just suggested that purgatory might be an appropriate word. The Minister now represents the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am sure that he will listen to everyone who has agricultural interests, and I am certain that we will have plenty of opportunity to continue to discuss agricultural matters.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who chaired the late lamented Agriculture Committee. I am sure that he will return in a different guise, and that there will be many further opportunities for us to discuss food, farming and related matters, now that there is a truly integrated Department.

I also wish to mention our former clerk, Lynn Gardiner, and Dr. George Turner, the former Member for North-West Norfolk, who was not returned to Parliament. He worked hard on the matter under discussion, and it is surely not beyond the rhyme and reason of the way that Parliament works to ensure that a copy of our proceedings is sent to him, and that mention is made of his excellent work.

Initially, it appeared that the debate would not be well attended, but I am pleased that so many hon. Members are present—especially because the issue that we are discussing is of considerable importance.

I will concentrate on a number of points that directly follow on from the comments that were made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall. Unless my eyesight betrayed me on Monday night, I noticed that he attended the public meeting that I went to at Conway hall in Holborn. It was a packed meeting on food policy, although it approached the subject from a wider perspective than the present debate, as the politics and policies relating to food in the context of globalisation were discussed.

At the meeting, we listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), Tim Lang and a number of other people, who put into perspective what the hon. Member for North Cornwall said. This is politics in the raw—people are interested in food. They have always been interested in food, but they are now much more interested in how food is produced and distributed and make their decisions accordingly. I am sure that that interest will grow. I hope that it will be reflected in the new Select Committee and in Government policy.

[Mr. David Drew]

The report is a good one. It is easy to consider the issues to which it did not refer, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford rightly picked us up on the sourcing through the public sector. We should perhaps have dealt with that matter. However, I think that the report does all the things that a good Select Committee report should do: it covers the ground, enhances the debate and draws on a lot of evidence, and it gave members of the Committee the opportunity to see, as well as to hear about, what is happening out there. It is generally objective, and the recommendations have met with a good deal of interest and elicited a positive response from direct stakeholders such as retailers and producers, and from the general public..

Organic farming not only affects health and environment but has a major impact on rural areas. Building a more sustainable agricultural system will have more impact than anything else on our rural areas. That is why the new Select Committee can help to regenerate rural areas.

Hon. Members have not spoken much about how we can remove some of the bottlenecks in the system. Several sections in the report highlight how we need to ensure that we help the production process as much as possible, rather than putting barriers in its way. We are, as always, indebted to the Soil Association for enabling us to put into context the distance we need to cover, and whether we should support the Organic Targets Bill. It is fair to say that the amount of organic production in this country is far too low. About 3 per cent. of United Kingdom farm land is allocated to organic produce, of which only 1 per cent. is actually certified. We have heard some of the arguments about the definition of "organic".

We need to do more, but at least the consumer is turned on to the issue. We know that from what people are buying and from the polling evidence, which is not always as inaccurate as some people would have us believe. Most people would want to buy organic as long as it is available, it is priced reasonably and they can trust that it is genuinely organic and produced in a humane way that conforms to the consumer welfare standards that they expect.

Mr. Todd: Although I agree with much of what my hon. Friend said, I draw attention to the Iceland argument in the intervention I made on—

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I am partially deaf, but I have just checked with the Clerk, and he cannot hear either. Will hon. Members please speak up a little so that we can hear?

Mr. Todd: Perhaps it was something to do with the microphone. I will stand a little closer to it. I am sorry for that.

I was going to say that some members of the Select Committee were troubled by the implications for poorer consumers of the price increases that a wholesale shift to organic farming might cause, and I would welcome my hon. Friend's thoughts on that.

Mr. Drew: I thank my hon. Friend and shall likewise try to speak up. He raises a fair point. I remember having a debate in this Chamber on food policy, and I want us to move towards a genuine food policy, not simply an organic food policy. If we are genuinely to tackle food poverty, we must deal with those who do not have the means to ensure that they get quality food. That is a fair and important issue to raise at this point.

I said that I wanted to speak about the Organic Targets Bill—not in order to reopen old sores, but to deal with a misunderstanding. It is not simply the target that is important, but the planning behind it. It was good that the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food accepted that point in his speech to the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester, and we must not lose sight of it. If we can get the action plan right, the target becomes much less important. I hope that those involved in writing the original Select Committee report and other hon. Members here today accept that.

We have alluded to other important matters, but we could make more of them. One such issue is the support that needs to be forthcoming for organic farmers. I totally support the emphasis on moving towards an organic stewardship scheme, but again the issue is how we get there. We are fooling ourselves if we think that that will happen overnight—a great deal of work needs to be put in, which goes back to the issue of planning.

I want to consider a few issues that link into support for organic farmers. This is more of a personal reflection on the needs of farmers who have converted, who are in the process of converting or who, more particularly, are worried about what would be involved and have held back from converting. There is clearly a need for advice and education. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford touched on that in respect of academic support, but training must also be important.

The conversion process in this country is still very difficult—let us not misunderstand that. People are taking a risk and might go without income for a time. We all know that the scheme has been bedevilled by the fact that it has been something of a stop-go process. There is much more demand to convert than we have been able to deliver. Perhaps the situation is as it should be, and people are truly tested. Regardless of whether one believes that we are talking about a philosophical conversion as much as a practical one—I do not want to go into that too much, because it was well covered in the House of Lords report on the subject—one needs to lock into place the way in which people will be subsidised for a time. The issue is not only how they will forgo income in the short run, but what guarantees they will need subsequently: it is all about market openings and what comes with them.

Of all the members of the Select Committee, I was, in many respects, the most scathing about the Iceland conversion, and we need to learn some lessons from it. Iceland was incredibly naive in thinking that people were locked into such a market opportunity and that the company was shooting at an open goal. As some of us tried to tell Iceland, it proved not to be as easy as that. I should hope that the organic movement could learn from it, without being too despondent. The organisation was naive and a little flip in trying to score such a goal. I am more persuaded by the approach taken by Sainsbury's, in studying the subject overall, in a more considered and practical manner.

Sometimes we consider the different sectors—milk, meat, fruit and vegetables, eggs, arable and the processed sector—as though they are all parts of a great organic movement. We must understand that those sectors have different needs and that the help that they need, from the Government and other sources, will vary. Their needs will change and evolve in various ways. The report covered that issue well, and perhaps it has not been discussed as much as it might have been.

I am still confused, even though I sat in on the evidence, about the issue of regulation, certification and standard setting. We put our finger on an important point in finding that the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards is rather underpowered. That needs to be sorted out urgently and I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister what is happening about the UKROFS review. I know that the quinquennial review is under way and an update would be valuable. We all wanted clarification.

There is confusion about who is setting standards and how much standards differ. That is a problem both nationally and internationally. The report is encouraging about the idea that countries exporting to this country should sign up to the standards of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. Some hon. Members would no doubt consider those standards in need of tightening, so that people buying organic food of UK origin or from abroad could be sure of the standards being applied. Confusion and conflict between different organisations was evident. There was majority agreement and I did not push the matter, but despite our belief that there was value in the present diversity and competition, there was a need for clarification for consumers. I hope that that will be forthcoming.

There is a relationship between organic and other forms of agriculture. It is wrong to see organic agriculture as in direct conflict and competition with conventional farming. I know that conventional farmers sometimes get upset at some of the statements of the organic movement, and I shall tread gingerly into that area. There is clearly a role for conventional farming. With the best of intentions, if we reached our 30 per cent. target that would still leave 70 per cent. doing other things. We must keep reminding ourselves of that.

The sector is important, but it is not the whole of agriculture. Some hon. Members were quite taken by the integrated management systems at the Co-operative Wholesale Society farm at Stoughton. That approach may have lessons for the organic movement as well as the conventional movement about ways of improving food production and, by research and efficient organisation, ensuring appropriate agricultural progress. We must decide on some priorities about what was learned in preparing the Select Committee report.

There are degrees of purity within the organic movement. I have tried to explain the biodynamic movement, and if the explanation is wrong, that is my fault, because they are my own words. There is a biodynamic farm in my constituency, Kolisko, at Brookthorpe, just outside Stroud, and I am firmly persuaded that the people involved have a role to play in the wider organic movement. Long may that continue.

A disillusioning fact that came home to us—as has already been made clear—is that a lot of people tend to buy organic food because they have the notion that it is wholesome and local. I shall not address the issue of wholesomeness, but much organic food is certainly not local. It might well be imported. Most people seem to want us to pursue the idea of sourcing produce locally. Can my hon. Friend the Minister tell us how we are helping the organic movement to re-establish local access? It can be done through farmers markets, which have taken off strongly. That is mentioned in the report, and is always referred to as one of the great successes of the Government: we have set up a new structure enabling people to buy other than through the normal retail outlets.

We have a strong farmers market in Stroud. I have mentioned it many times before, so I shall not dwell on it. However, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us how, indirectly, we can help organic production—which seems to be one of the mainstays of the farmers market movement—how we can further improve on what is happening, and how we can make sure that resources go into it.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) mentioned the co-operative possibilities. I am a Co-operative as well as a Labour Member. We greatly underestimate the opportunities that we have to restructure in every area—production, distribution and, dare I say, retailing—in a co-operative way. That can be the answer to some of the conflict that has previously occurred between different sectors. Will my hon. Friend the Minister look ahead and consider ways in which the Government can, by sensitive delivery of grants and in other ways, help potential developments?

It might be something that Members are nervous about in terms of the role of Government, but the Government can set, as a guiding light, the way in which they hope organisations will move, and subsequently fall back.

A key statement in the report is that the Committee is "not in favour of a 'dirigiste' approach to agriculture in the UK". I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will agree with that. Perhaps I am more of a pragmatist and an interventionist. I think that organic farming is both popular and necessary for the way in which we want to restructure our agricultural system. Any help that the Government can provide is very welcome.

3.43 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the Chairman of the Committee, on his elegant and excellent summary of the report's findings. It was very interesting.

One of the advantages in preparing the report was that we did not just listen to evidence in the Committee Room but went out and got our shoes dirty by visiting a number of organic producers. We went to Helen Browning's farm and saw what she did, which was an example of high-quality, meticulous farming, using some of the best techniques available. It made us think about that particular farming regime. In so thinking, we contrasted it with the CWS farm in Leicestershire that we visited and which the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) has mentioned. That was an example

[Mr. Michael Jack]

of—on the same site, cheek by jowl—conventional agriculture, integrated crop management and organics working alongside each other. We could see the lessons from each form of agriculture affecting the others.

Our trip to that farm raised some interesting questions. For example, what are the objectives of organic farming? Some may argue, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) has, that there are advantages in terms of health, safety and consumer confidence. We touch on all those matters in our report. Some have argued that the objective of organic farming is improvements in the agricultural regime. However, I found it difficult, and I have just re-examined the detailed evidence taken by the Committee, to get a definition of "organic". It seems to mean many different things to different people.

We took evidence from Dr. Nicolas Lampkin, who was, to say the least, evangelical in his view of organic farming. He spoke about the ethical nature of it, as if it were a question of organic growers being good people and other kinds of growers being bad people. However, that is not the case. The integrated crop management approach of CWS, in the context of certain environmental and quality targets, could also be described as good farming.

The case of CWS raised interesting questions. One might decide, for example, that environmental targets such as those for the release of CO_2 into the atmosphere were farming objectives in one's agricultural regime. Believe it or not, integrated crop management with no-till agriculture, even using genetically modified strains, would be more environmentally beneficial—if reducing CO_2 emissions were one's objective—than a full plough-up and use of natural manuring facilities as would be employed in an organic regime. The question of which agricultural regime is the right one to follow is very much determined by the targets that one sets oneself.

That leads me to a conclusion about the report. We must not see organics as in a battle with mainstream or any other form of agricultural regime. It is complementary to other types of agriculture. It responds, very properly, to the desire of some consumers—usually those who, at this stage, can afford to pay a premium for their food—to have some of their food produced in a way different from that used in mainstream agriculture.

I was in horticulture before I came into Parliament. I understand what it is like to work in the non-subsidised sector of agriculture and what it is like to have to respond to consumer demand. I understand what it means to undertake research and development in new crops without subsidy. I know that it can be done because, although our horticulture is now somewhat smaller than it was, it has survived. We are now seeing it fight back to retake, with better product such as vine-ripened tomatoes, markets that would formerly have gone to the Dutch competition.

It can be done, and I see parallels between that and the organic movement. To a degree, the whole debate has had an unstated sub-plot. We have been talking about the arable sector, which would benefit from the grants that are available, because it comes under IACS—the integrated arable control system. Likewise, livestock would benefit, because that comes under the same system. However, fruit and vegetables would not, because they do not qualify. The development in the take-up of organic production has perhaps been slower in horticulture, because there were no transitional grants. Even the very proper reference to the idea of a stewardship scheme linked to organic objectives would not benefit those sectors. So we have to be careful, when we make pleas to the Government for help, that we know exactly which parts of the agricultural regime will be helped.

A number of Government responses talk about the English rural development plan, particularly in the context of marketing. In the light of the huge demands that will be placed on the resources available for improvements in areas such as co-operation and marketing, and considering the vast array of outputs from UK agriculture, does the Minister think there will be enough left to sustain and develop, and to meet all the objectives that right hon. and hon. Members who have so far contributed to the debate suggested should apply to organic production?

What are our objectives? The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford made several claims about the benefits of organic production. However, when considering the health attributes of organic food, one question that begs an answer is whether it would be better for people to consume, regardless of their source, more fruit, salad and vegetables every day rather than to press on saying that some of those attributes can be achieved only if the products are organic. When I walk into my local branch of Tesco, I wonder whether everything is about to have an organic regime—even organic boot polish—because of the company's desire to achieve more choice in its catalogue.

In fairness to them, the much vilified supermarkets have expanded the market; they have pushed on. In our report, we mention the evidence of the Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative—OMSCo—the collective organisation that deals with the marketing of milk. In that context, Sainsbury's has tried to put a floor in the market by guaranteeing the price. The question of premiums is important because, in those products in which it is difficult to be fully subsidised, making the transition to organic farming is difficult. When dealing with the market for objectives, the Government's response includes the comment that we should be careful about not having too much over-supply in a sector.

The points that have been made so far about farming enterprises having a business plan are important. It is no use farmers rushing into organics, thinking that it is the failsafe way to cope with falling agricultural prices, only to find that it was fool's gold, that premiums have collapsed, that supermarkets have dragged in products from places with lower costs and that, bing-bang, the market has gone and they are back where they started. If anything, the premiums are illusory. One bit of information that we acquired—it was not in our evidence—was the view of some producers that the premiums represent the prices of five years ago. Producers in all sectors were complaining then that the prices were not enough. For commercial reasons, people must be careful when making the move to organic production.

We have heard of some important environmental attributes of organic farming. I have an allotment; it is almost organic, but when those nasty bugs start chewing away at my brassicas, I feel that I have to use the bug gun. However, I am now busy picking off the tops of my broad beans to ensure that I do not have to spray them for black fly this year, and I dig in my organic farm manure. The exercise is good for me, and I feel very virtuous doing it, but it makes me realise how narrow is the dividing line between having and not having an entirely organic farm.

I have a pretty good environmental regime on my 51 ft by 21 ft plot, but I realise that if the bulk of the population—of this country and others—are to achieve a regular maintained supply of food at an affordable price, they will still be dependent on mainstream agricultural production. We should not always do ourselves down. In the days of ignorance and DDT, we did a lot of damage, but we have learned from that and it has been getting better. For example, minimisation techniques in pesticides and herbicides make them too expensive to chuck on as if they cost only tuppence a tonne. People are now learning to manage their growing regimes in a much better way.

Successful agriculture entails having enough money to be properly aware of broader environmental responsibilities. What are the Government's environmental objectives? Where do they want to see the greatest gains? If the Minister can answer those questions, we shall be able to argue about the strategy needed to achieve those gains. The Helen Browning farm shows that organic farming can make a great contribution—for example, in the context of biodiversity—but so can others, such as the CWS farm, which has integrated good stewardship of the land and of the adjoining landscape features with crop management. Horses for courses is a useful expression in that context. We should not regard organic produce as good and everything else as bad. If handled properly, everything can contribute.

My next point is on consumer confidence. Other hon. Members who have spoken, including the Chairman in his opening remarks, said that the fact that BSE was followed by foot and mouth was quite properly bound to make people question how their food was produced. The less intensive regime with more attention to detail that underpins much organic production has plenty to commend it. It enables consumers to know where their food comes from and about techniques of production. Such intimacy with the food chain does not lend itself easily to a supermarket. If someone asks a shelf stacker where a product comes from, he will find considerable ignorance. Much work must be done to educate the public to ask the right questions about what food they should buy with confidence.

I got into deep trouble last Christmas when I saw a large container of organic milk in my fridge at home. It belonged to the wife of my brother-in-law. I was feeling bolshie at the time, so I asked the dear lady, Narissa, why she had bought it. She replied that it had no chemicals in it and talked about its production. I should add that my wife remonstrated with me for being overly aggressive in our argument about the organic regime. Narissa is a lovely person, and I shall have to be careful in case she reads the report of our debate. She had bought the organic milk because she thought that it was the right thing to do to shield her children from nasty antibiotics and chemicals that she thought were bad.

In fact, the organic regime allows an organic cow to be given two prophylactics if it is in difficulty, as the evidence shows. Why two, rather than three or one? It is an interesting question, and there are other such questions about definitions and people's exact understanding of what organic means. It does not mean without chemical substances, but it may mean no synthetic chemicals. We must try to educate people about the fact that organic production techniques are often underpinned by a philosophy, but that it may not be a common philosophy. The hon. Member for Stroud talked about different standards. All seven different accreditation bodies come to the definition of "organic" from different standpoints. The majority will pray in aid the Soil Association, but some think other definitions better. Around the world, the different definitions multiply, which provides some interesting questions.

When I went to Ashford for the Horticulture Research International conference on fruit, I learned that chemicals that we do not allow can be used on fruit crops in Germany. There are other such examples. There must be greater honesty and openness, and I back the finding in the report on beefing up the resources of UKROFS, the accreditation body, so that it can do its job.

I am conscious that there will be a Division in the House in a few minutes, so I shall bring my remarks to a close. I fully associate myself with the findings of the report on the subject. It is fascinating to ask the difficult questions about what organic means and how organic production is implemented. I strongly support developing the movement, but at the pace that the marketplace wants to absorb the product. Let us be aware that there is no battle between a good regime and a bad regime, but that organic production has a following that we should try to encourage.

3.58 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I shall be brief. I have a few points, especially on organic standards. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and other hon. Members mentioned the confusion between the various organic standards. It has been said that we can be reasonably certain of standards, at least across the European Union. I draw attention, however, to paragraph 57, which deals with EU livestock standards. Tesco recently found itself in some difficulty particularly because of the EU pork standards. It demonstrates that organic standards that are acceptable in other parts of Europe are not necessarily acceptable in the United Kingdom.

Other examples include organic eggs that came from battery birds raised on organic feed. We in the UK would not usually recognise those eggs as organic, but they are accepted as such elsewhere. In the United States, an attempt was made to change organic standards to encompass genetically modified food. Such a change would be unacceptable to most people in this country. We must therefore be careful when we talk about organic standards worldwide. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said that the standards should be the same for Venezuela, Mexico

[Mr. Michael Weir]

and Worcester. Unfortunately, there are differing standards around the world and, to reach agreement on an international standard, we would have to use the lowest common denominator. That would be dangerous for the organic movement.

We already have a problem with international marketing. When I first started buying organic food some years ago, I could buy a tin of baked beans with the Soil Association symbol on it, which assured consumers that it complied with organic standards. Now, when we now go into supermarkets, we see numerous—

4.1 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.16 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Weir: Before the Division, I said that, at one time, one could be assured of organic quality by buying products marked with the Soil Association symbol. Now, supermarkets sell a wide range of organic goods that are labelled with the stamps of different regimes. It is difficult for consumers to know what is truly organic and what standards apply to the products that they buy. As pointed out in paragraph 42 of the report, even within the UK, there are seven or more different certification authorities under the Register of Organic Food Standards. We must guard against a dilution of standards for organic produce if we are to keep consumer confidence high and boost the organic sector.

The right hon. Member for Fylde made a good point: at present, those who buy organic products tend to belong to a niche group. If organic agriculture is to increase, the challenge is to expand sales to the bulk of the population. However, we must accept that there will be a major cost if we take that route. If we are to tackle food poverty, which the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred to, the increased cost of organic produce will affect the budget of almost every Government Department and, if we do not accept that there will be an increased cost, farmers might be in danger of trading one financial nightmare for another. They will be under the same pressure to provide organic food as they are now to provide conventional food, and that would leave farmers in the same position; it would bring agriculture no further forward.

We should consider a two-stage process. We should move toward organics, but, as an intermediate stage, we should promote a better form of conventional agriculture and encourage farmers to cut back on the use of chemicals. The supermarkets, which are much vilified in the debate, can play a part in that; for example, I note that the Co-operative supermarkets have said that they want reduced residue levels in the food that they sell. I wish to put in a quick plug for early-day motion 82 on the subject. Supermarkets can help without moving totally into organic produce, which was such a disaster for Iceland. There is a middle way that will take farming forward without immediately committing all farmers to the organics path, which would be completely unsustainable and would only substitute one disaster for another.

4.19 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I congratulate the Committee on its comprehensive report, which is also a very good read. I hope that it will have a wider circulation than other, similar reports, which are not read by as many people as they should be.

Organic farming has come a long way in the past 20 or so years. At that time, I worked for an organisation called Dartington, near Totnes. It was the centre of an alternative lifestyle, which included alternative medicines, education and so on. Organic farming was then considered a strange alternative activity. A restaurant that opened at Dartington, which introduced organic food to the restaurant trade, perpetuated that idea by calling itself Cranks.

Various food scares helped to encourage organic farming, but there was a false start about five years ago, after BSE, when in spite of the demand for organic products they were not promoted and marketed by the supermarkets, which bought the food but shoved it into a relatively small corner of their operation. Organic food was expensive and not attractively presented, and after a few months the supermarkets said that there was no market for it. Fortunately, in more recent times, that has begun to change, and the supermarkets have responded accordingly.

Although the market is growing, there are not a significant number of well-informed, educated consumers. Many people buy organic food because they believe that it has certain properties, which it probably does not have. They take an emotional decision to buy organic food, perhaps for their children or because it is fashionable and they think that it is the right thing to do. Therein lies a danger, because those are thin reasons to purchase such products. A growing market needs to be much more educated and informed. Consumers need to be aware of what they are buying.

Although not necessarily science-based, it must be taken that organic farming offers some public good in respect of the environment and of human and animal health. We need to put that over in a much more realistic and easily understood way, because if the consumer is well informed about organic food and well motivated to purchase it the market will continue to grow.

I hope that the report, our debates on the subject and subsequent Government policy and strategies will help to accelerate the sector's momentum so that with maturity it develops on a solid basis and becomes a serious, although not necessarily huge, part of agriculture and food production.

I agree with much of the report and with what hon. Members have said. The big, magical figure of 70 to 75 per cent. of organic products coming from abroad is often quoted, but as a considerable amount of organic fruit cannot be grown here, it would be more helpful to have figures that show what could genuinely be grown in this country as a substitute for the imported food.

Supermarkets are part of the solution rather than the problem. They need to be brought on board in a much clearer and more concise way, especially in respect of the branding and labelling of information. There is a problem with certain words and I shall use the word "quality" as an illustration. Obviously, there has been a big debate on that issue. Supermarkets often use the term to refer to colour, shape, shelf life or

packaging. I was amazed to see square watermelons being grown so that they could be packed more economically. I hope that that does not affect their quality as consumers understand that term. When consumers look for quality, they are looking for freshness, taste, texture and the absence of residual chemicals on the skin.

Quality can have two entirely different meanings. We must ensure that consumers get what they understand to be quality produce, not what supermarkets want to impose on them. Shelf life and colour are advantages for supermarkets rather than what consumers want. I hope that we can begin to have a debate about the quality of food that involves education, because our children should grow up with an understanding of food quality, taste and so on.

In addition, supermarkets must not monopolise or dominate the market. For example, they already buy all the grade 1 fruit that they can, allowing very little to be available in other outlets. The supermarkets may not sell all that fruit, but they deny others the opportunity to compete in the market because they cannot physically buy the produce. We must not let that happen in the organic sector. Supermarkets must not become so powerful that they can scoop up all the organic produce, decide what they will sell and even throw away quite a lot of it. We must ensure that local outlets, box schemes and the other ways in which people can access and buy organic produce are preserved, protected and enhanced. Local markets must be strengthened to enable them to sell not only local organic produce, but organic produce generally.

I certainly support the idea of an organic stewardship scheme to create a more level playing field in respect of support, but it must be based on getting established public goods, as with other stewardship campaigns. That might be a little more difficult, and we need to consider how we can proceed. That is linked to the old chestnut of not gold-plating regulations from Europe. As our organic farmers move into the sector, we must ensure that they are not disadvantaged in any way, including by our Government's imposing increased costs and hurdles on them. We must ensure that our farmers have a good opportunity to compete, which relates partly to certification. Organic produce can be grown in slightly different circumstances abroad, perhaps at lower cost. We need an agreed certification system, which will create a level playing field.

Various hon. Members have referred to increased research into the sector, which I very much support. It is a question not so much of amount as of how the research is conducted. I well remember a considerable number of MAFF research centres in my part of the world, the south-west, virtually all of which have closed down. The centre that was very close to where I live is now a major manufacturer of pasties, mainly because it had a wonderfully large facility that could create a huge heat or go right down to the minus scale. It was an amazing facility used mainly for testing seeds.

That has now all gone, but we must recognise that independent research is becoming increasingly important. Conflicting research material affects too many aspects of Government policy, which confuses the general public and the consumer. It applies to economics, where different accountancy firms or universities may reach vastly different conclusions about the effects of foot and mouth disease on the rural economy. It also applies to the environment when different estimates of the effects of mobile telephone masts are made. On organic issues, we do not want research emanating from one particular standpoint being juxtaposed with different research undertaken perhaps by a commercially biased organisation.

It is easy to become cynical because if a sponsor offers a large sum of money to produce a report, it is often expected that it would broadly reinforce whatever the sponsor wants to prove. That undermines public confidence in the integrity of so-called independent reports. We must return to a genuinely independent research tradition undertaken and funded directly by the Government. Far too many commercial pressures are placed on research institutions to produce the right results. Cost hypothecation occurred under the previous Conservative Government, according to which industry should cover the cost of its own research and regulation. That is all right up to a point, but when it starts to become polluted by commercial bias, the integrity and value of the research is undermined.

We need education and training if we want consumers to be informed. Organic farming is not for everyone. It demands a high standard of farming. We must devote the time and effort necessary to ensure that those entering agriculture have the requisite training to operate in the marketplace. Otherwise we shall always be susceptible to imports.

4.32 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I, too, congratulate the Chairman and the members of the Agriculture Committee on an excellent report. We are pressed for time, with important developments taking place elsewhere in the Palace of Westminster, so I shall be extremely brief.

The report is excellent on more than one count, as it seems to have satisfied all the various parties interested in this important issue. We congratulate the Government on what they have achieved so far and we welcome the various aid schemes. The first organic aid scheme was initiated by the previous Government and continued, as the organic farming scheme, by the present Government. They may have been bounced into reopening the scheme, but we welcome it nevertheless. Such has been its attraction since the launch in January that by May the farming community had already taken up two thirds of the earmarked £13 million.

The expansion of interest among those in the agricultural sector has been matched by an expansion in the market. Organic production and marketing has increased all over the world. Within the European Union the likely demand for organic products far exceeds the supply of land. Within the United Kingdom organic farming has continued to increase, at a rate of about 25 per cent. per annum since the 1990s. The growth in demand is likely to continue to increase rapidly over the next five years. According to Tesco, Britain's biggest supermarket chain, its sales of organic food will quadruple and be worth approximately £1 billion a year by 2005. Its consumer research also suggests that one in four households now try organic products, mainly because of concerns about children's health.

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

Paragraph 5 of the report's introduction states:

"Many claims have been made for organically produced foods, ranging from food quality, food safety, animal welfare, support for rural communities and fair trade, and benefits for the environment."

Such claims have been mentioned in today's debate and many of them are widely accepted by the public as honest and accurate. However, the report continues:

"We have seen no evidence to enable us to state unequivocally that any of these claims are always and invariably true."

That point was made by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock).

The report is right to proceed with caution. That caution has also been expressed in this debate. That view is endorsed by no less a person than Sir John Krebs, the chairman of the Food Standards Agency. When interviewed by the BBC he said of consumers who went for organic produce:

"They are not getting value for money, in my opinion and in the opinion of the Food Standards Agency, if they think they are buying food with extra nutritional quality or extra safety. We don't have the evidence to support those claims. I think the organic industry relies on image and that image is one that many consumers clearly want to sign up to. However, I do think they should be aware of what they're getting when they pay quite a substantial premium in the shops."

Joan Ruddock: In quoting Sir John Krebs, the hon. Gentleman makes the point that the jury are out on nutritional value, but will he recognise that there is a body of evidence to suggest that there are real environmental benefits that the consumer is right to accept?

Mr. Moss: I do not dispute that point. I am simply endorsing the view expressed in the report about some of the claims that are made. I am convinced that there are environmental benefits from organic farming, but it must be right to exercise a little caution.

Value for money is important. Despite pledging to reduce the price of organic produce, many of the supermarkets acknowledge that organic goods will continue to be more expensive, as they say it costs farmers more to produce organic food. Despite the concerns that I have expressed, the statistics show that the market is increasing. However, the majority of organic produce sold in our shops is imported. The figure is about 70 per cent. and rising according to the Soil Association. Sir John Krebs argues that the dominance of imports in the organic market raises further doubts over claims of its advantages, simply because we do not have the checks on the quality of that food and its production before it is imported.

The National Farmers Union recently warned that imports would continue to supply the bulk of the UK organic market unless significant changes were made to the support offered to organic farmers in Britain. According to the NFU, in spite of the rising demand for organic food, the number of UK farmers applying to convert is levelling off or even falling after several years of steady growth. Perhaps the Minister would like to comment on that. In the light of that decline in conversion rates, the NFU persistently calls for further conversion support for UK farmers.

It was notable that the Committee could not unequivocally state that the many claims regarding organic farming are true. Despite that caution, the Committee concluded, and I agree, that the opportunity for agriculture is enormous. It found that it is vital that the organic sector develops it ability to market its products effectively so that it appeals not to sentiment but to proven benefits.

The thrust of the recommendations was towards marketing, not production support. We fully support the Committee's recommendation that the Government encourage the further development of local marketing schemes such as farmers markets—I mention Stroud in that regard, because it is always mentioned in such debates—and box schemes. The Committee recommended that the Government work with those responsible for the promotion of organic production to ensure that rural funds are channelled into the development of supply partnerships and farmer-controlled co-operatives. We also support the Committee's call to the Government to stimulate the development of new small abattoirs. We do not want to go down that road too far this afternoon, but it is as important an ingredient to the organic scheme of things as it is to our livestock farmers.

The Committee highlighted the problem of certification and common standards. We agree with the recommendation that the Government should encourage the effort of the organic certification bodies to co-operate more closely with each other, perhaps ultimately leading to some mergers. Seven bodies in the United Kingdom can certify organic products, of which the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards is just one. The Committee also advocates discussion between the farm assurance schemes and the organic sector so that common standards and protocols can be met. We believe that to be right. While the Committee did not advocate a single or exclusive scheme, its point about common protocols and standards is vital.

Consumers buy British organic produce because they believe it to be of the highest quality. The Government should work towards establishing an international standard, such as that of the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements. After all, under British regulations, it takes two years for produce to be designated as organic. That is far stricter than the rules that apply in many other countries. Yet again, British producers seem to be operating on an unlevel playing field. If and when international standards are agreed to, they should be replicated for food labelling.

The point was made earlier that the CAP reforms and the move towards extensification should benefit organic farmers because of the less intensive and more environmentally sustainable methods that will come in their wake. However, those are medium-term rather than immediate benefits. The Opposition would go further than the Committee recommended on support. All European Union member states support farmers converting to organic methods and we believe that Britain should match the help afforded our continental counterparts. We would fund increased payments

through redirecting the rural development regulation and seek our share of the redistribution of the tobacco subsidies paid under the CAP.

We agree with the Committee's recommendations in paragraphs 31 to 34 on research and development. Research should be increased. The Government's agriculture and research development budget has been skewed by their over-hasty efforts to endorse the movement to genetic modification. We would redirect £120 million of the agricultural research and development budget, to augment the £2.1 million that is currently spent on research and development for organic farming. If one listens to farmers who have attempted to join the organic farming scheme, one finds that there have been hiccups and mismanagement. Far too often, farmers spend money to start the conversion process, only to learn that funding has run out. The Government need to reform the system of conversion support, to guarantee support to suitably qualified farmers before they embark on conversion.

We agree with the recommendation that the Government should give British organic produce priority in public purchasing, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford said.

4.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): We have had an interesting debate, and I appreciate the way in which it was introduced by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). The Select Committee's report was challenging, thoughtful and pragmatic. It reflected the views of those who made representations, and we responded to the challenges in our response to the report.

I am pleased to participate in the debate, in which all speakers agreed that we should encourage development of the organic sector. There is no disagreement between the Government, the Committee and those who participated in the debate. The issue is how to encourage that development and apply the policies.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) rightly referred to the popularity of the organic sector and its enormous expansion, which hon. Members may be interested to know is greater in the United Kingdom than elsewhere in Europe. We should recognise that, but we cannot ignore the way in which foot and mouth disease has affected the organic sector.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the trend in conversion, which has been downwards, but that is almost entirely due to the disruption caused by foot and mouth disease. There has been a problem with getting people onto farms and with compliance with standards for the production of organic livestock. However, the regulatory body—the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards—has provided mechanisms to cover the worst effects on affected farmers. Even with the current problems facing agriculture, in the current year to July, 687 farmers have converted, at a cost of £8.7 million, and we have funds available for more conversions this year.

UKROFS is undergoing its five-yearly review, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said. The review is close to completion and I expect to receive it shortly. I am sure that it will examine some of the issues that he raised. It is important to achieve high quality of service delivery and to make services more responsive to the needs of those who use them. The review does not directly address the shape of the organic sector, so it does not, for example, consider how individual operators should be certified. However, that matter was raised during the debate and we must consider it. The review considers how regulation of the sector is best dealt with, how the interface with European standards is best handled and how advice to Ministers and Departments is best delivered. The answers to those questions will set the framework in which the organic sector operates in future, so it is important to get that right, and the Agriculture Committee examined that closely.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), who referred to standards: it is important in the European context to ensure that people understand them. We must also discuss the contribution of organic farming and how to deliver it. Some hon. Members suggested that one way might be to set targets for conversion of land to organic farming or the production of organic food. Targets have a role and can be useful, but we must think carefully about their effects, particularly if they are arbitrary and no one quite knows whether they are desirable or achievable. There have been debates on targets in the organic sector, and there are differing views there about their value and whether they can have a detrimental effect on prices and the strength of the market. I think that the Select Committee's conclusions on targets are correct.

I agree that there is a need for a strategy. We agreed at the Copenhagen conference, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) mentioned, to sign the declaration on organic standards. Work is taking place on that: meetings are being held on developing an EU-wide strategy. We are considering how to put together an organic farming strategy.

That strategy might be influenced by our manifesto commitment to set up an independent policy commission on achieving the aim of a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and foods sector within a thriving rural economy. I am sure that that commission will examine a whole range of issues, including organic farming. That will be useful in influencing the debate on how we develop and shape a strategy.

The Agriculture Committee's report provided an important contribution to the debate, especially as we approach the mid-term evaluation of the English rural development programme, which will take place in 2003. Several hon. Members, including the hon. Members for South-East Cornwall and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), spoke about the role of an organic stewardship scheme. The Government do not rule out the possibility of such a scheme, which has much stronger justification than, for example, on-going maintenance payments of the kind provided by some European countries. However, many people in the

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

agricultural world recognise that automatic production support for agriculture is giving way to more sophisticated, flexible, diverse and targeted support.

An organic stewardship scheme would have to deliver environmental benefits. It could not be a scheme to which people could simply sign up and get money for nothing. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford said that organic farming can deliver environmental benefits, and I accept that. Much independent research demonstrates that, and I think that organic farming lends itself to organic stewardship schemes, but there are difficulties, for example with the horticultural sector, as the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) rightly said. The horticultural sector is unsupported. It is very adaptable and has a long record of innovation, but in terms of organic development, it is discriminated against by the nature of subsidies. They do not help it towards organic conversion. We should think about that, but the answer probably lies in general reform of the common agricultural policy, which is one of the Government's objectives.

Mr. Drew: I want to tease out the Minister's meaning. I understand completely that horticulture is outside the subsidy regime, but is he saying that we might be able to renegotiate the basis on which support is given? Could we make progress, for example, through using environmental schemes that already exist?

Mr. Morley: One advantage of the way in which we have been developing the countryside stewardship scheme is that it can be targeted at different outcomes and objectives. Horticulture is quite a challenging sector in terms of environmental benefits. It competes with other food sectors that receive production subsidies, which means that making choices is difficult for it. If we have CAP reform, a more unified market opportunity might make things easier for it. That is all I was saying.

Research and development is an important subject, and some confused issues surround it. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall, who talked about redirecting the research and development budget into the organic sector, seems to misunderstand the budget's role. It is true that we have doubled the budget for organic R and D, and I am very pleased about that. However, at present 25 per cent. of our R and D budget is committed to agri-environmental research, from which the organic sector will receive benefits. Moreover, research into projects such as biological control, pest and disease forecasting, animal health and welfare, farm waste management, plant nutrition and conservation is funded by our general R and D budget, from which the organic sector receives considerable benefits.

It is sometimes said that the biotech sector gets more funding than the organic sector, but even that is misleading. Biological pest control, for example, which is very important to organic management, is included under the heading of biotech. People get confused when they look at budgets in terms of headings. In fact, we are giving broad-based benefits to the whole agricultural sector. Such benefits go beyond the allocation of particular budgets. We are taking such efforts further. We are funding current projects to discover how to apply some of the conventional sector R and D to the organic sector. In trying to adapt existing R and D to make it relevant to the organic sector, we are maximising the available resources.

Joan Ruddock: I hear clearly what my hon. Friend says, but why, then, does the organic sector feel that the Government are not funding necessary research into organics? Is he open to, or has he received, submissions from the sector about research that the Government are not currently prepared to fund in any of the ways that he has described?

Mr. Morley: I am sure that we have received submissions, although I have not seen any detailed ones myself. As with every other sector, we are always open to suggestions and ideas on how budgets are applied. Of course, the organic sector's point is that it would like more money to be spent on it. That is not an unusual request—it is made by all the sectors with which we deal.

In keeping with the request from my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford, we accept the Committee's recommendation that consumers be given sound information on which to base judgments on what to buy. Part of our R and D is based on that principle. We also accept that the Committee is asking for organic and conventional agriculture to be seen as interdependent. Indeed, the way in which we apply R and D is an example of that interdependency. We strongly support the view that the agricultural sector needs to be seen in the round, and that each part of it should contribute to diversity of practice and to consumer choice. We further accept that the issue of sustainability—on which the organic sector places great emphasis, of course—is at the heart of the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall mentioned imports, and I accept what he says. Of course, we are stronger in some food products—eggs, meat and milk, for example—than in others. It is in respect of fruit and veg and cereals that a lot of work needs to be done.

I also accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud said about our former colleague, George Turner, who made a very significant contribution to the Committee and to agriculture in general. I hope that that is recognised.

The right hon. Member for Fylde raised the issue of horticulture, with which I have dealt. He also asked about environmental objectives. One agriculture objective that we have built in, and which we have made very clear, is our public service agreement target for increasing the number of farmland birds.

The hon. Member for Angus referred to standards and validation, on which I have touched, and they are important issues. A whole range of organisations are involved in providing standards. There is nothing wrong with having such a range, but given that various quality assurance schemes and types of labelling exist these days, there might be an argument for considering some consolidation over time. We understand the point that was made, and I am sure that changes—perhaps resulting from the UKROFS review—will occur that might encourage such consolidation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 2 July 2001

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Fahri Bici and Avni Dudi

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor-General what conclusions she has reached concerning the three paratroopers alleged to have shot Fahri Bici and Avni Dudi. [1079]

The Solicitor-General: Fahri Bici and Avni Dudi were killed in Pristina in Kosovo on 2 July 1999. Three British servicemen who were part of the KFOR peacekeeping operation fired the shots that killed them. Fahri Bici had been sitting on the roof of a moving car firing a Kalashnikov automatic rifle into the air. The servicemen said Fahri Bici pointed the rifle at them after being told to drop the weapon. They said they shot at him as they feared their lives were in danger. Avni Dudi was a passenger in the car and was killed by bullets aimed at Fahri Bici. Two other passengers in the car were severely injured.

The Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police carried out an investigation. Following consultation with the former Attorney-General, Lord Williams, the Army Prosecuting Authority sought the advice of Treasury Counsel. Treasury Counsel advised the Army Prosecuting Authority that there was no realistic prospect of conviction of the three servicemen of any criminal offences. Lord Williams accepted the view of the Army Prosecuting Authority that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mercenaries

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to monitor and regulate companies recruiting and selling the services of mercenaries; and when he will publish a consultative paper on options for future regulation. [979]

Peter Hain: The aim of the Green Paper, recommended by the Foreign Affairs Committee in its Report on Sierra Leone published in February 1999, is to set out options for the regulation of mercenaries and private military companies. Work on the Green Paper is continuing; the issues are complex. I am unable at present to give a specific date for publication of the paper.

Meanwhile, guidance has been issued to British embassies requiring them to report any contact with companies which may be judged to fall within this sector.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit *(a)* Kuwait, *(b)* Libya, *(c)* the West Bank, *(d)* Jerusalem, *(e)* Albania, *(f)* Ukraine, *(g)* Denmark, *(h)* Chechnya, *(i)* Syria, *(j)* Egypt and *(k)* Jordan. [1122]

Mr. Straw: I am currently considering proposals for visits to a number of countries. The House will be informed when decisions have been made.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he next plans to visit *(a)* Bangladesh, *(b)* Nepal, *(c)* Hong Kong, *(d)* North Korea, *(e)* South Korea, *(f)* Malaysia, *(g)* the Moluccas Islands, *(h)* Rwanda, *(i)* the Democratic Republic of the Congo, *(j)* the Central African Republic, *(k)* Mozambique, *(l)* Nigeria, *(m)* Brazil, *(n)* Bolivia, *(o)* Mexico, *(p)* Guatamala and *(q)* Peru; [1819]

(2) when he next plans to visit *(a)* Anguilla, *(b)* the British Antarctic Territory, *(c)* the British Indian Ocean Territory, *(d)* the British Virgin Islands, *(e)* the Cayman Islands, *(f)* Montserrat, *(g)* Pitcairn, *(h)* St. Helena and the St. Helena dependencies, *(i)* South Georgia, *(j)* Gibraltar and *(k)* the South Sandwich Islands; [1817]

(3) when he next plans to visit *(a)* the Caribbean, *(b)* Bermuda, *(c)* the Falkland Islands, *(d)* the Turks and Caicos Islands, *(e)* Canada, *(f)* Australia, *(g)* New Zealand, *(h)* Indonesia, *(i)* Turkey, *(j)* Saudi Arabia, *(k)* South Africa, *(l)* Chile, *(m)* Argentina, *(n)* Sudan, *(o)* Taiwan, *(p)* the UAE, *(q)* Iran and *(r)* Cuba. [1818]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 78W.

Settlement Application

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision will be made on the settlement application under Islamabad reference 496527. [1646]

Mr. Bradshaw: The application for a settlement visa was refused by the Entry Clearance Officer at Islamabad on 17 May. Notice of appeal against the refusal was received on 12 June. It is not possible to predict when the appeal will be heard by the Immigration and Appellate Authority, nor the eventual determination.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down in 2000. [1004]

Dr. Moonie: During 2000 a total of 19 service volunteers participated in studies conducted at CBD Porton Down. A further 25 RAF service volunteers participated in a CBD study conducted at RAF Honington in 2000.

Thirty five civilian volunteers also took part in the human volunteer programme at Porton Down during 2000.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a list of the titles and dates of films held by the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, which record the establishment's trials with biological warfare simulants in public places since 1971. [997]

Dr. Moonie: No. The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector at Porton Down has been unable to identify any films recording trials with biological warfare simulants in public places since 1971.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will instruct the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, to conduct research to determine the long-term effects of a single dose of the oripavine derivative TL 2636 on the health of humans. [989]

Dr. Moonie: No. The current evidence suggests that following single, acute doses of the oripavine derivative TL 2636 there are no long-term effects on health. The conduct of a study is, therefore, not warranted.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the comprehensive survey of the service volunteer programme at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, announced on 1 May will examine allegations that service personnel were misled into taking part in experiments at Porton Down. [1003]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 550–51W.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will transfer films from the archives of the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, to the Imperial War Museum. [998]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 196W.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of technical reports compiled by the chemical and biological defence establishment, Porton Down, to record the results of trials carried out between 29 September 1975 and 21 October 1975 in which two simulants were disseminated from the Fleet Tender Cockchafer in Lyme and Weymouth bays. [996]

Dr. Moonie: I am withholding copies of the technical reports under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the protocol drawn up by the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, to carry out the experiment in 1989 in which service personnel were exposed to sarin nerve gas. [987]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many papers in the MRD report series of technical papers produced by the biological defence establishment at Porton Down are unclassified; when this series of papers *(a)* started and *(b)* finished; how many papers in this series were produced in total; and if he will place in the Library a list of the titles and dates of each of the papers in this series. [991]

Dr. Moonie: The MRD series of reports started in 1950 and finished in 1956. Of a total of 20 papers produced during this period, five were originally unclassified. However, Defence Records are now in the process of re-reviewing all 20 reports to establish whether the original classifications still stand. If declassification is possible, reports will be transferred to the PRO. I will arrange for a list detailing these reports to be placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requests he has received from Wiltshire police to assist the Operation Antler team to locate official notices which are alleged to state that volunteers were needed to take part in common cold research at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down. [1734]

Dr. Moonie: My officials were asked to undertake a full search of all service instructions and notices dealing with the Porton Down Service Volunteer Programme. In addition, we have provided research support to the Wiltshire police in examining service unit records, as well as initiating a full trawl by service units and establishments for any relevant records or historical papers.

Lynx Helicopter Accident

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he will publish the accident report on the Lynx helicopter which crashed near Tilton on the Hill, Leicestershire on 17 May 1999; [1082]

(2) if he will publish the preliminary findings of an investigation into the causes of the crash of a Lynx helicopter near Tilton on the Hill, Leicestershire on 17 May 1999. [1083]

Dr. Moonie: The Military Aircraft Accident Summary—a report that summarises the accident report and the findings of the subsequent investigation—will be published shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

The Board of Inquiry proceedings were issued to the families of those killed in the accident earlier this year.

Navigation Marks

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what responsibility his Department has for the maintenance of navigation marks, with special reference to moorings and lighthouses; and what plans he has to review those responsibilities. [1263]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service (RMAS), part of the Warship Support Agency (WSA), is responsible for the maintenance of some 224 navigational buoys, 148 moorings and 12 targets around the coast of the British Isles. The Chief Salvage and Mooring Officer (CSALMO), also part of the WSA, is the tri-Service manager and design authority for Ministry of Defence moorings and is responsible for the oversight of all maintenance work in the UK and of a further 54 moorings

and navigational buoys overseas. Responsibility for lighthouses rests with the three General Lighthouse Authorities (GLAs) administered by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). The GLAs are ultimately responsible through legislation for all navigational marks including those owned by the MOD.

The Government's Better Quality Services (BQS) policy encourages a robust review of services and the opportunity has therefore been taken to explore the obvious synergy between the GLAs and the RMAS.

Exploratory meetings with the GLAs have led to Trinity House, acting on behalf of the three GLAs and with the authority of the DTLR, making an offer for the absorption and maintenance of all MOD navigational buoys in UK waters. The MOD is now assessing the GLAs' offer and an initial meeting took place on 27 June 2001. Further work is required and the MOD and the GLAs have agreed to jointly examine their operations without commitment.

It is unlikely that any firm recommendations will be made before the end of 2001 and implementation will be subject to full consultation with staff and their representatives, as well as requiring ministerial approval in both Departments.

Aberporth

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of his Department's apprenticeships at Aberporth. [843]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 June 2001]:* The apprentice school at Aberporth is run by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), and is staffed by DERA personnel. On completion of their apprenticeship the great majority of apprentices are employed by DERA. As a result, the school forms part of the undertaking that is planned to become QinetiQ plc, as part of the DERA Public-Private Partnership. DERA receives a contribution from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) for various aspects of the apprentice training at the school. The MOD will continue to contribute funding for the apprentices who are attending the school at the date of vesting of assets in QinetiQ plc. Discussions on the funding of future intakes of apprentices will take place during the summer between MOD, QinetiQ plc and trade union representatives, and are scheduled to conclude in September 2001.

Stun Grenades

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many stun grenades have been issued to the Army in the last 12 months; how many have been used in Northern Ireland in the past 12 months; what level of authorisation is required for use of this weapon; and what *(a)* rules and *(b)* guidance applies to its use; [1232]

(2) who has authorised the use of stun grenades in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months. [1121]

Mr. Ingram: The use of stun grenades must be reasonable, proportionate and no more than absolutely necessary in the circumstances. The service personnel concerned are fully trained in how to use them. I am withholding details of numbers, use, level of authorisation and rules of engagement under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF Training Group Defence Agency

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent agreement between his Department and the Horizon consortium to market spare training capacity in the RAF/Training Group Defence Agency. [1594]

Mr. Ingram: The RAF has identified some unavoidable surplus training capacity, particularly in the area of engineering training. Although the RAF has had some success in selling this capacity, it was recognised that it does not have the necessary skills to market, promote and sell opportunities presented by the spare capacity. To maximise both the potential use of the capacity and income generation, the RAF has sought a commercial partner to provide the expertise required.

The Agreement for the Marketing Partnering Arrangement between the RAF and the Horizon consortium, consisting of BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Westland Augusta, PERA and Bournemouth and Poole College, was signed on 30 May 2001. The agreement is for seven years.

In addition to increasing the income received from selling training capacity, the partnership will help to meet the increasing aerospace industry demand for technician training.

East Timor

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British forces are operating in and around the East Timor theatre; and what their role is within the United Nations contingent. [1181]

Mr. Ingram: Four British observers are currently deployed in support of the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). Their roles typically include observation, monitoring and reporting; registration and negotiation between belligerent factions and other agencies. In addition, an Army legal officer has recently been seconded to the Office for Defence Force Development (ODFD) to assist with the development of the new East Timorese Defence Force (ETDF).

Two British servicemen currently serving on exchange programmes with the Australian and New Zealand Defence Forces are also deployed to East Timor with their host units.

WORK AND PENSIONS

New Deal

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Coventry are in the New Deal programme; and how many had been placed in employment up to June. [1178]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Numbers currently on new deal and jobs gained in Coventry

	Numbers currently on as at end March 2001	*Jobs gained to March 2001*
New Deal for Young People	505	1,836
New Deal for Long Term Unemployed aged 25+	138	87
New Deal for Lone Parents	632	559
New Deal 50plus: Employment Credit	202	282
New Deal for Musicians	11	3
New Deal for Partners	8	1

Notes:
1. Figures relate to Coventry 'Unit of Delivery'.
2. Latest figures relate to the period ending March 2001 which were reported in the May Statistical First Release for New Deal for Young People/25 plus and June First Release for New Deal for Lone parents.
3. New Deal 50 plus figures relate to clients claiming the Employment Credit only. Figures relating to the numbers on the ND50 plus caseload are not available.
4. Jobs gained includes those who gain a job while accessing New Deal or as an immediate destination on leaving the programme.
5. New Deal for Disabled People is being piloted in various districts. Coventry is not included in the pilot scheme.

Source:
The New Deal Evaluation Database; except for figures on New Deal for Partners which is collated from management information.

Pensioners (Preserved Rights)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners with preserved rights who are ineligible for local authority support. [1320]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of the numbers of pensioners with preserved rights who are ineligible for local authority support are not available.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the way in which the Pension Credit will operate for claimants whose entitlement to the basic state pension is below 100 per cent. [1461]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Credit forms a key part of the Government's overall strategy for tackling pensioner poverty.

We are completing the design of the Credit and will publish details of our proposals when the Bill is introduced.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library *(a)* a summary and *(b)* full copies of the replies he has received to his consultation paper on the Pension Credit. [1266]

Mr. McCartney: We will be announcing our response to the Pension Credit consultation in due course.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to publish the Pension Credit Bill. [920]

Mr. McCartney: As indicated in the Gracious Speech, we intend to introduce legislation in this Session of Parliament.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people eligible for Pension Credit. [929]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to "The Pension Credit: A consultation paper" (November 2000, Cm 4900).

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the results of and submissions to the Pension Credit consultation process will be placed in the Library. [366]

Mr. McCartney: We will be announcing our response to the Pension Credit consultation in due course.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend the provision to permit benefit claimants to undertake therapeutic work. [20]

Malcolm Wicks: As the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley), said on 22 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 346W, from April 2002 we propose to introduce new rules for people who receive Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support based on incapacity who want to undertake some form of paid work which may ease their way back into full-time employment. We are aware of concerns that the current therapeutic work rules may be of limited use where it is difficult to demonstrate that a particular job would be beneficial to a person's medical condition. The current rules also do not help someone who wants to work on a limited basis in order to have social contact if they do not satisfy the therapeutic requirement. This is why we have reviewed the current position and are introducing some improvements.

Under the proposed changes, the therapeutic work rules will cease to exist. Instead we intend to introduce rules which will allow any person receiving incapacity benefits to:

(a) work for less than 16 hours a week and up to £60.50 for up to six months; with a six month extension for those working with a Personal Adviser, Job Broker or Disability Employment Adviser;

(b) work for maximum earnings of £20 a week with no time limit and no hours limit.

Claimants who undertake sheltered work or are undergoing a hospital treatment programme which includes work, will, as now, be able to earn up to £60.50 a week (April 2001 rates) with no limit on the number of hours they work.

We believe that these rules are much fairer than those that currently exist. Because we are opening up the rules to anyone on incapacity benefits we are giving more people the opportunity of trying paid work. This, together with our other measures to help people find suitable work, will enable people to move off benefits and into work. Also by allowing all claimants to do some paid work without time limit, we will be encouraging those who are otherwise excluded to take part in activities which will help them feel part of, and play a more active role in, their local community. Additionally, of course, there are the rules

which we already have in place to allow claimants to try full-time work or training and return to benefit at the same rate if they have to give up that work or training.

These changes do not affect the position whereby people receiving Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance may do unpaid voluntary work for an unlimited period.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which House of Commons Minister in his Department will have responsibility for matters relating to *(a)* the Child Support Agency, *(b)* the integrated child credit, *(c)* child care, *(d)* maternity/paternity pay and *(e)* the Appeals Service. [1465]

Malcolm Wicks: Departmental ministerial responsibility for these areas in the House of Commons is divided as follows: I am responsible for the Child Support Agency and the Integrated Child Credit; the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), is responsible for Maternity/Paternity pay and the Appeals Service. The Department for Employment and Skills has policy responsibility for child care.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase take-up of the Minimum Income Guarantee. [377]

Mr. McCartney: Our recent national take-up campaign on the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) was a success resulting in 110,286 successful claims to MIG. The average additional income awarded is £20 per week.

We have also increased the lower and upper capital limits to £6,000 and £12,000 respectively. These increases will result in more people becoming newly entitled to MIG and will increase the number of people who will become entitled to the full amount of the MIG.

Additionally, we will continue to work in partnership with the voluntary sector and local authorities to find ways of identifying and encouraging those who are likely to benefit from MIG to claim.

NIRS2

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the total amount of compensation (1) that he expects to be paid as a result of the problems with the NIRS2 computer system; [360]

(2) that has so far been paid as a result of the problems with the NIRS2 computer system. [359]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The delay in the implementation of NIRS2 caused arrears of work in both the Inland Revenue and the then DSS. These arrears are being managed through a recovery plan that has been developed by both Departments and continue to be cleared as quickly as possible. Compensation is being paid as a result of the delays.

Compensation payments to 31 March 2001 total £65.1 million. The estimated compensation costs for 2001–02 cannot yet be quantified.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Walton Group

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the companies and others to whom the claimed qualifying expenditure of £23,705,511 made by Walton Commercial Group Ltd. now Walton Group plc, was made, indicating the reasons for payment and the amount paid to each. [400]

Ms Keeble: The claimed qualifying expenditure was paid to Todd and Benn (Contractors) Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of the Walton Group plc, against invoices for work claimed to be done on the Exchange Flags building, Liverpool.

Pollution

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has conducted into changes in pollution following the implementation of congestion taxes. [810]

Ms Keeble: My Department will be working with local authorities when they develop and implement schemes, to carry out before and after studies to assess schemes' impacts, including changes in levels of air pollution. Modelling work for the Government's 10-Year Plan for Transport published in July 2000 forecasts significant reductions in particulate and oxide of nitrogen emissions by 2010 from a range of measures in the plan, including the introduction of urban congestion charging in a number of towns and cities.

Railtrack

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Railtrack has applied to the Rail Regulator for an interim review of its access charges. [1009]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack has not made any application to the Rail Regulator for an interim review.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of delays to train services during the most recent month for which figures are available are attributable to temporary speed restrictions associated with gauge corner cracking. [1011]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack's Network Performance Report for the four-week period to 26 May 2001 shows that 6 per cent. of delays were attributable to gauge corner cracking. This includes both passenger and freight services.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many temporary speed restrictions remain in place on the national railway network in connection with gauge corner cracking. [1010]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack reports that, as of 25 June, 118 temporary speed restrictions were in place on the national rail network in connection with gauge corner cracking.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in the appointment of a public interest director to the board of Railtrack. [1020]

Mr. Spellar: As part of the Statement of Principles agreed between the Government and Railtrack, the company announced on 2 April the decision to appoint, in consultation with Government, a non-executive director to its main board with the background and credentials to provide a powerful public and consumer interest voice around the boardroom table. The appointment of such a director is currently under review by the nominations committee of the Railtrack Board.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been granted to Railtrack from public funds over the past year; and what contractual safeguards exist to ensure that the money is used for its intended purposes. [1023]

Mr. Spellar: In 2000–01, train operating companies (TOCs) were paid £847 million in Support for Passenger Services (SPRS) by the Franchising Director and the Strategic Rail Authority and £185 million in grants by Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs). Since some 85 per cent. of Railtrack's income is paid to the company by TOCs in access charges, Railtrack's revenue is contingent on that indirect subsidy.

In future, Railtrack will also receive considerable sums in direct grants for track renewals. As part of the Statement of Principles agreed on 2 April between the Government and Railtrack, the Government agreed to bring forward the timing of £1.5 billion of payments due to the company under the Periodic Review. In doing so, the Government have attached strict conditions of increased public accountability and Railtrack has undertaken to spend the Government revenues strictly on improving the railway. A copy of the Statement of Principles has been placed in the Library. None of this new funding has yet been paid.

The main safeguard in respect of all subsidy to Railtrack is the Network Licence and the conditions attached to it by the Rail Regulator. The Regulator's reformed regulatory structure is nearing completion. It comprises the Periodic Review; a strengthened network licence; and new model clauses for clearer and simplified track access agreements with Railtrack's customers, the passenger and freight train operators. The Transport Act 2000 has also strengthened the regulation and accountability of Railtrack. The Regulator now has the powers and resources to ensure that Railtrack delivers on its public service commitments.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the financial position of Railtrack. [1019]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack is a public limited company. Its latest financial position is set out in its 2000–01 Annual Report and Accounts published on 20 June.

Commission for Integrated Transport

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future role of the Commission for Integrated Transport. [1032]

Mr. Spellar: The Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT) was established in July 1999 to provide independent advice on the implementation of integrated transport policy. Its remit was set out in the Integrated Transport White Paper.

CfIT has been asked to monitor progress on the implementation of the 10-Year Plan for Transport, and to identify any further policy measures that might be needed to achieve 10-Year Plan objectives.

At the CfIT Plenary on 22 March 2001 it was decided that the three priority areas for CfIT were to be:

Monitoring, Delivery and Review of the 10-Year Plan

Work on securing best value for public subsidy in the bus industry

European best practice.

Rail Freight

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken by his Department to promote the greater use of the railways for freight. [1028]

Mr. Spellar: Our policy is to help establish an integrated, sustainable freight distribution system to support economic growth and to bring social and environmental benefits. We set out our long-term strategy in the 10-Year Transport Plan in July last year. We have established the Strategic Rail Authority with a duty to promote rail freight. The SRA set out its Strategic Agenda, including its plans for freight, earlier this year and is now consulting the industry on its detailed Freight Strategy.

National Air Traffic Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in the contract negotiations for the National Air Traffic Services public-private partnership. [1035]

Mr. Spellar: The PPP remains subject to certain conditions. We are working with the Airline Group to ensure that those conditions are satisfied at the earliest opportunity.

SPADs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to implement the recommendations of the Uff-Cullen inquiry into technical solutions to the problem of railway signals passed at danger. [1017]

Mr. Spellar: The Government welcomed the publication on 29 March of the Joint Inquiry Report by Lord Cullen and Professor Uff into train protection systems and reaffirmed the Deputy Prime Minister's undertaking to Parliament on 20 July 2000, *Official Report*, columns 549–52, that the measures arising from the report will be brought within the 10-Year Plan for Transport.

The report endorsed the Government's existing policy to install the Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS) across the network by the end of 2003, and set out a programme for the new European Train Control System (ETCS) on high-speed and other main lines.

The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) will be advising the Government on regulations to take ETCS forward and will publish a progress report in September.

Railway Industry

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the state of industrial relations in the railway industry. [1022]

Mr. Spellar: Industrial disputes are properly matters for the employers and the trade unions to resolve.

Successful negotiation between the train operators and the trade unions avoided strike action in all but one of the 25 train operating companies on 25 June. We would greatly regret any possible further industrial action on the railway which would cause yet more inconvenience to passengers.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the Strategic Rail Authority to *(a)* begin the next stage of the competition for the new Wales and Borders franchise and *(b)* recommence the competition for the Central Trains franchise. [1027]

Mr. Spellar: Further announcements will be made by the Strategic Rail Authority in due course.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many additional employees have been recruited by the Strategic Rail Authority during the past year. [1014]

Mr. Spellar: On 1 June 2000, 261 people were working at the shadow Strategic Rail Authority (sSRA), which comprised the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and British Railways Board staff.

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) was set up on 1 February 2001 under the provisions of the Transport Act 2000 , with 330 staff. This included 259 from the sSRA and, to cover additional functions transferred on that date, 70 from the Office of the Rail Regulator (including those working for Rail Passengers Committees) and one from the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The SRA also took responsibility for the 2,297 British Transport Police.

On 1 June 2001, 362 people were working at the SRA.

Second Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made on the feasibility study for a second channel Tunnel. [1031]

Mr. Spellar: At the end of 1999 Eurotunnel sent to the Governments of France and the UK, through the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission, a package relating to two tunnel projects, one road the other rail. Eurotunnel submitted that package in order to discharge an undertaking in the Concession Agreement to submit, before 2000, a proposal for a drive through link.

Eurotunnel described these as proposals which are likely to evolve in the light of technical and economic developments. There is no cause for the Government to take a decision for several years.

Multi-modal Studies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the multi-modal studies. [1033]

Mr. Spellar: The Multi-Modal Studies are looking for solutions to some of the most severe and urgent problems on our transport network. They exemplify our integrated approach to transport and will be central to the delivery of the 10-Year-Plan.

We are moving the studies forward as quickly as possible, bearing in mind their complex nature and the need for full and proper consultation.

Midlands-Manchester Multimodal Study

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ensure that the conclusions of the multi-modal study into the transport corridor between the midlands and Manchester are published in time to be taken into account in the formulation of the new regional planning guidance for the west midlands. [1330]

Mr. Jamieson: The final study report and the Steering Group recommendations will be formally submitted to the West Midlands Regional Planning Body and the North West Regional Assembly in autumn 2001. Interim outputs from the study will be available this August to inform the development of the draft West Midlands Regional Planning Guidance due for publication in autumn 2001.

Ladbroke Grove Rail Disaster

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will respond to the recommendations of Lord Cullen's inquiry into the Ladbroke Grove rail disaster. [1016]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend responded to Part One of Lord Cullen's report in a statement issued on 19 June, the day of its publication. The statement reads:

"I am grateful to Lord Cullen for today's report into the causes of the Ladbroke Grove rail crash. On such a day our thoughts turn to the survivors and bereaved of that tragic accident. We cannot begin to imagine the pain and suffering felt by these people and it is important that we bear their experiences in mind as we act to improve rail safety in this country.

Safety is paramount and at the very heart of our policies on revitalising the railways. Our railways are safe, but we must never be complacent. Safety is a matter of continual improvement and I have asked the HSC to ensure that the recommendations are acted upon, and to report to me within six months.

I now await the final part of Lord Cullen's report into the culture, management and regulation of safety on the railways. This will be a particularly valuable document which will enable us to take the further necessary measures to enhance rail safety."

Bus Companies

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his

Department is taking to encourage bus companies in the south-east of England to offer commuter services to London; and if he will make a statement. [1068]

Ms Keeble: The 10-Year Transport Plan recognises that coach services have a valuable role in expanding transport options including for commuting journeys into major cities. Coach services will benefit from increased investment in the strategic road network, including measures to tackle bottlenecks and improve network management.

The public consultation draft of the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy said that additional commuter and scheduled express coach services on particular routes could fulfil a valuable role in supplementing rail capacity. It said that Transport for London would work with coach operators to review opportunities for extending the role of commuter coaches, taking account of traffic and parking issues. I understand that the Mayor will publish his final Transport Strategy shortly.

Housing

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his definition is of decent in the context of housing standards. [1128]

Ms Keeble: A decent home must be above the current statutory minimum standard for housing (the fitness standard); be in a reasonable state of repair; have modern facilities and services; and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

Guidance has been issued providing more detail for social landlords on how the elements of the definition should be interpreted. A copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the target outputs for SRB-funded housing units between 1997 and 2001. [1741]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 56W.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to encourage housing associations to improve the energy efficiency of their *(a)* existing properties and *(b)* new build schemes; what plans he has to support district heating schemes; and what plans he has to encourage housing associations to use solar energy in new build social housing. [1112]

Ms Keeble: My Department, together with the Housing Corporation, is taking a number of measures to improve the energy efficiency of registered social landlords' (RSLs) properties.

For existing properties, the Housing Corporation's Performance Standards require RSLs to assess the energy efficiency of their housing stock and, through planned improvement work, to help local authorities to meet their obligations under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

The Housing Corporation is also promoting the adoption of sustainable development action plans in the RSL sector. These will require RSLs to adopt environmental good practice across a range of activities including refurbishment, management and maintenance of their existing stock. An environmental management system specifically designed for RSLs is being developed and will be launched later this year. In addition, the Housing Corporation's Innovation and Good Practice (IGP) programme will continue to fund projects that raise awareness of environmental considerations. A number of good practice guides and tools to help RSLs address energy management for affordable warmth and energy services has already been developed.

For new build schemes and the rehabilitation of existing dwellings, the Housing Corporation's Scheme Development Standards specify a minimum Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) energy rating which must be achieved. In its guidance the Corporation strongly encourages the achievement of SAP ratings above the minimum level.

In addition, from 1 April this year, RSLs have been required to use a recently developed system of Housing Quality Indicators (HQIs) in planning new schemes. HQIs provide a basis for assessing the quality of schemes against 10 key aspects of design, including energy efficiency and sustainability.

The Housing Corporation is investigating the potential for RSLs to use Combined Heat and Power (CHP) schemes as part of its wider promotion of energy efficiency. Most CHP schemes are on a scale which is not generally suitable for RSL properties, but the Corporation is currently participating in an EU-wide project to scope the potential for micro-CHP systems. We will consider the scope for greater use of CHP in relation to RSL properties in the light of the fundings in this report.

The Housing Corporation is actively encouraging RSLs to consider the use of Photovoltaic (PV) roofs and solar water heating. A number of RSLs now use these systems and a network of RSLs with an interest in PV roofs is being established to address areas of concern and to develop good practice guidance on the use of PV roof and solar water heating systems within the sector. However, at present the costs are high with conventional systems.

Housing (Yorkshire)

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further changes he is intending to make to regional planning guidance for Yorkshire and the Humber about the distribution of housebuilding in west Yorkshire. [2073]

Ms Keeble: Over 800 comments have been received in response to the proposed changes to draft Regional Planning Guidance for Yorkshire and the Humber which were published in March 2001. Many of the consultation responses welcome the proposed changes as they improve RPG and provide a clear strategy for sustainable development in the region. An issue has been raised about the distribution of housing in west Yorkshire which we consider needs to be resolved by publishing further changes to RPG for public consultation.

The level of housing provision in west Yorkshire published for consultation in March 2001 was 6,175 dwellings per year, some 800 more than originally proposed in the Regional Assembly's draft RPG. However, where these additional 800 houses per year should be located within west Yorkshire was not specified. Instead, it was proposed that it be established in the next review of RPG in a few years' time. The Regional Assembly and the local authorities have not objected to the proposed increase. Environmental groups have objected, while developers have expressed support or argued that provision should be further increased. There were also significant arguments put forward that the distribution of the additional housing within west Yorkshire should be determined now rather than left to the next review of RPG. In the light of all comments received, we are proposing that there should be no further change to the overall amount of housing in west Yorkshire, but that its distribution between local authorities should be set out now. This will provide greater certainty in the planning system, and will assist urban renaissance by helping to reduce the need to travel by providing homes near to jobs. The following annual rates of housebuilding are proposed:

	Number
Bradford	1,540
Calderdale	450
Kirklees	1,310
Leeds	1,930
Wakefield	950

Comments on these revised figures are being invited over a six week period. These will be considered, along with all the representations already received, before RPG is finalised later in the year.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to publish PPG8 on mobile phone masts. [1239]

Ms Keeble: On 16 March 2001, my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing, Planning and Construction announced a series of important improvements to the planning arrangements for telecommunications development. We shall introduce the rules and publish the revised Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG8) on Telecommunications Development to implement the changes at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received calling for health risks to be considered as part of the planning consideration for mobile phone masts. [1238]

Ms Keeble: The Department has received centrally in the last year 363 letters from Members of Parliament and 541 letters from members of the public and local planning authorities about the amenity or health aspects related to mobile phone masts. These are in addition to responses to last year's consultation exercise seeking views on possible changes to the planning laws relating to telecommunications masts and associated guidance (365 in total).

House Sales (Seller's Packs)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation requiring persons selling a house to provide a pack of information to prospective purchasers. [1317]

Ms Keeble: We remain committed to seller's packs, as set out in our manifesto. Legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows. In the meantime, we are pressing ahead, in consultation with consumer representatives and the professional bodies, with developing the detailed contents of the seller's pack to prepare the ground for a smooth introduction across England and Wales.

Railways

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for how many years the Railway Development Fund will run. [1440]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-Year Plan for Transport provides for spending on the Rail Modernisation Fund over the years of the plan, that is to 2010–11.

Concessionary Bus Fares

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to equalise the age of qualification for the national concessionary bus fares scheme. [1419]

Ms Keeble: We are making good progress with this issue and have already introduced the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[H.L.]* which will equalise at 60 the age at which both men and women become eligible for travel concessions.

Aviation

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to commission a strategic study on the environmental impacts of aviation in the UK to match the strategic study of the economic impacts of aviation included in the Developing Aviation White Paper process. [1587]

Mr. Jamieson: In December last year we published a consultation document, "The Future of Aviation". This examined the main issues underpinning air transport policy, including the need to tackle the environmental effects of aviation. We are giving careful consideration to the responses to the consultation document and propose to publish a summary of them later this summer. Alongside the consultation document, we published a paper, "Valuing the External Costs of Aviation", which reviews some of the literature about the valuation of noise, air quality and climate change impacts and considers the implications of aviation meeting its estimated external costs.

The study of regional airports and regional air services announced in the 1998 Transport White Paper, covering the north of England, the midlands, the south-west of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was completed last year. The findings are currently being reviewed as part of a UK-wide Regional Co-ordination

study. A key component of this process has been the commissioning of studies on the impact of air transport (including associated surface transport) on local air qualify and noise at 23 regional airports. This work will provide an important input to a comprehensive appraisal of options for development of capacity at regional airports under a range of potential national policy scenarios.

We are also studying issues in the south-east and east of England. The South East and East of England Regional Air Service Study (SERAS) is examining all options for future development of airports in the south-east and east of England. The appraisal process includes an examination of environmental impacts, including noise and local air quality, climate change, urbanisation, land-take, biodiversity, landscape, heritage and designated areas. We propose to issue individual regional consultation documents for all these regions around the turn of the year.

All of these strands of work will feed into the new air transport White Paper, which we hope to publish next year.

Ice Falls

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the information leaflets available to report ice falls from aeroplanes; and what plans he has to make them more widely available. [1301]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has produced a comprehensive leaflet entitled "Icefalls", which provides detailed information on how icefalls occur, how incidents can be reported and how these reports are investigated.

Members of the public wishing to seek more information on the subject or to report an icefall incident most commonly contact either the CAA directly or the local police or council. Copies of the leaflet have therefore been supplied to the Police Service and the Local Government Association as well as to the British Airports Authority. The information in the leaflet is also available on the CAA's website for those with internet access. There are currently no further plans to make the leaflet more widely available.

Transport Safety

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what statistics he collates about the safety of different forms of transportation and the costs in each case of undertaking further measures to improve safety. [1472]

Mr. Jamieson: The DTLR collects and publishes statistics on accidents in all main forms of transport. These can be found in a variety of publications and in the compendium volume "Transport Statistics Great Britain 2000 edition". There is also a comparative table (Table 51) in "Road Accidents Great Britain: 1999" which shows casualty rates by mode of transport since 1990 and also provides a 1990–99 average casualty rate for each mode. Both of these publications are available in the Libraries of the House. Costs depend on the measures adopted and on local circumstances.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the operating results of Ordnance Survey were in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [1325]

Ms Keeble: As disclosed in Ordnance Survey's annual published accounts, the operating surplus/deficit for each year since 1997 is as follows:

	£000
1996–97	[1](5,115)
1997–98	[1](2,197)
1998–99	[1](8,862)
1999–2000	[2]12,590

[1] Deficit
[2] Surplus

Regional Planning

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government plan to publish (1) a draft regional planning guidance for *(a)* the Nort-West and Merseyside, *(b)* the North-East and *(c)* the East Midlands; [1277]

(2) a definitive version of regional planning guidance for *(a)* the South-West and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside. [1278]

Mr. Keeble: We plan to issue final regional planning guidance (RPG) for the South-West later this summer and final RPG for Yorkshire and the Humber in the autumn. The Proposed Changes to draft PRG for the East Midlands were published in April and we plan to issue the final version in the autumn. The Proposed Changes to draft PRG for the North-East were published in april and we plan to issue the final version by the end of the year. We intend to publish the Proposed Changes to draft (RPG) for the North-West in spring 2002, assuming that the Panel report is received shortly.

Postal Voting

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use and conduct of postal voting during the general and local elections in June. [1282]

Mr. Raynsford: The Electoral Commission, which was established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, will publish a report on various aspects of the administration of the general election, in accordance with section 5 of the Act.

Local Government

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what reasons underlay the decision to publish the Local

Authorities (Executive and Alternative Arrangements) (Modification of Enactments and Further Provisions) (England) Order 2001 on 18 June, revoke it on 19 June and publish the Local Authorities (Executive and Alternative Arrangements) (Modification of Enactments and Other Provisions) (England) Order 2001 on 19 June. [1477]

Mr. Raynsford: The Local Authorities (Executive and Alternative Arrangements) (Modification of Enactments and Further Provisions) (England) Order 2001 was laid before Parliament on 19 June 2001 and expressed to come into force on 20 June 2001, thus breaking the convention that negative resolution statutory instruments come into force at least 21 days after being laid before Parliament.

Unfortunately, it had not been the Government's intention to break the convention. Accordingly, the Order was revoked and replaced with an Order in similar terms—the Local Authorities (Executive and Alternative Arrangements) (Modification of Enactments and Other Provisions) (England) Order 2001—with a date of coming into force of 11 July, which is 21 days after it was laid. This means that all the necessary legislation is now in place to allow councils to implement the leader and cabinet form of executive arrangement.

Departmental Responsibility

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the areas of responsibility that have *(a)* been transferred from his Department to other Departments and *(b)* been transferred to his Department from other Departments since 8 June. [1439]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) came into existence on 9 June 2001. It will carry out all the functions for which its predecessor Department, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) was responsible except:

Sustainable development, environmental protection and the protection and enhancement of the landscape, countryside and wildlife, together with related sponsorship responsibilities, transferred to the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

The Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Offices for the Regions, bodies with cross-departmental responsibilities for which DETR had management responsibility, transferred to the Cabinet Office.

Sponsorship of the construction industry transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Sponsorship of the Regional Development Agencies transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Electoral law and local byelaws, including sponsorship responsibilities, transferred to DTLR from the Home Office.

The Fire Service, including its sponsorship responsibilities, transferred to DTLR from the Home Office.

Fire Authorities

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's current responsibilities in respect of funding for fire authorities. [630]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department has the same responsibilities as were formerly held by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for the revenue support grant system and as the Home Office for the issue of fire service credit approvals.

Positive Discrimination

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent advice he has taken from other European countries which allow positive discrimination in the selection of candidates for elected office. [644]

Mr. Raynsford: Government officials recently attended a seminar aiming to examine what can be learned from legal frameworks in other European countries in regard to changing the law to improve women's representation in politics.

The Government will be preparing legislation to allow political parties to make positive moves to increase the representation of women in public life.

Council Tax

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to allow residents to elect to pay their council tax by 12 payments rather than 10. [2167]

Dr. Whitehead: The statutory instalment scheme gives council tax payers the right to pay their council in 10 monthly instalments. However, local authorities can agree to a different payment regime, such as 12 monthly payments or 52 weekly payments. I believe it is right that local authorities should be able to make such decisions in response to individual or local circumstances because they are ultimately answerable to local people for the service they provide.

HEALTH

Waiting Times

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* longest and *(b)* shortest waiting times were for (i) heart operations, (ii) hip replacements and (iii) cancer treatment (A) in North Yorkshire and (B) nationally in (1) 1997, (2) 1998, (3) 1999, (4) 2000 and (5) 2001. [6]

Mr. Hutton: The tables show waiting times for waiting list and booked admissions to National Health Service hospitals in England and the Northern and Yorkshire region for the years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 for hip replacements, heart operations, and cancer treatment. Data have been given on the distribution of waiting times to give a more informative picture than the two most extreme results. Data for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Waiting list and booked admissions by waiting time for primary hip replacement operations only or revisions, by health authority area of residence—NHS hospitals, England 1997–98 to 1999–2000

	1997–98		1998–99		1999–2000	
	North Yorkshire HA	England	North Yorkshire HA	England	North Yorkshire HA	England
Episodes with a valid waiting time	430	29,979	3,973	33,563	567	33,526
Waiting time						
Up to six weeks	84	3,617	584	3,825	82	3,865
Six weeks to three months	78	4,164	552	4,239	89	4,375
Three to six months	102	7,062	840	7,227	110	7,106
Six to nine months	68	5,478	641	5,930	89	5,820
Nine months to one year	34	4,434	702	5,116	87	4,681
Over one year	64	5,224	654	7,226	110	7,679
Not known	23	1,105	325	1,052	152	1,150

Notes:

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

The main operation is the first of four operation fields in the HES data set, and is usually the most resource intensive procedure performed during the episode.

Operation (OPCS4R) and diagnosis (ICD10) codes used are as follows:

Primary hip replacement operations—operation codes W37–39 and W46–48, excluding emergency admissions, and those with primary diagnosis S72 (fractured neck of femur). Revision operations—W37.3, W38.3, W39.3, W46.3, W47.3, W48.3, excluding emergency admissions and those with a primary diagnosis of S72 (fractured neck of femur).

Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.

Data in this table are not adjusted for shortfalls.

Patients whose waiting time is 'not known' are from a waiting list or booked admission where the date of decision to admit was invalid, therefore a duration of elective wait cannot be calculated.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Waiting list and booked admissions for heart operations by waiting time and health authority area of residence—NHS hospitals, England 1997–98 to 1999–2000

	1997–98		1998–99		1999–2000	
	North Yorkshire HA	England	North Yorkshire HA	England	North Yorkshire HA	England
Episodes with a valid waiting time	577	93,599	797	107,741	958	107,868
Waiting time						
Up to six weeks	267	38,106	356	42,314	398	43,216
Six weeks to three months	83	20,718	116	23,755	152	25,376
Three to six months	93	16,557	129	20,348	181	20,346
Six to nine months	55	7,914	65	8,860	72	8,509
Nine months to one year	38	6,157	73	7,231	77	5,539
Over one year	41	4,147	58	5,233	78	4,882
Not known	226	9,908	674	8,340	617	9,656

Notes:

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

The main operation is the first of four operation fields in the HES data set and is usually the most resource intensive procedure performed during the episode.

Operation (OPCS4R) codes used are as follows K01-K71.

Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.

Patients whose waiting time is 'not known' are from a waiting list or booked admission where the date of decision to admit was invalid, therefore a duration of elective wait cannot be calculated.

Data in this table are not adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Waiting list and booked admissions for cancer patients by waiting time, main diagnosis/operation and health authority area of residence—NHS hospitals, England 1997–98 to 1999–2000

	Episodes with a valid waiting time	*Up to six weeks*	*Six weeks to three months*	*Three to six months*	*Six to nine months*	*Nine months to one year*	*Over one year*	*Not known*
1997–98								
North Yorkshire HA								
Cancer (1)	4,275	3,541	437	178	52	48	19	1,052
Cancer (2)	3,640	2,958	401	163	51	48	19	847
England								
Cancer (1)	378,013	333,352	28,614	10,766	2,950	1,234	1,097	88,667
Cancer (2)	293,533	252,988	25,674	9,961	2,756	1,155	999	66,058
1998–99								
North Yorkshire HA								
Cancer (1)	5,364	4,625	329	200	71	89	50	2,215
Cancer (2)	4,875	4,162	312	197	69	88	47	2,070
England								
Cancer (1)	344,548	298,459	30,401	10,861	2,593	1,147	1,087	90,569
Cancer (2)	303,471	260,301	28,094	10,428	2,499	1,113	1,036	69,455
1999–2000								
North Yorkshire HA								
Cancer (1)	6,763	5,895	478	236	75	50	29	2,146
Cancer (2)	6,057	5,230	446	232	73	49	27	1,964
England								
Cancer (1)	333,806	289,163	30,903	9,921	2,240	770	809	89,699
Cancer (2)	294,935	253,251	28,498	9,523	2,159	734	770	67,106

Notes:
An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.
The main operation is the first of four operation fields in the HES data set and is usually the most resource intensive procedure performed during the episode.
The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
Operation (OPCS4R) and diagnosis (ICD10) codes used are as follows:
Cancer (1)—Diagnosis 'C00-C97 Malignant/Neoplasms'
Cancer (2)—Diagnosis 'C00-C97 Malignant/Neoplasms' with any surgical operation or procedure.
Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.
Data in this table are not adjusted for shortfalls.
Patients whose waiting time is 'not known' are from a waiting list or booked admission where the date of decision to admit was invalid, therefore a duration of elective wait cannot be calculated.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Health Services (London)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action the Government are taking to recruit more *(a)* nurses, *(b)* physiotherapists, *(c)* occupational therapists and *(d)* GPs in London; and if he will make a statement; [412]

(2) what action the Government are taking to recruit *(a)* more community psychiatric nurses and *(b)* more approved social workers in London; [416]

(3) what action the Government are taking to recruit more psychiatrists in London. [414]

Mr. Hutton: We are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention in the National Health Service for all staff, including London. Examples include investing in fair pay, encouraging the NHS to become a better employer, increasing training commissions for all professional groups, attracting former staff back to the NHS, encouraging flexible retirement, and supporting more effective, collaborative international recruitment where appropriate. We are also funding a recruitment campaign to raise the profile of social work and improve recruitment rates into social work.

In places where recruitment is most difficult, we are also looking at accommodation issues. For example, a NHS housing co-ordinator has been appointed in London to improve the recruitment and retention of key workers. The NHS Plan aims to provide 2000 residential units in London by 2004.

From March 2000 until May 2001, 661 nurses and midwives returned to practice in London.

By 2004 we will increase the number of general practitioners, nationally, by at least 2000 and increase the number of GP training places by 550. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also announced a package of measures aimed at improving recruitment and retention of GPs on 13 March 2001. Other measures such as personal medical service pilots will attract GPs into deprived areas. In London we already have 265 GP registrars in training

and are looking to increase training capacity to increase local supply. We are also seeing if we can increase the number of feeder senior house officer posts to increase the flow into the GP registrar grade. Increasing numbers of newly qualified pre-registration house officers are now getting exposure to general practice as part of their year's training.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about additional funding being given to London health authorities in recognition of the additional costs incurred by the health service in London; and if he will make a statement. [417]

Mr. Hutton: We have received one representation in the last three months about additional funding being given to London health authorities in recognition of the additional costs incurred by the health services in London.

Following the planning round an additional £155 million for 2001–02 has been made available to the National Health Service, partly in recognition of additional financial pressures. London received £25.4 million of this.

Primary Care Trusts

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how primary care trusts will be accountable for their use of public resources. [1129]

Mr. Hutton: The chief executive of the primary care trust (PCT), as accountable officer, is responsible for ensuring that the PCT carries out its functions in such a way as to ensure proper stewardship of public resources.

PCTs will continue to be accountable to their health authority by means of an annual accountability agreement which sets out agreed aims and targets for improving health, health services and value for money.

NHS Recruitment

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications there were to train as a *(a)* general practitioner, *(b)* social worker, *(c)* physiotherapist and *(d)* special therapist in (i) London and (ii) England and Wales in each year since 1996. [1113]

Mr. Hutton: Consistent data for the number of applicants to train as a general practitioner in England have been collected only this year.

In 2001 the number of applications from GP registrars to begin training in August was 2,239. There were 539 applications to the North and South Thames deaneries which cover London.

Data for the number of social workers are not collected centrally.

Data for the number of physiotherapists are collected by the University and Colleges Admissions Service for the whole of the United Kingdom. Data for London are not available separately.

Year	*Number of applications*
1997	28,534
1998	27,985
1999	26,316
2000	25,025

Specialist therapists are not a recognised staff group.

Northwick Park Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hospital medical staff, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff were employed at Northwick Park hospital in each year since 1996. [1110]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not collected in the format requested. Information by National Health Service trust is provided in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, hospital medical staff and consultants at Northwick Park NHS Trust, Central Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust and North West London Hospitals NHS Trust as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	All hospital medical staff	*Consultants*	*Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, of which:*	*Qualified staff*	*Unqualified staff*
1996	410	130	1,320	1,160	160
Northwick Park	250	80	820	730	90
Central Middlesex hospital	160	50	500	430	70
1997	430	140	1,210	1,130	80
Northwick Park	270	80	770	730	50
Central Middlesex hospital	160	60	440	410	30
1998	430	150	1,250	1,150	100
Northwick Park	280	90	770	740	30
Central Middlesex hospital	150	60	480	410	60
1999					
NW London Hospitals	460	150	1,210	1,120	90
2000					
NW London Hospitals	470	160	1,250	1,140	110

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, hospital medical staff and consultants at Northwick Park NHS Trust, Central Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust and North West London Hospitals NHS Trust as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	All hospital medical staff	*Consultants*	*Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, of which:*	*Qualified staff*	*Unqualified staff*
1996	500	170	1,610	1,350	260
Northwick Park	290	90	1,040	860	170
Central Middlesex hospital	210	80	570	480	90
1997	500	170	1,530	1,360	170
Northwick Park	300	90	1,030	900	140
Central Middlesex hospital	200	80	490	460	40
1998	510	180	1,560	1,370	180
Northwick Park	320	100	1,000	910	90
Central Middlesex hospital	190	80	550	460	90
1999					
NW London Hospitals	530	170	1,560	1,340	210
2000					
NW London Hospitals	540	180	1,700	1,430	280

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
4. In 1999 Northwick Park NHS Trust merged with Central Middlesex Hospitals NHS Trust to form North West London Hospitals NHS Trust

Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

NHS Consultants (Income Disclosure)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what disclosure he requires from consultants employed by the National Health Service of those consultants' income from private medical practice. [1422]

Mr. Hutton: At the end of each financial year, whole-time consultants are asked to submit a return to their National Health Service employer, indicating that their annual gross income from private practice has not exceeded 10 per cent. of their gross NHS salary. An employer may require fully audited accounts if they consider that they have grounds for seeking more information. Consultants on other types of contract are not required to disclose their private practice earnings to their NHS employer.

NHS Staff Numbers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses left service in the NHS in the last two years. [1609]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Commission for Health Improvement

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will define the role and terms of reference of the Commission for Health Improvement. [1410]

Mr. Hutton: The role of the Commission is set out in section 20 of the Health Act 1999 and further defined in the Commission for Health Improvement (Functions) Regulations 2000. The main functions are:

to provide advice or information to the National Health Service on clinical governance (clinical governance is a framework through which NHS organisations are accountable for continuously improving the quality of clinical services and safeguarding high standards of care);

to review and report on local clinical governance arrangements;

to investigate and report on the management, provision or quality of healthcare for which NHS bodies have responsibility;

to carry out national service reviews of particular types of healthcare.

Alzheimer's

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be introduced to help carers who look after those with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. [1179]

Jacqui Smith: We fully recognise the vital role played by carers and are doing much to improve the support and services available to help them in their caring role.

Our approach to support carers is outlined in "Caring About Carers", the report of the National Carers Strategy which highlighted the need for better information for carers, better support for carers and better care for carers. Two of the objectives of the strategy were to ensure more breaks are available to carers and to provide services direct to carers and to support them in their caring role through the carers grants.

We will increase the amount of money put aside specifically to support carers in England through the carers grant from £50 million last year to £70 million this year, £85 million in 2002–03 and £100 million in 2003–04; this will be an important step towards ensuring that up to 75,000 more carers receive a break from their caring duties.

In addition to this, The National Service Framework for Older People was published on 27 March 2001. The NSF builds the needs and appropriate support of carers into all the standards it sets.

Standard 7 of the NSF relates to mental health and will ensure that older people with dementia and depression have access to integrated health services to ensure effective diagnosis, treatment and support for them and their carers.

Importantly, this standard will also ensure that carers receive the information, advice and practical help such as counselling services or short-term breaks to support them in caring for the older person.

Junior Doctors

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he estimates that junior doctors will be required to work a maximum of 56 hours a week. [R] [1483]

Mr. Hutton: Monitoring carried out at the end of March 2001 indicated that only some 21 per cent. of junior doctors were still working more than 56 hours a week.

From 1 August this year, pre-registration house officers will by contract be limited to an average 56 hours a week maximum, and all other junior doctors, Senior House Officers and Specialist Registrars, will be similarly protected from August 2003.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out, for each Department where responsibilities have been changed since 8 June, the areas of responsibility that have been transferred *(a)* from and *(b)* to each Department from other Departments; and what new responsibilities have been assigned. [1156]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The information is contained in press notices which I have placed in the Libraries of the House.

Cabinet Champions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Cabinet champions he has appointed to date. [1155]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* I have appointed the Cabinet. From time to time I invite Ministers to take on additional roles. For example, my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) continues to be a champion for older people.

European Affairs

Mr. Spring: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Ministers in each Government Department with responsibility for European affairs. [855]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The Minister for Europe in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain). Practice on the allocation of responsibility for European matters in other Departments varies. Some designate a single Minister to deal with all European matters, but most divide responsibilities between several Ministers, including the ministerial head of the Department, as appropriate.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Spring: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the items discussed and the conclusions reached during his meeting with the President of the European Commission on 25 June. [1148]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* I had a productive working breakfast with the President of the European Commission on 25 June. We discussed a range of EU issues, including enlargement, the ongoing debate on the future of the Union and the EU economy. On the latter subject, we briefly discussed the progress of the euro, on which I emphasised that the Government's policy remained unchanged. I also reiterated the Government's strong commitment to an economic reform agenda capable of realising the objective set at the Lisbon Council last year for the EU to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.

Cabinet Committees

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to establish a Cabinet sub-committee on foreign affairs which would include non-Government members. [1740]

The Prime Minister: None.

Public Services

Mr. Jack: To ask the Prime Minister if he will define the phrase "world class" in the context of his recent speech relating to public services. [1649]

The Prime Minister: Our agenda on public service reform is clear. We want to improve our public services through a combination of investment and reform. First, we will set high minimum standards in every public service. Secondly, we will build public services around the consumer. And thirdly, we will put the front-line of public service provision first.

International Law

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on advising *(a)* Parliament and *(b)* Her Majesty the Queen about violations of sovereignty and international law in the UK. [1953]

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy is to keep Her Majesty The Queen and Parliament informed of significant developments in our international relations.

Poverty

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to mitigate poverty in the United Kingdom. [1755]

The Prime Minister: The Government's objectives for tackling poverty are set out in their Second Annual Report on tackling poverty and social exclusion "Opportunity for all: one year on—making a difference" (Cm 4865—September 2000).

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Students

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students were in higher education on *(a)* 1 May 2000 and *(b)* 1 May 2001; and what is the projected figure for 1 May 2002. [24]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is given in the following table:

Higher education students[1] in England—as at 1 December

Thousand

	Number
1999–2000[2]	1,610
2000–01[3]	1,652
2001–02[4]	1,710

[1] Full-time and part-time, postgraduate and undergraduate, home and overseas, including the Open University
[2] Actual
[3] Provisional
[4] Projected

Teachers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male (1) primary and (2) secondary school teachers are aged (i) 20 to 24, (ii) 25 to 29, (iii) 30 to 34, (iv) 35 to 39, (v) 40 to 44, (vi) 45 to 49, (vii) 50 to 54, (viii) 55 to 59, (ix) 60 to 65, (x) 65 to 70 and (xi) 70 years plus. [388]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Full-time teachers by age in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary school sector in England at March 1999 (the latest date available), as published in the DfEE publication "Statistics of Education: Teachers: England and Wales: 2000 edition" were as follows:

	Nursery/primary			*Secondary*		
Age of teacher	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Under 25	900	9,000	9,800	1,900	4,300	6,200
25 to 29	3,100	23,200	26,300	8,800	15,700	24,600
30 to 34	3,300	16,100	19,400	8,900	11,200	20,000
35 to 39	3,000	11,600	14,600	9,400	10,000	19,400
40 to 44	3,900	20,100	24,000	13,300	15,300	28,600
45 to 49	6,600	30,800	37,400	20,200	19,400	39,700
50 to 54	5,200	22,100	27,200	14,900	13,200	28,100
55 to 59	1,500	7,500	9,000	4,300	4,600	8,900
60 to 64	200	1,000	1,200	800	800	1,500
65 and over	[1]—	100	100	[1]—	[1]—	100
All ages	27,770	141,400	169,100	82,500	94,500	177,100

[1] Less than 50 teachers

Note:
Totals may not be the sum of the component parts because of rounding

School Meals (Stockton, South)

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in Stockton, South have school meals provided by the local authority. [1094]

Mr. Timms: The latest information available is shown in the following table.

School meal arrangements—January 2000

	Stockton, South	*England*
Primary schools		
Number of pupils eligible for a free school meal	1,538	816,994
Percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal[1]	15.4	18.4
Number of pupils who took a free school meal	1,333	671,486
Percentage of pupils who took a free school meal[1]	13.4	15.0
Secondary schools		
Number of pupils eligible for a free school meal	1,524	523,630
Percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal[1]	18.6	16.5
Number of pupils who took a free school meal	984	368,303
Percentage of pupils who took a free school meal[1]	12.0	11.6

[1] Number of pupils eligible for a free school meal and taking a free school meal expressed as a percentage of all day pupils

Comprehensive School System

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her Department's aims for a comprehensive school system are. [1130]

Mr. Timms: Our aims for a comprehensive school system are to give all young people the opportunity to acquire the skills, attitudes and formal qualifications necessary for their personal development, lifelong learning, work and citizenship. This means that all schools must deliver a broad and balanced curriculum including literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. At secondary level they must also provide high-quality pathways able to meet the needs of individuals, be they academic or vocational. In order to better achieve these aims, we want to increase diversity by enabling each school to develop a distinct mission, ethos and character and, provided it demonstrates success, have the autonomy to manage its own affairs.

School Places (Bromley)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in the London borough of Bromley have not had an offer of a secondary school place for September. [1268]

Mr. Timms: As of 25 June, 152 children in Bromley were still to be made an offer of a secondary school place for September. However, appeals are still taking place, and some parents may also be holding offers of places in neighbouring boroughs. As in previous years, the LEA will be negotiating with their schools to take on additional pupils. They also have powers to direct the admission of pupils for whom no school place can otherwise be found.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review the effects of the Greenwich Judgment, particularly with regard to the number of out-of-borough pupils in schools in the London borough of Bromley. [1270]

Mr. Timms: We have listened carefully to representations that we should seek to reverse the effect of the Greenwich Judgment. However, when we consulted on the Bill that became the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 there was no evidence of a groundswell of opinion nationally for doing so, and we have no reason to alter that view. The judgment was a sensible recognition of cross-LEA patterns of travel to schools. It prevented LEAs from refusing applications for schools simply on the basis that a child might not live in their specific administrative area.

Parents can apply for any school, regardless of where they live. If a school is oversubscribed, admission criteria are applied to decide which applicants should be allocated the available places. The Code of Practice on School Admissions encourages admission authorities to operate admission arrangements which reflect the reality of pupil admission patterns, especially where there tends to be a high level of cross-border movement.

Typical criteria used give priority where there is a sibling already at the school, to those who attend a named feeder school, who have a medical condition, live in a defined catchment area or who live closest to the school. Admission authorities for schools must review and consult on their admission arrangements each year, and this gives an opportunity to introduce any changes they consider to be in the best interests of local parents and children.

In many cases, a child's nearest school may be in another authority area. This is one reason why there is so much cross-border travel. Cross-LEA travel to school is a well-established practice in London, and pre-dates the Greenwich judgment. It is one of many factors that LEAs must take into account when planning and organising the provision of school places in their area.

Supply and demand of places is finely balanced at present in Bromley with significant growth predicted. A new secondary school will open in September 2003.

LEA Councillors (Disqualifications)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will have discussions with other relevant Ministers about introducing legislation to make agency teaching staff subject to the same disqualifications from serving as councillors on their local education authority as teaching staff directly employed by the schools or local education authority. [1335]

Mr. Timms: Agency teachers are already subject to the same legislation.

Teaching Assistants (Staffordshire)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new posts of teaching assistant she plans to fund during the current financial year; how such funding will be distributed; and what Staffordshire's share will be. [1337]

Mr. Timms: The appointment and deployment of teaching assistants are matters for individual schools and local education authorities to consider in the light of local needs and circumstances, so I cannot say how many posts will be created this financial year. But the numbers of full-time equivalent teaching assistants rose by over 25,000 between 1999 and 2001. During the period April 1999 to March 2004, we are making available around £750 million to local education authorities in England to meet the cost of recruiting, maintaining and training this level of new teaching assistants. The Department has allocated funds this year to LEAs on the basis of 80 per cent. to primary and nursery schools and 20 per cent. to secondary and special schools and Pupil Referral Units. Staffordshire's share for 2001–02 is £3,174,241.

Modern Languages

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers are qualified to teach *(a)* Urdu, *(b)* Bengali, *(c)* Gujerati, *(d)* Hindi, *(e)* Mandarin, *(f)* Cantonese and *(g)* modern languages; how many teacher training places are available for the teaching of such languages; and if she will make a statement on her policy on the teaching of such languages in schools. [1396]

Mr. Timms: Data on the number of teachers qualified to teach these languages are not collected centrally.

The total number of teacher training places available for all modern languages is set annually by the Government and allocated to providers by the Teacher Training Agency. In 2001–02, 2,050 places on courses of initial teacher training in modern languages will be available. That figure does not include the employment-based training places for modern languages available though the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes. Providers themselves determine the languages in which they will offer training courses.

The National Curriculum requires schools to offer at least one of the working languages of the European Union, but schools are free to offer additional languages, including those spoken in the local community. The development of specialist Language Colleges is intended further to widen the language-learning possibilities on offer. The Colleges now offer over 20 different languages, including Urdu, Bengali, Gujerati, Hindi and Chinese.

Teacher Shortages

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of teacher shortages in Castle Point *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools; and what action she will take to remove those shortages. [1485]

Mr. Timms: We do not collect data on anticipated vacancies in schools. Information on the number of teacher vacancies is collected once a year in January as part of the annual census of teachers and vacancies. However, information is not available at individual constituency level.

University Staff

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many academic staff at universities in the UK resigned their posts in the first three months of this year who would otherwise have been employed on 31 March and included in the RAE submissions either as research active or as not research active; how many of them were re-engaged *(a)* to teach

and *(b)* to continue research broken down by university and unit of assessment; and if she will make a statement. [1494]

Margaret Hodge: This information is not available.

Special Advisers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Special Advisers in her Department together with their date of appointment and their responsibilities; which of them are authorised to speak to the media; and if she will make a statement. [1497]

Estelle Morris: Special Advisers have not yet been appointed.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the pupil to teacher ratio was in secondary schools *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [1611]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table.

The ratio has improved for the first time in 10 years, following the increases in funding we have made for schools: funding per pupil since 1997–98 has increased by an average of £540 in real terms.

Pupil:teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools

Position in January each year	*Pupil:teacher ratio*
2001[1]	17.1
2000	17.2
1999	17.0
1998	16.9
1997	16.7

[1] Provisional

Maths Teachers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacancies there are for mathematics teachers in English secondary schools. [1614]

Mr. Timms: At 18 January 2001 there were 410 full-time vacancies, which represents approximately 2.1 per cent. of mathematics teachers.

AS-Levels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will set out the *(a)* remit and *(b)* timetable of the review of AS-levels and details of the process of reporting the results of the review. [1618]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The review will concentrate on the examination and assessment requirements of the new advanced level qualifications. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked for a first report in July on those issues and a further report in December in the light of the summer results.

The outcome of the QCA review will be made public together with the Government's response.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many pupils have sat the new AS levels in the current year; what the average number of subjects studied was; and what the cost of the new AS level exams has been for schools; [1626]

(2) how many students in further education colleges have undertaken AS levels in the current year; and what the cost of the exams has been to further education colleges. [1627]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information is not available, but an announcement on Advanced level results will be made on 16 August.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the areas of responsibility that have *(a)* been transferred from her Department to other Departments and *(b)* been transferred to her Department from other Departments since 8 June. [1619]

Estelle Morris: The Department for Education and Skills came into being on 9 June, with responsibility for the education, skills and lifelong learning responsibilities of the former Department for Education and Employment. Information on the distribution of the remaining responsibilities of the former DfEE is set out in the following table.

Transferred to	*Areas of responsibility*
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	Employment policy Civil rights for disabled people Policy on age (with the exception of the Article 13 Employment Directive) Employment Service Sponsorship of the Disability Rights Commission
Home Office	Work Permits (UK)
Department of Trade and Industry	Implementation of Article 13 Employment Directive with respect to age, religion and sexual orientation Race equality in employment including Race Relations Employment Advisory Service Equality Direct Work-life balance policy
Women and Equality Unit (in the Cabinet Office)	Gender legislation and policy Sponsorship of the Equal Opportunities Commission Kingsmill Review of Women's Employment and Pay Sexual orientation issues (other than Article 13)

International policy is being handled in a joint unit located in the DWP, reporting to me and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. No responsibilities have been transferred from other Departments to the Department for Education and Skills.

Secondary Schools

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received regarding admission policies for secondary schools. [1620]

Mr. Timms: As part of the consultation exercise on the Green Paper "Schools—Building on Success", we received 421 responses from a number of organisations, LEAs, teachers, governors and parents which commented on secondary schools, some of which addressed admissions directly. Common themes have been the need for maximum access to good local schools, and for admission authorities to adopt a more co-ordinated approach to the admission process.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on admissions to secondary schools. [1624]

Mr. Timms: We introduced a new admissions framework for all schools in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Its aim was to promote parental choice and make the admissions system fairer and easier for parents. A new statutory requirement was imposed on admission authorities requiring them to consult each other annually, before determining their admission arrangements. Where local agreement cannot be reached, admission authorities can object to an independent Schools Adjudicator or, where appropriate, to the Secretary of State.

School admission arrangements are decided locally and admission authorities are free to choose what arrangements to use, although they must be clear, fair and objective and operated in a reasonable manner in line with guidance contained in the Code of Practice on School Admissions.

Parents have the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel if refused a place at their preferred school.

Graduation Award

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consultation has taken place with teachers on the introduction of the new over-arching graduation award for 19-year-olds. [1621]

Mr. Timms: The Government asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in December 1999 to consult on the "graduation certificate" proposal which was set out in the Social Exclusion Unit's report "Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training". The idea behind the certificate was to encourage all young people to stay in learning until 19.

The extensive consultation during 1999 and early 2000 covered a range of interested parties including teachers. We will consider what further consultation will be needed in taking forward the most recent proposal by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions were held with the Learning and Skills Council on the introduction of the new graduation award for 19-year-olds. [1625]

Mr. Timms: The Further Education Funding Council was involved in exploring the proposal for a graduation certificate included in the Social Exclusion Unit's report "Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training". The Learning and Skills Council have an on-going role in the current work being done by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on that proposal, and they will be involved in the development of any new award.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the new graduation award for 19-year-olds will be available to those studying at the further education colleges post-16; and if further education colleges will be expected to hold graduation ceremonies. [1628]

Mr. Timms: The award would be for all young people to attain by 19 years of age, and would be available to young people learning in a variety of settings including further education colleges. We will need to consider what the appropriate form and content of any ceremonies to recognise and celebrate young people's achievement of the award should be.

Teacher Training

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will set out the targets for recruitment into teacher training for each of the next three years for *(a)* BEd courses, *(b)* PGCE courses and *(c)* GTTP. [1622]

Mr. Timms: The target for recruitment to initial teacher training courses at institutions in England for 2001-02 is 29,890. The indicative targets for 2002–03 and 2003-04 respectively are 29,535 and 29,095. The targets are not split between undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Decisions on the allocation of teacher training places, including between undergraduate and postgraduate courses, are made by the Teacher Training Agency.

My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced on 12 March this year an extra 570 places on the Graduate Teacher Programme that will bring the total, in due course, to 2,250 a year.

Admission Appeals Panels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what analysis has been undertaken by her Department of the impact of the introduction of independent admission appeals panels on the number of appeals upheld. [1623]

Mr. Timms: The Department has commissioned research into the operation of independent appeal panels and a report on its findings is due in January 2002. In 1999-2000 (the latest year for which figures are available), 89,200 admission appeals were lodged by parents, although only 62,700 appeals reached an appeal panel. Of these, 21,500 appeals were decided in the parents favour, representing 34 per cent. of all appeals heard by a panel.

The introduction of independent appeal panels has not shown a marked impact on the success rate of appeals; at secondary school level, the percentage of appeals being decided in parents' favour has remained stable at 32 per cent. for the last three years. At primary level, where class size legislation has placed restrictions on appeal panels, there has been a drop in the percentage of successful appeals over the last three years, from 47 per cent. in 1997–98 to 39 per cent. in 1999–2000.

Education Reform

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to issue the White Paper on education reform. [1572]

Mr. Timms: The Government will issue a White Paper on education reform before the summer adjournment.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Paper Recycling

Ms Walley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on phase one of the House of Commons paper recycling scheme. [1747]

Mr. Kirkwood: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms; I have asked him to write to the hon. Lady.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what dates KPMG received letters from Carlisle Holdings during its study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; if she will place copies of these letters in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [994]

Clare Short: To the Department's knowledge KPMG only received three letters from Carlisle Holdings dated 10 August 2000, 18 August 2000 and 9 April 2001. The correspondence is private to the parties concerned.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place in the Library a copy of the report arising from the study commissioned from KPMG by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; and on what date this report was *(a)* completed and *(b)* received by her Department. [992]

Clare Short: The report is for disclosure only to DFID and the Government of Belize. The final report was issued by KPMG on 24 May 2001 and received by the Department on 25 May 2001.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she plans to hold meetings with the Belize Government to discuss progress on the Commonwealth Debt Initiative and the effect of tax exemptions and public investment companies on pro-poor programmes. [995]

Clare Short: A team from DFID's Caribbean office will be visiting Belize next month to discuss these and other issues.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what meetings KPMG requested with representatives of the two public investment companies during its study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; and if she will make a statement. [993]

Clare Short: KPMG requested information on the two public investment companies from the Government of Belize. As far as the Department is aware KPMG did not request meetings with representatives of the two companies.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date she asked the Permanent Secretary of her Department to investigate a possible conflict of interest by KPMG over a study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; on what date her Department met KPMG to discuss the issue of a possible conflict of interest; and if she will make a statement. [1007]

Clare Short: International consultants engaged by the DFID typically work for a number of different clients and our standard contract requires them to ensure there is no conflict of interest. Following the submission of a report that failed to fulfil the original terms of reference, my Permanent Secretary was assured of an impartial Final Report from the consultant when he spoke to a senior partner of KPMG on 18 May.

Lord Ashcroft

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date her Department received a request for documents under the Data Protection Act 1998 from Lord Ashcroft; and on what dates her Department replied to the request. [1008]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development received a subject access request from Lord Ashcroft's solicitors, under the Data Protection Act 1998, on 12 February 2001. A reply was issued on 23 March 2001, within the 40-day deadline required by the Act.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date her Department received a letter from Lord Ashcroft and Carlisle Holdings regarding the remarks made at the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle in 1999; on what date her Department responded to the letter; if she will place copies of the correspondence in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [1006]

Clare Short: We have no record of any such correspondence.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Clean Coal Technology

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for UK involvement in the recently announced US research project into clean coal technology; and if she will make a statement. [1442]

Mr. Wilson: This Government attach importance to developing cleaner coal technologies (CCT) to keep options open for diversity and security of energy supply in the UK and I recently announced a review into the case for support for a CCT demonstration plant. We have close links with the US cleaner coal technologies programme and some technologies developed in the UK are involved in the US demonstration programme. A new Memorandum of Understanding between my Department and the US Department of Energy on Energy R&D, signed in November last year, provides a framework for further co-operation and we expect a number of collaborative projects to emerge.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if progress on the development of clean coal technology will be included in the Energy Review; and if she will make a statement. [1441]

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Any review of energy must look at the role of coal. The study that I announced recently on the case for cleaner coal power demonstration plant will be an important part of this discussion, and the results of this study will inform the work of the PIU Energy Review.

Working Time Regulations

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's plans to consult on amending the Working Time Regulations to remove the qualifying period for paid annual leave. [2077]

Alan Johnson: I am pleased to announce that the consultation has been launched. The Government are consulting on proposals to remove the qualifying period and introduce a system of accrual of the entitlement to paid annual leave in the first year.

I have placed copies of the consultation document in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies may also be obtained from Room UG139, Department of Trade and Industry, 1 Victoria street, London SW1H 0ET; by telephone on 020–7215 0445; or via the Department of Trade and Industry website at: www.dti.gov.uk/er/worktimeregs/palconsult.pdf.

All responses to the consultation must be received by Friday, 27 July 2001.

Competition Law

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many alleged breaches of the Competition Act 1998 have been reported to the Office of Fair Trading; how many investigations have been conducted into such breaches; and what the outcome was in each case, indicating the level of fines imposed. [748]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Between the coming into force of the main provisions of the Competition Act 1998 on 1 March 2000 and the end of May 2001, the Office of Fair Trading has received over 5,000 complaints alleging a breach of the Competition Act 1998, or the complex monopoly provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. These complaints have resulted in 2,065 preliminary inquiries being opened to consider the allegations. Of these, 68 resulted in investigations of which 34 investigations are on-going.

The Office of Fair Trading will conduct an investigation when the Director General of Fair Trading is satisfied that he has reasonable grounds to believe that an infringement of the prohibitions contained in the Act has taken place.

The Director General of Fair Trading has issued one infringement decision and one non-infringement decision resulting from the investigations. He imposed a fine of £3.2 million on Napp Pharmaceutical Holdings Ltd. Napp have appealed his decision.

ERDF

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the EU Regional Development Fund goes towards the city of Coventry; and what is the annual amount. [1182]

Alan Johnson: Up to £68 million (based on current exchange rates) has been awarded to projects in the Coventry and Warwickshire area from the Structural Fund Programmes operating during the period 1997–99. These programmes are now closed.

This resource has had a direct impact on Coventry in two ways: first, offers of grant have been made to support projects operating in Coventry itself; and secondly, grant has been awarded to reclaim sites and support projects in areas adjacent to the Coventry border thus generating a major beneficial economic effect on the citizens of Coventry.

The 2000–06 Objective 2 and 3 programmes are still in their infancy but to date £12 million grant has been awarded to Coventry from the Objective 3 ESF programme. The West Midlands Objective 3 Regional budget for 2000 and 2001 is £80 million, at current exchange rates, and commitments so far total £45 million across the region. So far no offers have yet been made anywhere in the region under the Objective 2 programme, launched by Ministers in April this year. However, a number of proposals are under consideration from the Coventry Partnership, and it is expected that Coventry will be major beneficiaries of this programme.

Foot and Mouth (Devon)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of foot and mouth disease on the foreign language school industry in Devon; and if she will make a statement. [4]

Mr. Michael: I have been asked to reply.

Various assessments have been made by organisations in the south-west of the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak on businesses, including in Devon, although it might not be possible from these to identify specifically the impact on the foreign language school industry.

Government recognise that foot and mouth has had an impact on a wide range of businesses and have put in place a package of measures to help recovery. Advice on the assistance is available through Business Link on telephone number 0845 600 9006. The Government have also allocated to the British Tourist Authority (BTA) an extra £14.2 million to help promote Britain abroad as an attractive tourist destination. The BTA's recovery plan includes targeted activity to encourage overseas students to continue to learn English here.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

City Status

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will make a statement on what the criteria are for determining the award of city status to towns; [1338]

(2) if he will make the criteria for determining the award of city status more transparent; and if he will make a statement. [1339]

Mr. Wills: City status is not a right that can be claimed by the meeting of specific criteria, but an honour granted by the Queen, on ministerial advice, under the Royal Prerogative. A competition for grants of city status to mark Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee will be launched shortly. It is expected that guidance will be provided to local authorities, at that stage, as to the main factors which will be taken into account by Ministers before my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor submits his recommendations to the Queen.

The Lord Chancellor himself will take responsibility for this matter. Although I, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), will be responsible for answering questions in this House on city status, we shall not be involved in the consideration process because of our constituencies potential interests in the outcome.

Open Government

Helen Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how he will monitor the Government's commitment to openness in Government Departments. [615]

Mr. Wills: The Government report to Parliament annually on the operation of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which is the current regime governing access to information held by Government Departments and many non-departmental public bodies.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor expects to publish the Monitoring Report on the Code of Practice for the year 2000 shortly. This report includes information about the number of Code requests received, the speed with which they are dealt and the number of refusals made.

The Government have demonstrated their strong commitment to openness in the public sector through the passing of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Lord Chancellor is required under the provisions of the Act to report to Parliament on the progress made towards implementation of the Act, before 30 November 2001.

The Freedom of Information Act applies to a very wide range of bodies, over 50,000 across the public sector, going well beyond the scope of the Code of Practice. The Government are discussing with the Information Commissioner what is the best way of ensuring that the rigorous monitoring of the Code of Practice is retained when the provisions of the Act replace the Code and extending the monitoring to all of the bodies covered by the Act.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when *(a)* she and *(b)* Ministers in her Department next intend to meet the French Environment Minister. [819]

Mr. Meacher: I understand that the current French Environment Minister, Dominique Voynet, plans to stand down shortly. I intend to meet her successor at the next available opportunity. This may be at the COP 6 bis meeting in Bonn, between 16–27 July. I will also have similar opportunities to meet the French Environment Minister, particularly at the Environment Council in October, if not before.

Trade Effluent

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what enforcement actions were taken by the Environment Agency against those sites with significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses in England and Wales which breached those consent levels in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [945]

(2) what the level of compliance was with significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses held by industry in England and Wales in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [944]

(3) what percentage of significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses held by industry in England and Wales were monitored by the Environment Agency in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [942]

(4) what percentage of the significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses in England and Wales were reviewed by the Environment Agency in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [946]

(5) what percentage of significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses held by industry in England and Wales included permission to discharge red list substances in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [943]

(6) how many significant consents to discharge trade effluent to watercourses were held by industry in England and Wales in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [941]

Mr. Meacher: The information that my hon. Friend has requested is not held centrally. I will therefore let him have this information as soon as it is available.

Abandoned Cars

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government intend to introduce legislation on abandoned cars. [814]

Mr. Meacher: Legislation to tackle abandoned cars is already contained in the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986.

We will be consulting later this summer on possible changes to the 1986 regulations, following a review carried out into the current legislation covering abandoned vehicles.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to publish a paper on nuclear waste; and if she will make a statement. [809]

Mr. Meacher: The Department and the devolved Administrations aim to publish the consultation paper very soon.

Municipal Incinerators

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to introduce tougher controls on emissions from existing municipal incinerators; and if she will make a statement. [816]

Mr. Meacher: The recently adopted Waste Incineration Directive 2000/76/EC sets minimum standards for a variety of plants that burn waste, including municipal solid waste incinerators (MSWIs). The UK Government are committed to transposing the EU Waste Incineration Directive, and the provisions therein, into UK law by 28 December 2002. This will apply to all new incinerators by this date, and to existing plant by 28 December 2005. This directive tightens dioxin limits to 0.1ng/m^3. These standards will be a minimum requirement for MSWIs. The Environment Agency intends to review the performance of existing plant before the Directive applies.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to introduce a moratorium on new municipal incinerators; and if she will make a statement. [815]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have no plans to introduce a moratorium on new municipal incinerators. The choice of waste facilities in an area is for local authorities to make in consultation with their local communities, taking into account the waste hierarchy, which places recycling and composting above incineration with energy recovery, and the need to achieve the best practicable environmental option.

Environmental Protection Act

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the average spend was by local authorities for meeting their duties under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in 2000–01; and what the average planned spend is in 2001–02; [938]

(2) what average funding was allocated to local authorities for meeting their duties under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in 2000–01 and in 2001–02. [940]

Mr. Meacher: Following the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review, £12 million per year was added to the totals for Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) for English local authorities to reflect the revenue implications of the implementation of the Contaminated Land Regime in Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This funding has been allocated to individual local authorities under the normal system for SSA calculations, and is supported by Revenue Support Grant payments.

Capital expenditure by local authorities on the investigation and remediation of contaminated land for which they are responsible has been supported by the Contaminated Land Supplementary Credit Approval Programme (SCAs). A total of £21 million was available in 2000–01 for projects submitted by local authorities or the Environment Agency, with the same amount being available in 2001–02.

Expenditure outturn figures for the SCA programme in 2001–02 are not yet available, as expenditure returns by individual local authorities are not required until mid-July.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of local authorities have met their duty under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to produce a written strategy by the end of June on inspecting their areas for the purpose of identifying contaminated land. [939]

Mr. Meacher: This information is currently being gathered by the Environmental Agency. I will write with the information that my hon. Friend requires as soon as possible.

Pollution

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has conducted into changes in pollution following the introduction of congestion taxes. [811]

Mr. Meacher: A number of local authorities are developing proposals to introduce charging schemes to tackle congestion problems in their area, but implementation of schemes will generally take a number of years and none has yet started. I understand that the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions will be working with authorities introducing any such schemes to assess their overall impacts, including any changes in levels of air pollution.

Anti-dumping Tariffs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European Commission's proposal to introduce anti-dumping tariffs on urea fertiliser originating from non-EU countries. [1591]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The Government did not believe the information available was sufficient for them to adopt a formal position on the European Commission's proposal. We have therefore asked for further work to be carried out in the likelihood that provisional measures will be imposed while the Commission continues its investigation. We will consult interested parties before taking a final view on definitive measures.

Environment Council (Luxembourg)

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Environment Council held in Luxembourg on 7 June. [1798]

Mr. Meacher: I am writing to report the outcome of the Environment Council in Luxembourg on 7 June. As the Council fell on the same day as the General Election, there were no Environment Ministers available to attend, and the UK was represented by Bill Stow, Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU. The Council reached a political agreement on six common positions, two of which allowed agreement to be reached with the European Parliament at first reading. The UK abstained on the vote on a proposed Directive on low-temperature emissions from motor vehicles, and voted in favour of the other common positions. The Council also adopted five sets of conclusions.

Political agreement was reached on a Decision of the Commission and European Parliament on the Sixth Environment Action Programme. This will set out the EU's environmental priorities for the next 10 years, focusing on climate change, nature and biodiversity, environment and health, and sustainable management of natural resources and waste. The UK achieved its objectives of a commitment to improve the policy process, a clearer priority for climate change action, and of a commitment to further analysis before the development and adoption of detailed targets. Political agreement was also reached on a proposal to amend Directive 90/313, giving the public enhanced rights of access to environmental information in line with the more demanding requirements of the Aarhus Convention.

In reaching Political Agreement on a Directive seeking to reduce the quantity of waste from electrical and electronic equipment and increase recycling, the UK achieved its objectives. The Directive delivers environmental benefits, and is in line with the Government's objectives on waste, and Council has avoided changes which would have made it more inflexible and less workable. In particular, the UK secured additional flexibility for small manufacturers and on the arrangements for retailer takeback. Member states agreed that collection systems will have to be set up within 30 months of the Directive coming into force, with distributors having to take back used equipment free of charge on a like-for-like basis either in-store or through third parties. Producers were made responsible for reaching recovery and recycling targets within 46 months. A target of recycling 4 kg waste per person per year by 36 months following entry into force of the Directive was also agreed. Agreement was also reached on a related Directive restricting the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment, protecting the environment from potential damage arising form the disposal of this equipment, and facilitating recycling. The Council agreed a date of 2007 for the phasing out of specific hazardous substances, including lead and mercury.

The Council was able to approve all of the European Parliament's amendments on a Decision establishing a list of priority substances under the Water Framework Directive, allowing it to be adopted at first reading. The list contains 33 Priority Substances, 11 of which are classified as Priority Hazardous Substances. The Commission will be responsible for bringing forward proposals for measures aimed at the progressive reduction and, for Priority Hazardous Substances, at the cessation or phasing-out of emissions, discharges and losses. A first reading agreement was also reached on a Directive regulating emissions from motor vehicles starting in cold conditions. The UK abstained on the basis that the costs of implementing the proposal were disproportionate to the limited environmental benefits it would bring about, and recorded its position in a statement for the Council minutes.

The Council's conclusions on climate change reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol and its willingness to negotiate constructively at the resumed COP6 in July. Ministers reiterated the target of ratification and entry into force of Kyoto by 2002. The Council also held an informal discussion on climate change over dinner.

In response to the Commission's White Paper on EU chemicals policy Council conclusions were agreed. Ministers offered broad support for the proposal that existing and new substances would in future be subject to the same authorisation process ("REACH"—Registration, Evaluation, and Authorisation of Chemicals) while stressing the need for realistic deadlines. The conclusions recommend an objective of phasing out uses of chemicals that lead to a significant negative impact on the environment by 2020, while maintaining the competitiveness of the chemicals industry. The Conclusions also call for a minimum of animal testing and increased public access to information about chemicals. Separately, in response to a suggestion by the Netherlands, the Council agreed conclusions calling on the Commission to clarify the legal situation and possible consequences of the phase-out of mercury in the chlor-alkali industry, and report back to Council.

In preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) in Johannesburg in 2002, Council conclusions were agreed setting out a broad EU approach with suggestions for themes for consideration at the Summit. These include protection of natural resources, integrating environment and poverty eradication and making globalisation work for sustainable development. Council also agreed conclusions on a strategy for an integrated product policy, the overall aim of which is to reduce the environmental impact of products across their whole life cycle.

The Commission briefly updated the Council on work on a number of forthcoming proposals, including its planned proposals on the labelling and traceability of GMOs, emphasising the difficult technical and legal implications of the proposals, which are still under consideration within the Commission. Commissioner Wallstrom also reported on developments in environmental relations with Russia.

The Presidency informed the Council it would consider what progress could be made on the Directives on Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making, Recreational Craft, Non-Road Mobile Machinery and the Recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, before Belgium took over the EU Presidency in July.

Over lunch, the Council discussed the Commission's Communication on an EU Sustainable Development Strategy, and a Presidency report on the integration of environmental considerations into other policy areas, in preparation for the Gothenburg European Council on 15–16 June.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Chief Inspector of Prisons

15. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the chief inspector of prisons. [627]

Beverley Hughes: I have accepted an invitation from Sir David and will meet him and his team in the near future.

I have also arranged to see Anne Owers, Sir David's successor, early in August, when she takes up her appointment.

Police Recruitment (Hertfordshire)

16. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase recruitment in the Hertfordshire constabulary. [628]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, Hertfordshire constabulary has been allocated a total of 107 additional officers, over and above the force's previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003.

I know that the force has been experiencing difficulty in attracting recruits and was not able to recruit any of its CFF allocation in 2000–01. In recognition of these difficulties, the force has been allowed to defer its allocation from 2000–01 into 2001–02. The force will now be able to recruit up to 70 officers through the CFF in 2001–02.

On 12 March my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary announced that he had agreed to the Police Negotiating Board's recommendation for new allowances for certain officers serving in a number of forces in the south-east. The affected officers are those appointed since 1 September 1994 and not in receipt of Housing Allowance. For such officers in Hertfordshire the new allowance is £2,000 per annum. It has been payable since 1 April 2001.

All police forces, including Hertfordshire, also benefit from the national recruitment advertising campaign, which was launched in August 2000.

Police Numbers

17. **Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of police officers is per 10,000 population in *(a)* England and *(b)* Devon and Cornwall. [629]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: In 2000–01 there were 23.4 police officers per 10,000 population in England, and 18.7 officers per 10,000 population in Devon and Cornwall.

32. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police numbers. [646]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the most recent police numbers on 28 June. On 31 March 2001, police numbers in England and Wales were 125,519. This is an increase of 1,349 over 31 March last year. It is a clear indication that the Crime Fighting Fund which is intended to deliver an additional 9,000 recruits over three years is taking effect .

We expect that within the lifetime of this Parliament police strength will reach 130,000 officers.

34. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report on police numbers in North Yorkshire. [649]

Mr. Denham: The Home Secretary announced the most recent police numbers on 28 June. At 31 March 2001, police numbers in North Yorkshire were 1,305. This is an increase of 22 over March 2000.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers and civilian staff were employed in each year since 1996 in Harrow. [1111]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been provided by the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis and is set out in the table.

I am told by the Commissioner that he has increased the Budgeted Workforce Total for police officers in Harrow from 295 officers in 2000–01 to 311 for the current financial year.

Metropolitan police—Harrow division

Year[1]	*Police officers*[2]	*Civilian staff*[2]
December 1996	283	76
December 1997	289	71
December 1998	281	68
December 1999	291	69
December 2000	292	68
May 2001	307	72

[1] Information for 1996 to 2000 is available only by calendar year
[2] Figures are for full-time equivalent staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of police *(a)* sergeants and *(b)* inspectors in England and Wales. [1250]

Mr. Denham: The powers of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to decide on the number of police officers in each rank for each force were removed under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. It is for Chief Officers of Police to determine staffing levels for sergeants, inspectors and other ranks within the overall resources available.

Youth Crime

18. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for dealing with youth crime and disorder. [631]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have a wide agenda across Government concerned with tackling youth crime and disorder. We have introduced programmes which focus on the family; tackle deprivation; address truancy and school exclusion; deal with alcohol-related crime and disorder and under-age drinking; and address drug misuse among young people.

We have also made improvements to the youth justice system. Tackling delays to speed up justice; expanding the powers available to the police and the courts, establishing new youth justice structures and intervention programmes. And we are continuing to bring in new measures and programmes to tackle youth offending.

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the levels of juvenile crime. [635]

Beverley Hughes: The Government have put in place a major programme of reforms to tackle youth offending. We have overhauled youth justice and introduced a wide range of prevention policies to stop young people becoming involved in crime.

Double Jeopardy

19. **David Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to abolish the double jeopardy rule. [632]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government's manifesto included a commitment to reform the double jeopardy rule in cases involving murder, and the Government will do so when parliamentary time allows.

Prisons (Rehabilitation)

20. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to improve the record of prisons as institutions of effective rehabilitation. [633]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are committed to ensuring the effective execution of the sentences of the courts so as to reduce reoffending and protect the public. The Prison Service, in conjunction with other criminal justice agencies, has a target of reducing the rate of reconvictions of all offenders punished by imprisonment or by community supervision by 5 per cent. by April 2004 compared to the predicted rate. The Service is investing an additional £31 million in the period 2001–02, £30 million in 2002–03 and £71 million in 2003–04, from the Spending Review 2000 on work on basic skills, drugs, offending behaviour programmes and resettlement to help achieve this objective.

Crime Prevention Partnerships

21. **Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of crime prevention partnerships. [634]

Mr. Denham: The local crime and disorder reduction partnerships, established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, ensure that the resources and commitment of local authorities and a wide range of other local organisations are harnessed to support the police in the fight against crime. This joint effort has helped secure the 10 per cent. reduction in crime measured by the British Crime Survey 2000.

27. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support is being given to crime and disorder partnerships to tackle drug-related crime. [640]

Mr. Denham: Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are being provided with additional investment and guidance to disrupt local drugs markets, and tackle drug-related crime.

Partnerships have been allocated a total of £50 million this year to tackle drugs problems, under the Communities Against Drugs initiative, and this will rise to £70 million in 2002–03 and £100 million in 2003–04. The Communities Against Drugs toolkit is available on the Crime Reduction website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk) and further written guidance is under preparation. Advice to partnerships is being provided by the Crime Reduction Directors and by the Drugs Prevention Advisory Service (DPAS) in the regions in England, and in Wales by the Crime Reduction Director and the Substance Misuse Intervention Branch.

Asylum Seekers

23. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that asylum seekers are able to work while awaiting determinations by the Home Office. [636]

Angela Eagle: Under the terms of the employment concession, adult asylum seekers can apply for permission to work if their application has been outstanding for longer than six months without a decision being made on it. There are no immediate plans to alter the way the concession operates.

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of applications for asylum have been refused since July 2000; and what percentage of those refused have *(a)* been deported and *(b)* otherwise left the country. [637]

Angela Eagle: 80 per cent. of initial decisions made since July 2000 were to refuse asylum and exceptional leave to remain.

There were over 8,900 asylum removals in the 12 months ending March 2001. It is not possible to identify how many of those removals related to initial decisions since July 2000, nor how many former asylum seekers leave the country without notifying the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND).

26. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the outcome of the review of the voucher scheme for asylum seekers. [639]

Angela Eagle: We are considering the evidence and will announce our conclusions in due course.

Visible Policing

25. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit a police station in Castle Point to discuss visible policing. [638]

Mr. Denham: I am keen to visit as many police forces as I can to hear the views of the police service and to see the work being done to reduce crime and to provide public reassurance. Although I do not currently have plans to visit Essex, I am always interested in discussing ways of making police officers more visible and accessible to the communities they serve.

Young Offenders (Secure Accommodation)

28. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans for the provision of secure accommodation for young offenders in Wales. [641]

Beverley Hughes: The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales commissions and purchases secure accommodation for remanded and sentenced young people. The Board aims to increase secure accommodation for male and female juvenile offenders in Wales, as part of its wider strategy to provide 400 more secure training centre places for England and Wales as a whole. A number of Welsh sites have been looked at but none has yet been selected for development.

County Police Forces

29. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on maintaining the identity of county police forces. [642]

Mr. Denham: We have no present plans to change the procedures in the Police Act 1996 for the alteration of police areas.

We will consider on their merits any proposals from police authorities for amalgamations which might lead to more effective policing.

We will continue to encourage Chief Officers and police authorities to take advantage of opportunities for collaboration between forces where this will help deliver best value.

Police Recruitment

30. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the level of police recruitment. [643]

Mr. Denham: Following the introduction of the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) in April 2000, there has already been a significant rise in police recruitment. Forces recruited 7,415 officers during the year to 31 March 2001, 64 per cent. more than the previous year.

About 2,800 recruits were funded by the CFF in 2000–01. Forces will be able to recruit about 3,200 CFF officers this year and a further 3,000 in 2002–03.

Given forces' recruitment plans and projections of wastage, we expect police strength to reach at least 128,000 officers by March 2002 and record numbers by March 2003.

To help forces meet their recruitment targets the first National Recruitment Campaign was launched in August 2000.

By 1 May 2001, the campaign had generated over 147,000 responses and over 30,000 expressions of interest had been forwarded to police forces. A further phase of the campaign is planned for the end of the summer.

Bids covering a number of police force areas have proceeded to Stage Two of the bidding round of the Government's Starter Home Initiative under which £250 million will be made available over the next three years to help key workers purchase homes.

We are reviewing entry requirements for the Police Service to ensure consistency across forces and a good supply of quality candidates.

Police Morale

31. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to improve police morale. [645]

Mr. Denham: There is no established direct method of measuring the level of morale in the police service.

As part of the process of police reform the Government are determined to tackle those elements of police officers' working lives that can create frustration and detract from their ability to do their jobs in the way that they would wish.

We are determined to reduce the burden of unnecessary bureaucracy.

We are investing in technological support to help increase the effectiveness of the police in fighting crime and to ensure that officers are able to spend as much of their time as possible on the front line.

An ambitious programme of work in police training has begun to raise professional standards for officers and support staff, and to achieve greater consistency nationally.

We have turned a round the decline in police numbers that started under the last Government. Substantial Government investment in the police service is now delivering the positive results that we promised when the Crime Fighting Fund was launched in September 1999 and commenced in April 2000.

Police numbers rose in the 12 months to March 2001 by 1,349 officers to 125,519—an increase of 1.1 per cent. This is the largest single annual increase in police numbers since 1988–89.

We expect that within the lifetime of this Parliament police strength will reach 130,000 officers.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the level of police morale in England and Wales. [152]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* There is no established direct method of measuring the level of morale in the police service.

As part of the process of police reform the Government are determined to tackle those elements of police officers' working lives that can create frustration and detract from their ability to do their jobs in the way that they would wish.

We are determined to reduce the burden of unnecessary bureaucracy.

We are investing in technological support to help increase the effectiveness of the police in fighting crime and to ensure that officers are able to spend as much of their time as possible on the front line.

An ambitious programme of work in police training has begun to raise professional standards for officers and support staff, and to achieve greater consistency nationally.

We have turned around the decline in police numbers that started under the last Government. Substantial Government investment in the police service is now delivering the positive results that we promised when the Crime Fighting Fund was launched in September 1999 and commenced in April 2000.

Police numbers rose in the 12 months to March 2001 by 1,349 officers to 125,519—an increase of 1.1 per cent. This is the largest single annual increase in police numbers since 1988–89.

We intend that police numbers overall should continue to rise. We expect that within the lifetime of this Parliament police strength will reach 130,000 officers.

Police Complaints System

33. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform the police complaints system. [647]

Mr. Denham: We will bring forward legislation in this Session, which will include provisions to establish a new police complaints system to replace the current system. The new system will mean a new body, the independent Police Complaints Commission, will replace the Police Complaints Authority. The Government published their plans for a new system in a framework document on 18 December last year, copies of which can be found in the Library.

Private Security Industry

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to begin the registration of private security industry staff as outlined in the Private Security Act 2001. [618]

Mr. Denham: The Private Security Industry Act 2001 provides for the establishment of a Security Industry Authority which will have responsibility for licensing individuals employed in designated sectors of the security industry; and approving companies.

We aim to establish the authority as soon as possible. Once established, the authority will draw up its licensing criteria and institute a rolling programme of licensing. The relevant provisions of the Act will come into force by means of commencement orders when the authority is ready to begin its licensing operations.

Mobile Police Stations

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report on the rural mobile police station initiative proposed for north Yorkshire. [621]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I welcome the introduction of a mobile police office in north Yorkshire, which was launched on 29 May this year. It will give a high-visibility police presence in rural areas. The cost of the police office will be covered by a £186,000 grant from the Government's Targeted Policing Initiative.

Police Areas

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement about his proposals to ensure the police co-operate more effectively across force boundaries; [1258]

(2) what plans the Government have to amalgamate police forces in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [1256]

Mr. Denham: We have no present plans to change the procedures in the Police Act 1996 for the alteration of police areas.

We will consider on their merits any proposals from Police Authorities for amalgamations which might lead to more effective policing.

We will continue to encourage Police Authorities and Chief Officers to take advantage of opportunities for collaboration between forces where this will help achieve best value.

We are already promoting the use of common equipment and methods through, for example, the support given to the countrywide adoption of Airwave and the roll-out of the National Intelligence Model. Work in hand as part of the police reform process will consider what more can be done to ensure cross-border working.

Travellers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to tackle antisocial behaviour by travellers; and if he will make a statement. [1243]

Mr. Denham: As I said in response to a question from the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) answered on 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W, the police and local authorities have powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to direct travellers or other trespassers to leave land when the appropriate statutory requirements are met. We have no plans to amend this legislation at present, although its effectiveness is kept under review. But the reduction of antisocial behaviour, by whoever it may be committed, is a prime objective of the Government, and our strategy for tackling it is set out in the Report of Policy Action Team 8 on AntiSocial Behaviour.

Unauthorised Traveller Encampments

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he offers to the police and local authorities on the removal of unauthorised traveller encampments, with special reference to nuisance to the general public; and if he will make inquiries into the persistence of a rave beginning on 22 June at Borough Hill, Daventry. [1447]

Mr. Denham: Both the police and local authorities have powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to direct travellers or other trespassers to leave land when the appropriate statutory requirements are met. These are discretionary powers and it is the operational responsibility of the chief officer of the force concerned to decide when and how to enforce these powers.

The Chief Constable of Northamptonshire police informs me that about 1,000 people attended the illegal rave at Borough Hill, which began on Saturday 23 June and lasted until the afternoon of Monday 25 June. I understand that it was not considered practicable in the circumstances to bring the event to a conclusion before Monday. Police have since met with council officials to discuss the problems caused by this event and the strategies needed to be put in place to prevent any recurrence and have held a public meeting with residents to discuss the issues arising from the incident and to reassure them should anything similar happen in the future.

Victim Personal Statements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make a statement on the implications for the administrative workload of the police of the introduction of victim personal statements. [1248]

Mr. Denham: The police, and other criminal justice services, were closely involved in the design of the victim personal statement scheme, and every effort was made to keep the procedures as simple and straightforward as possible for victims and police alike. It is difficult to assess what additional administrative effort may be needed to run the scheme, since factors such as the level of take-up by victims and the nature and content of the statements made will clearly play a part. However, both the introduction of the scheme in October and its subsequent operation will be carefully monitored and evaluated.

Police Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his proposals for a more professional and effective police service. [1257]

Mr. Denham: The police reform programme aims to deliver a modern police service providing the highest standards of detective capability, public reassurance, scientific and technical support, leadership, and modern working practices to secure reductions in crime and in the fear of crime. Discussions are continuing with representative police organisations to determine the best ways of delivering these goals.

Police effectiveness will be supported by the continuation of the Best Value regime and by the new Standards Unit, for which I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 48W.

Immigration and Asylum Act

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Part III of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 will be brought into effect. [1105]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 does not specify a date by which Part III has to be implemented. While it was not proposed to implement Part III before October 2001, the actual implementation date is currently under review and a final decision has yet to be taken.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Orders have been issued under section 8(4)(d) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. [1647]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Part V Exemption: Educational Institutions and Health Sector Bodies) Order (SI 2001 No. 1403) and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Part V Exemption: Eligible Voluntary Bodies and Relevant Employers) Order (SI 2001 No. 1393) have been made under section 84(4)(d) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Both Orders were laid before Parliament on 9 April 2001 and came into force on 30 April 2001.

Life Sentence Prisoners

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners serving life sentences have a whole life tariff. [1086]

Beverley Hughes: There are currently 23 people in custody in England and Wales serving life sentences who have a whole life tariff.

Hertsmere Borough Council

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to write to the hon. Member for Hertsmere following the meeting on 3 April between the hon. Member for Hertsmere, members of Hertsmere borough council and the former Minister of State for the Home Office, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke). [3]

Mr. Denham: I wrote to the hon. Member on 22 June.

Coroner System

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to involve representatives of specialist non-governmental organisations in the review of the coroner system; and how he will ensure the participation of NGOs from Northern Ireland in the review. [977]

Beverley Hughes: The review will need to take evidence from a wide range of relevant experts and representative bodies. To help with this, it is intended that the review should work with a reference group of appropriate organisations, including non-governmental organisations in Northern Ireland. These are matters which I propose to discuss with the review chair following the appointment which I hope to announce shortly.

Mr. Cemal Han

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a decision on the citizenship application of Mr. Cemal Han of Keverne Close, Aspley, Nottingham. [1448]

Angela Eagle: I am pleased to say that our inquiries into Mr. Han's citizenship application have been completed and a decision reached. He has been advised of the outcome.

Re-offenders

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to ensure persistent re-offenders are processed quickly through the penal system. [1180]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government have introduced procedural reforms which were implemented in November 1999, which require that any person (with or without previous convictions) who is charged with an offence must be brought before a magistrates court without delay. As a result the average time from charge to first listing has fallen from 20 days in June 1999 to six days in March 2001. Further action is under way to speed up the progress of cases from their first appearance until completion.

Under s.51 of the Crime and Disorder Act, which was brought into effect nationally on 15 January 2001, cases involving adults charged with indictable-only offences are no longer subject to committal proceedings but must be sent straight to the Crown court from a first appearance before the magistrates. Although no data are yet available, it is hoped that these serious cases will as a result be brought to trial more quickly.

In addition, good progress has been made towards halving the time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders: the national average fell from 142 days in 1996 to 83 days in March 2001.

Football (Disorder) Act

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will report on the operation to date of the Football (Disorder) Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [1496]

Mr. Denham: A report on the working of the Act in the period 28 August 2000 to 11 June 2001 was laid before Parliament on Wednesday 20 June.

Sentencing

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the review of sentencing; and if he will make a statement. [1495]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I will publish the report of a review of the sentencing framework for England and Wales shortly.

Community Policing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on community policing in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [624]

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) answered a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn) on 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 697. Effective policing depends on the community working together in partnership with the police to fight crime. Community beat officers can provide a vital link between the police and the local community.

Visitor Visas

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what publicity was given to the implementation of section 1 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, with particular reference to the changes in the administration of visitor visas. [1648]

Angela Eagle: At the time of the implementation of section 1 of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, our diplomatic posts abroad were instructed to seek local publicity to advertise changes to the way entry clearance, which includes visit visas, was to be issued. Detailed guidance was also provided to all our diplomatic posts in the form of leaflets and posters which were to be displayed prominently in all visa sections. Leaflets were also produced for insertion into the passports of those applying for entry clearance.

Police Response Times

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* targets he gives to police authorities for the time taken to respond to (i) 999 calls and (ii) other calls. [1651]

Mr. Denham: Police authorities are not issued with national guidance or targets for responding to calls for assistance. Under best value, they should set local targets for answering 999 calls and for attending incidents requiring an immediate response. Police authorities report their performance against these targets at the end of each financial year in their annual policing/best value performance plans.

Special Advisers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the special advisers in his Department together with their date of appointment and their responsibilities; which of them are authorised to speak to the media; and if he will make a statement. [247]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The number of special advisers working for me has been increased by 0.5 of a full-time post compared with the number working for me in the pre-election period. This, as with the arrangements between 1997 and 2001, reflects the particular circumstances of my position and also the extent of written work associated with my present post. Nick Pearce, Katharine Raymond and Sophie Linden (part-time) took up their appointments as special advisers on 8 June. I am also appointing Huw Evans, who will join the Department shortly. As part of their duties they will brief the media as appropriate.

With the transfer of the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit from the Cabinet Office, Keith Hellawell will be joining the Home Office on special adviser terms.

Drugs (Stafford)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the evaluation of the drug treatment and testing pilot project at Stafford. [14]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office is at an advanced stage of negotiation with a research consultancy company to undertake the evaluation of the new drug-testing provisions in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The evaluation will cover Stafford and the other two pilot sites of Nottingham and Hackney.

Investigatory Powers Tribunal

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the appointment of members of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal under section 65 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [1965]

Mr. Blunkett: On 4 June 2001 Her Majesty appointed Sir John Pringle to serve as a Member of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal for a period of five years.

TREASURY

NIRS2

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the problems with the NIRS2 computer system to be resolved. [363]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him and the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 31 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 409W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the total cost of the work that will be needed fully to rectify the problems with the NIRS2 computer system; [362]

(2) if he will estimate the total cost of the work that has so far been carried out to rectify the problems with the NIRS2 computer system. [361]

Dawn Primarolo: The delay in the implementation of NIRS2 caused arrears of work in both the Inland Revenue and the then Department of Social Security. These arrears are being managed through a recovery plan that has been developed by both Departments and continue to be cleared as quickly as possible.

Estimated additional operational costs up to March 2001 are £40.4 million. It is not possible accurately to estimate the future costs until the backlog of cases has been cleared.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate his Department has made of the number of families with children up to *(a)* three years old and *(b)* five years old who are eligible to receive the childcare tax credit; [937]

(2) how many families with children up to *(a)* three years old and *(b)* five years old (i) receive child benefit and (ii) are in receipt of the childcare tax credit; and what was the annual cost in the last year for which figures are available. [936]

Dawn Primarolo: At November 2000, 50,000 families with a child up to three years old were receiving the childcare tax credit within Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Person's Tax Credit. The total extra payment to these families due to the childcare tax credit was £2.2 million per week. 85,000 families with a child up to five years old were receiving the childcare tax credit. The total extra payment to these families was £3.5 million per week.

I understand from the Department for Work and Pensions and the Northern Ireland Department for Social Development that, at November 2000, 2.0 million families with a child up to three years old were receiving child benefit totalling £30.8 million per week, and 2.7 million families with a child up to five years old were receiving £45.6 million per week.

Credit Unions

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further action he is taking to establish a central support organisation for credit unions; and if he will make a statement. [930]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him on 14 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 654W.

Pensioners

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people of pensionable age lived in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* the county of Essex and *(c)* the boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea in each year from 1995 to 2000 inclusive. [1067]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alan Hurst, dated 2 July 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of people of pensionable age living in England and Wales, the County of Essex, and the Boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea in each year from 1995 to 2000 (inclusive). (1067)

Attached is a table showing the information requested from mid-1995 to mid-1999, which is the most recent year for which a population estimate is available. The population estimate for mid-2000 will be available on the National Statistics website on 23 August 2001.

Mid-year estimate of people of pensionable age in selected areas, mid-1995 to mid-1999

Thousand

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
England and Wales	9,490.7	9,504.8	9,521.8	9,553.7	9,574.5
County of Essex[1]	238.6	240.9	243.4	246.5	248.6
Southend-on-Sea	37.1	36.6	36.5	36.2	36.2
Thurrock	19.9	19.8	19.8	19.8	20.0

[1] Data for County of Essex are on a consistent basis for all years and do not include Southend and Thurrock. This reflects the local government reorganisation which took effect from 1 April 1998

Note:

Pensionable age is 60 years and over for women, 65 years and over for men

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Crown Copyright 2000

Hospices

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has received from the hospice movement about the taxation it pays; and if he will make a statement; [1040]

(2) what changes would need to be made to the constitutional framework of hospices for them not to qualify for the payment of VAT. [1043]

Mr. Boateng: The care services of a hospice are not chargeable with VAT. Charitable hospices benefit from a number of specific VAT reliefs on purchases which they make but, in accordance with the basic principles of VAT, they cannot recover VAT paid on purchases relating to the their VAT exempt or "non-business" activity. This issue was considered in response to representations from hospices and other charities during the recent Review of Charity Taxation.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the liability of hospices for VAT; and if he will make a statement. [1345]

Mr. Boateng: Representations were received from hospices at the time of the review of charity taxation. The care services of a hospice are not chargeable with VAT. Charitable hospices benefit from a number of specific VAT reliefs on purchases they make but, in accordance with the basic principles of VAT, they cannot recover VAT paid on purchases relating to their VAT exempt or "non-business" activity.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much, and what proportion, of the income of hospices in each of the past 10 years is derived from *(a)* charitable giving and *(b)* Government sources; [1042]

(2) how much income he received in VAT receipts from hospices in each of the past 10 years; [1039]

(3) what calculation he has made of the amount of money that the hospice movement saves the National Health Service because of its fund-raising efforts. [1041]

Mr. Boateng: Government Departments have no centrally gathered information available.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total cost of tax relief on employers' contributions to pensions was in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 1999–2000; [1138]

(2) what was the cost of employers' tax relief on *(a)* defined benefit pension schemes in the public sector, *(b)* defined benefit occupational pension schemes in the private sector, *(c)* defined contribution schemes in the private sector and *(d)* group personal pension schemes, where made; [1139]

(3) what was the total cost of tax relief on employee contributions in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 to *(a)* defined benefit occupational pension schemes in the public sector, *(b)* defined benefit occupational pension schemes in the private sector, *(c)* defined contribution occupational pension schemes, *(d)* group personal pension plans, *(e)* additional voluntary contributions and *(f)* free-standing additional voluntary contributions at (i) the standard rate and (ii) the higher rate of tax; [1140]

(4) what the total cost of tax reliefs on pension contributions was in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 1999–2000. [1137]

Ruth Kelly: The information that is available and can be supplied without disproportionate cost is given in the table.

£ million

Cost of tax relief for:	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Total contributions to approved schemes	14,100	15,400
Employers' contributions to occupational pension schemes	7,500	8,100
Employers' contributions to personal pensions	450	460

VAT Theft

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue is estimated to be lost to the Treasury every year because of VAT theft. [1267]

Mr. Boateng: There are no estimates relating specifically to the revenue lost every year because of VAT theft.

Climate Change Levy

David Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT revenue he forecasts will be raised in the current financial year as a result of the introduction of the climate change levy and consequent application of VAT. [1168]

Mr. Boateng: Business will be able to reclaim the majority of VAT paid on the Climate Change Levy (CCL). We estimate therefore that the introduction of the CCL might lead to additional VAT receipts of around £30 million, significantly below the £1 billion expected to be raised by the levy in the first year. All revenues from the CCL will be recycled back to business through a 0.3 percentage point cut in employers' national insurance contributions and additional support for energy-efficient measures and energy-saving technologies.

Aggregates Tax

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government plan to make separate provision for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* England in respect of the application of the aggregates tax. [864]

Mr. Boateng: The Government currently have no such plans, although they will continue to assess the implications of the application of the aggregates levy.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the British Aggregates Association in connection with the impact of the aggregates tax. [862]

Mr. Boateng: The British Aggregates Association has made a number of representations on the aggregates levy.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the aggregates tax upon each local authority in the United Kingdom in respect of the cost of purchasing aggregates for construction and maintenance work; [860]

(2) what impact the aggregates tax will have on actual costs to the end user; [861]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of the imposition of the aggregates tax from April 2002 on *(a)* the importation of aggregates, *(b)* the number of small quarries and *(c)* the use of road transport for transportation of aggregates. [863]

Mr. Boateng: Budget 2000 announced that the Government had decided to introduce an aggregates levy with effect from April 2002. It will be charged at £1.60 per tonne on the commercial exploitation of primary aggregates in the UK, including those imported from abroad. Aggregates exported from the UK will be exempt.

A full Regulatory Impact Assessment was published at the time of Budget 2000.

A higher price of primary aggregate will provide an incentive to all users, including the public sector, to make more efficient use of aggregates and better use of recycled aggregates as an alternative. The impact on the actual costs to the end user will be dependent on the commercial decisions of aggregates suppliers.

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest date is by which his Department will complete its assessment of the five economic tests for UK membership of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [1346]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete another assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the technical work which is necessary before an assessment of the five economic tests for British entry into the euro is started; who will carry out this preliminary technical work in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [1347]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete another assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Before any such assessment is started, the Treasury must continue to do the necessary preliminary work for the analysis—technical work that is necessary to allow the Treasury to undertake the assessment within two years as promised.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the policy of his Department is on the reforms of the European Central Bank that would be needed before the UK could join the euro; and if he will make a statement. [1348]

Ruth Kelly: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 59W, on the Financial Services Authority, for what reason it is inappropriate to comment during the investigation into the Independent Insurance Co. [1446]

Ruth Kelly: Any comment made on an investigation prior to its conclusion may well prejudice the investigation.

It is not usual to comment on the conduct of an investigation until a decision has been made on whether to institute proceedings or not. This is both to protect the investigation and those who are the subject of it.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Corporal Anthony Green

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the outcome was of the investigation into the shooting of Corporal Anthony Green on 25 January. [1134]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) has retained jurisdiction over the investigation into the death of Corporal Anthony Green in Northern Ireland. The case was referred to the Director of Public Prosecution for Northern Ireland (the DPP) in May 2001 for direction on the possibility of any charges being made in relation to the incident.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts Funding (West Midlands)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much support the Arts Council provided for projects within each west midlands local authority in each of the last three years. [354]

Tessa Jowell: The Arts Council of England provides both grant in aid and Lottery funds to West Midlands Arts Board to act as the arts development and funding agency in the west midlands region. The table shows the allocation of grant in aid funding for arts organisations and individual artists within County, Metropolitan, Shire County and unitary authorities over the last three years (1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01). Figures for 2000–01 are a draft subject to final audited accounts to be published by West Midlands Arts in October 2001.

West Midlands Arts funding to arts organisations and individual artists in west midlands local authorities

	£
1998–99	
West midlands metropolitan area	
Birmingham	1,861,451
Coventry	679,750
Dudley	13,085
Sandwell	124,790
Solihull	9,000

West Midlands Arts funding to arts organisations and individual artists in west midlands local authorities

	£
Walsall	39,200
Wolverhampton	96,170
Total metropolitan area	2,823,446
Shropshire county	
Bridgnorth	10,000
Oswestry	3,070
Shrewsbury and Atcham	54,180
South Shropshire	150,455
Telford and Wrekin	4,800
Total	222,505
Hereford and Worcestershire county	
Bromsgrove	4,500
Hereford	113,749
Malvern Hills	68,401
Worcester	236,045
Wychavon	12,000
Wyre Forest	3,300
Total	437,995
Staffordshire	
Cannock Chase	7,000
East Staffordshire	36,500
Lichfield	18,800
Newcastle under Lyme	519,688
Stafford	42,875
Stoke on Trent	44,310
Tamworth	5,500
Total	674,673
Warwickshire	
Nuneaton and Bedworth	700
Stratford upon Avon	4,731
County	100,685
Total	106,116
Out of region	300
Total shire counties	1,441,289
Total metropolitan	2,823,446
Regional	1,349,210
Total grant aid	5,614,245
1999–2000	
West midlands metropolitan area	
Metropolitan	76,480
Birmingham	2,263,657
Coventry	807,375
Dudley	28,835
Sandwell	122,960
Solihull	20,655
Walsall	199,418
Wolverhampton	84,185
Total metropolitan area	3,603,565
Shropshire county	
Shropshire county	93,103
Bridgnorth	11,225
Oswestry	3,240
Shrewsbury and Atcham	49,993
South Shropshire	51,434
Total	208,995
Telford and Wrekin	
Telford and Wrekin	23,060
Total	23,060
Herefordshire	
Herefordshire	129,875
Total	129,875
Worcestershire county	
Worcestershire county	198,000
Bromsgrove	10,850
Malvern Hills	19,150
Worcester City	34,950
Wychavon	9,202
Wyre Forest	16,500
Total	288,652
Staffordshire	
Staffordshire	312,250
Cannock Chase	4,655
East Staffordshire	35,694
Lichfield	16,285
Newcastle under Lyme	15,605
Stafford	3,950
Tamworth	11,595
Staffordshire Moorlands	16,400
South Staffordshire	4,850
North Staffordshire	2,850
Total	424,134
Stoke on Trent	
Stoke on Trent	307,540
Total	307,540
Warwickshire	
Warwickshire	52,500
Nuneaton and Bedworth	11,240
Stratford upon Avon	16,445
Warwick	41,596
Rugby	14,840
North Warwickshire	3,000
Total	139,621
Total non metropolitan	1,521,877
Total metropolitan	3,603,565
Regional	1,419,603
Total grant aid	6,545,045
2000–01	
West midlands metropolitan area	
Metropolitan	—
Birmingham	5,223,600
Coventry	874,287
Dudley	42,477
Sandwell	196,972
Solihull	45,736
Walsall	544,909
Wolverhampton	134,071
Total metropolitan area	7,062,052
Shropshire county	
Shropshire county	81,115
Bridgnorth	10,950
Oswestry	160
Shrewsbury and Atcham	35,213
South Shropshire	155,581
Total	283,019

West Midlands Arts funding to arts organisations and individual artists in west midlands local authorities

	£
Telford and Wrekin	
Telford and Wrekin	57,145
Total	57,145
Herefordshire	
Herefordshire	267,067
Total	267,067
Worcestershire county	
Worcestershire county	230,279
Bromsgrove	7,858
Malvern Hills	3,860
Worcester City	39,413
Wychavon	12,550
Wyre Forest	4,000
Total	297,960
Staffordshire	
Staffordshire	38,869
Cannock Chase	11,000
East Staffordshire	57,724
Lichfield	21,365
Newcastle under Lyme	31,335
Stafford	12,170
Tamworth	15,100
Staffordshire Moorlands	23,122
South Staffordshire	9,500
North Staffordshire	—
Total	220,185
Stoke on Trent	
Stoke on Trent	578,070
Total	578,070
Warwickshire	
Warwickshire	100,482
Nuneaton and Bedworth	25,165
Stratford upon Avon	24,095
Warwick	19,230
Rugby	16,750
North Warwickshire	6,001
Total	191,723
Total non metropolitan	1,895,168
Total metropolitan	7,062,052
Regional	934,838
Total grant aid	9,892,058

Notes:

Grant-in-aid has been allocated, wherever possible, to the local authority benefiting from the grant; where a grant benefits more than one local authority the amount has been apportioned. Grants benefiting more than one local authority but which cannot be apportioned exactly between authorities are classified as County, Metropolitan Regional, or Shire County areas, or Regional grants as appropriate.

Allocation by local authority has a wider benefit as audiences and participants are often drawn from several counties, both within and outside the west midlands region.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of Wembley Stadium. [107]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 37W, to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall).

Lottery Funding (Films)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those films which have received National Lottery funding to date indicating *(a)* how much National Lottery funding they received, *(b)* their total budgets and *(c)* their box office takings. [73]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Details of box office receipts are not kept separately as they are only one form of income for film, and change as films are released in new territories and re-released. I have today placed the information requested in respect of Lottery awards made in England and Wales in the Library of the House. I will write to the hon. Member in due course about awards made in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Archaeological Sites and Monuments

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to place a statutory duty on local authorities to maintain records of archaeological sites and monuments. [101]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I have no such plans. The Government are, however, giving constructive consideration to the recommendation made by English Heritage in its report "Power of Place" that Historic Environment Record Centres should be established, and that electronic access to such records should be made widely available.

English Heritage

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to introduce legislation to permit English Heritage to undertake overseas assignments. [92]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government remain fully committed to enabling English Heritage to undertake overseas assignments. There are always great demands on parliamentary time, but we will seek to implement appropriate measures at the earliest opportunity.

Live Entertainment Licences

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to reform the law governing the licensing of live entertainment. [82]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Our proposals for reforming the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws were published in the White Paper "Time for Reform" (Cm 4696) in April last year. In May this year, following a public consultation, the Government confirmed their intention to legislate to introduce these proposed reforms, with one change concerning the procedure for appealing against adverse licensing decisions. We remain fully committed to bringing forward legislation to reform the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Analogue Television

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the timetable for the proposed switch-off of analogue television. [86]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government will maintain analogue terrestrial broadcasts until everyone who can currently receive the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form can receive them on digital systems, switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people, and, as a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers have access to digital equipment. We are committed to develop a strategic plan which will lead the UK to meet these criteria on affordability, availability and accessibility within the period 2006 and 2010.

School Sports Co-ordinators

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those schools which have to date benefited from the work of school sports coordinators. [122]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The schools which have school sports co-ordinators are:

Phase 1

Stockwell Park School
Archbishop Tennison's CE School
Charles Edward Brooke CE School
London Nautical School
Ashton on Mersey School
Stretford High School
Lostock High School
Broadoak High School
Moorside High School
All Hallows R.C. High School
Boston Spa Comprehensive School
Wetherby High School
John Smeaton Community High School
Agnes Stewart C. of E. High School
Lawnswood High School
West Oaks Special School
St. Johns School for the Deaf
Falmouth Community School
Camborne School and Community College
Humphry Davy School
Mounts Bay School
Cape Cornwall School
Pool School and Community College
Redruth Community School
Bodmin Community College
Treviglas Community College
The Roseland Community School
Newquay Tretherras School
Liskeard School and Community College
Launceston College
Looe Community School
Sir James Smith's Community School
St. Joseph's R.C. High School and Sports College
Withins School
Thornleigh Salesian College
Firwood SLD
St. Brendans R.C. Primary School
Brookfield High School
Halewood Community School
St. Edmunds of Canterbury
Prescot School
All Saints High School
Manor School and Sports College
Holgate Comprehensive
Meded Comprehensive
Dukeries Community College
Tuxford Comprehensive School
Rawmarsh Sports College
Wath Comprehensive
Swinton Comprehensive
Pope Pius Comprehensive
Wingfield Comprehensive
Lancaster School
Moat Community College
Fullhurst Community College
Riverside Community College
Ellesmere College
Wright Robinson Sports College
St. Peters R.C. High School
Varna Street Primary School
Cedar Mount School
William Parker School
Fisham Valley
Grove
Helenswood
William Parker
Hillcrest
Saxon Mount
King James Community School
Wolsingham Comprehensive
Parkside Comprehensive
Bishop Barrington Comprehensive
St. Johns R.C. Comprehensive
Benfield School
Denton Park Middle School
Chevyside Middle School
Chapel Park Middle School
Firfield/West Denton Amalgamation School
West Gate Community College
Archbishop Beck Catholic High School
Childwall CC School
Shorefields CC School
Bellerive R.C. High School
Langdon School
St. Angela's R.C. School
St. Bonaventure's R.C. School
Forest Community School
Brampton Manor School
St. Marys Catholic Comprehensive School
Green Meadows Special School
Guiseley School
Horsforth School
Prince Henry's Grammar School
Birmingham Education Services

Waverley
Hodge Hill Mixed
St. Albans
Saltley
James Brindley
Yardley
Hodge Hill Girls
Bordsley Green Girls
St. Paul's Community
Aston Manor
St. Pauls Girls
Handsworth Girls School
King Edwards Handsworth Girls
Mayfield Special School
Holte School
Holyhead School
St. John Wall
Southfields Community College
Ernest Bevin College
Elliot School
Graveney School
Burntwood School
Battersea Technology College
ADT
Manor High School
Woodensborough High School
Menzies High School
Stuart Bathurst R.C. High School
St. Michaels High School
Tividale High School
Abraham Guest Sports College
Bedford High School
West Leigh High School
Mornington High School
Rose Bridge High School
Northfield School
Abbey Hill School
Bishopgarth School
Blakeston School
The Norton School
Alfred Barrow
Park View
St. Bernard's R.C.
Thorncliffe
Walney
Dowdales
Millom
Wyndham
Ehenside
Whitehaven, St. Benedicts
Southfield Technology College
St. Joseph's R.C. High
Stainburn
Netherhall
Solway Community
Beacon Hill
Biddick Sports College
Hylton Red House Comprehensive
Pennywell
Felstead Special Educational Needs School
Moreton Community School
The Northicote
Our Lady and St. Chad R.C.
Pendeford High School
Penn Hall Special School

Phase 2

Alumwell School
Brownhills School
Blue Coat Church of England
Sneyd Community School
The Coseley School
The Pensnett School of Technology
Hillcrest School and Community College
Redhill School
Peters Hill Primary School
Whickham Sports College
Hookergate School
Joseph Swan School
Ryton Comprehensive School
St. Edmund Campion R.C School
The Cedars School
St. Wilfrids Catholic High School
Savio Catholic High School
Bootle High School
Manor High School
Chesterfield High School
Laurence Jackson School
Freebrough College from merger of De Brus, Rosecroft, Warsett
Huntcliff School
Kilton Thorpe School
Wyvern Community School
Broadoak Community School
Priory Community School
Worle Community School
Churchill Community School
Gordano Community School
Failsworth School
Breezehill
Grange
The Hathershaw Technology College
Kaskenmoor School
Radclyffe School
St. Benedict's Catholic College
Cheltenham Bournside School
Balcarras School
Cheltenham Kingsmead School
Pittville School
Pates Grammer School
Bettridge
Belmont School
King Edward VII School
The Park High School
Springwood High School
St. Clements High School
Marshland High School
Angley School-a sports college
The Astor of Hever School
Cranbrook School
Homewood School
Tunbridge Wells High School

Sacred Heart School
St. Saviours and St. Olaves School
Aylwin Girls School
Brookway High School and Sports College
Parklands School
St. Pauls R.C. High School
Newall Green School
Piper Hill School
Tong School
Yorkshire Martyrs
The Grange School
Bradford Cathedral Community College
Buttershaw High School
Dorothy Stringer High School
Patcham High School
Portslade Community College
Falmer School.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many school sports co-ordinators have been appointed; and if she will make a statement. [121]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Under Phases 1 and 2 of the scheme, 195 co-ordinators in 48 partnerships of schools are currently in place. When Phase 3 starts in September this year there will be 345 co-ordinators in 78 partnerships in place.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the annual budget of the schools sports co-ordinator programme; and what has been the expenditure to date. [123]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* There is no set annual budget for the programme. Sport England has allocated £30 million and the New Opportunities Fund £25.5 million of National Lottery money to the scheme. Sport England's grant in aid allocation for the years 2001–02 to 2003–04 includes a total of £60 million of additional funding earmarked specifically for the scheme in order to ensure that there are 1,000 co-ordinators in place by 2004. So far Sport England has committed a total of £13.60 million of Lottery funding to Phases 1 and 2.

UK Sports Institute

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the UK Sports Institute. [124]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Good progress is being made in the establishment of facilities and delivery of services to our top athletes. Centres in Scotland and Wales are now operational; the English Institute is developing apace and work on the Northern Ireland Institute will begin soon.

The UKSI is beginning to provide our best sportsmen and women with world-class facilities and a higher standard of co-ordinated support services than the UK has ever had before. This will complement the support already being provided through World Class funding.

The Government remain committed to the development of the United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI), which should be fully operational by the end of 2002.

Digital Television

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure platform diversity for the delivery of digital television services. [87]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government have set out in their White Paper "A New Future for Communications" their proposals for the sector, including how to ensure a competitive environment for the delivery of digital television services across platforms and the availability of public service channels on all main platforms.

Ealing Studios

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of Ealing Studios. [118]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Ealing Film Studios are privately owned and future ownership is therefore a commercial matter. Nonetheless, the Government welcome the fact that the studios, which are an important part of our film heritage, are to undergo a £50 million refit.

Licensing Laws

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects to introduce legislation to reform the liquor licensing laws. [648]

Dr. Howells: We remain fully committed to bringing forward legislation to reform the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library copies of the correspondence received by her Department from Sport England about the funding of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester 2002. [1343]

Mr. Caborn: My Department regularly discusses issues of sports policy with Sport England and these discussions—including exchanges of correspondence—are carried out on the understanding that they are in confidence and will not be divulged.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what advice she has received about the proposed funding of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester; [1341]

(2) what estimate she has made of the adequacy of funding arrangements for the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester; [1340]

(3) what representations she has received from Manchester 2002 Ltd. and Manchester City Council about the funding of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester. [1342]

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the 2002 Commonwealth Games. [2198]

Tessa Jowell: The Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002 will be the biggest multi-sport event ever held in the United Kingdom. They will leave a lasting sporting, economic and social legacy.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office explained, in evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee on 20 March 2001, that Manchester City Council, with the Government, had arranged a review of the finances and organisation of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester next year as a build up to the Games moves from the planning to the implementation phase.

Following the review, conscious of the benefits the Games will bring to the nation as a whole, the Government have agreed to provide from existing resources up to £30 million to support the Games. Sport England has agreed to provide up to £30 million to support the Games' costs in addition to its existing contribution to capital facilities, and Manchester City Council will make available a further £35 million. £25 million of these funds will be held jointly by the three parties as a contingency fund. This support is additional to the £10.5 million which the Government have already made available towards the costs of the opening and closing ceremonies for the Commonwealth Games, and marks the full extent of the financial support that the Government are prepared to make available.

The Government consider that this package should give the Games' organisation sufficient certainty to deliver the Games. Manchester City Council continues to retain ultimate financial responsibility for the Games.

Discussions continue about the make up and timing of the package of financial support. The Government, Manchester City Council and Sport England will working with the Games' organisers so strengthen the management arrangements for the control of expenditure.

Athletics Stadium

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects Sport England to make a further announcement about the feasibility of a new national athletics stadium at Picketts Lock. [1753]

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the plans for staging the World Athletics Championships in 2005. [2083]

Tessa Jowell: Sport England have concluded that they are not able yet to provide lottery funding to develop the Lee Valley National Athletics Centre and have asked Patrick Carter, who is conducting the review of the national stadium project, to carry out a separate review of the project with the following terms of reference:

"In the light of the Government's manifesto commitment to ensure that a first-class athletics stadium is available for the World Athletics Championships in 2005, to assess whether the Lee Valley National Athletics Centre project can be funded and managed in its current format and if not, what alternatives might be feasible. The review should report its findings within seven weeks."

Picketts Lock

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects the athletics facility at Picketts Lock to be completed; and if she will make a statement. [102]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Sport England have concluded that they are not able yet to provide lottery funding to develop the Lee Valley National Athletics Centre and have asked Patrick Carter, who is conducting the review of the national stadium project, to carry out a separate review of the project with the following terms of reference:

"In the light of the Government's manifesto commitment to ensure that a first-class athletics stadium is available for the World Athletics Championships in 2005, to assess whether the Lee Valley National Athletics Centre project can be funded and managed in its current format and if not, what alternatives might be feasible. The review should report its findings within seven weeks."

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regional Government

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to publish a White Paper on regional governance. [2197]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Our manifesto committed us to making provision for directly elected regional government in regions where people decide in a referendum to support it and where predominantly unitary local government is established. The Prime Minister has asked me to be responsible for a White Paper on Regional Governance, in close liaison with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and in co-operation with other Cabinet colleagues. I will present the White Paper to Parliament as soon as it is ready.

Lord Ashcroft

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what date his Department received a request for documents under the Data Protection Act 1998 from Lord Ashcroft; and on what date his Department replied to the request. [1001]

Mr. Leslie: Under the non-disclosure provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 it is not appropriate to disclose personal data except to the individual concerned.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 3 July 2001

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Playing Fields

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications were *(a)* made, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused, and in how many cases in which requirements or directions were made under Schedule 22(3) that proceeds or land should be paid or transferred to the local authority under section 77 or Schedule 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 for (i) the disposal or (ii) the change of use of land used as playing fields by schools in each year since 1 October 1998. [842]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 26 June 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table. This relates to applications to dispose of areas equal to, or larger than, a sports pitch. The table also shows the number of applications that did not result in the loss of any areas larger than a sports pitch. In the case of all approved applications, any proceeds were used to provide new or improved sports or education facilities at maintained schools.

Applications under section 77 and Schedule 22 of the school standards and framework Act 1998 to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields larger than a sports pitch[1]

	1998[2]	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[3]	*Total*
Applications received	35	68	49	17	169
Applications approved[4,5]	9	54	43	23	129
Approved applications where there is no permanent loss of playing field larger than a sports pitch[6]	3	20	12	8	43
Applications rejected	0	2	0	0	2
Applications withdrawn	3	6	1	0	10
Schedule 22(1)(3) direction made[7]	1	0	3	0	4

[1] 'Sports pitch' means an area of open grassed land equal to, or larger than, the Football Association's recommended area for games played by under-10s of 2,000 sq m, and which has a configuration making it suitable for use as a sports pitch
[2] The School Standards and Framework Act came into force on 1 October 1998. Figures for 1998, therefore, cover applications received and applications determined between 1 October to 31 December 1998
[3] This covers the period from 1 January to 22 June 2001
[4] Applications may not have been approved in the same year that they were made because of the time needed to assess them. There are 28 applications not yet determined
[5] In all approved cases, any proceeds were directed back into providing better sports or educational provision
[6] Not all approvals result in the loss of playing fields. Some proposals involve the granting of a lease in which the playing field remains in place, or they may involve the transfer of ownership but no change of use
[7] No directions made under Schedule 22(1)(3) have transferred land back to a local authority

Modern Languages

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students obtained GCSE and A-level examinations in *(a)* Urdu, *(b)* Bengali, *(c)* Gujerati, *(d)* Hindi, *(e)* Mandarin, *(f)* Cantonese and *(g)* modern languages in each of the last five years. [1299]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of students of all ages who obtained GCSE and GCE A-level passes in the various languages over the last five years are shown in the table. Figures for Mandarin and Cantonese are not available, data for Chinese as a whole have been provided instead.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
GCSE					
(a) Urdu	5,658	6,660	6,370	6,497	6,677
(b) Bengali	2,116	2,220	2,146	2,152	2,041
(c) Gujerati	1,313	1,309	1,026	1,189	1,200
(d) Hindi	—	—	—	—	—
(e)(f) Chinese	1,956	2,048	1,937	1,917	2,028
(g) All modern languages	450,244	444,639	460,186	472,010	476,050
GCE A-Level					
(a) Urdu	833	837	591	746	725
(b) Bengali	99	98	108	37	53
(c) Gujerati	—	—	—	—	—
(d) Hindi	31	19	13	8	—
(e)(f) Chinese	972	887	1,074	1,165	1,225
(g) All modern languages	32,937	32,340	31,298	30,224	27,455

Departmental Response Times

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the speed with which her Department communicates with hon. Members. [1300]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department intends at all times to inform constituency MPs on announcements and to ensure letters are posted on the letter board the day before an announcement is made.

MPs were notified of the new Beacon Schools on 20 June, in advance of the announcement the following day. We will continue to provide early notice to MPs of announcements which affect their constituencies.

LEA Councillors (Disqualifications)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the disqualification for serving as a councillor on the local education authority applies equally to teaching staff of *(a)* foundation schools, *(b)* voluntary aided schools and *(c)* community schools. [1334]

Mr. Timms: Yes. Teachers are disqualified from being councillors for their school's maintaining local authority, regardless of whom the contract of employment is with.

Teacher Training

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information her Department collates on the number of people leaving teacher training who enter teaching; and if she will publish those figures. [1617]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* My Department collects the number of teachers awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) each year. Data are then obtained from employers' returns to the Teachers' Pensions Scheme (TPS) to show which of these newly qualified teachers have entered teaching by the following 31 March in the maintained sector in England and Wales, the parts of the independent sector that are members of the TPS, full-time further education lecturers in England and Wales, and lecturers in higher education who are members of the TPS. The service of teachers is subsequently monitored at 31 March every year.

There were 24,740 teachers in England who obtained QTS in 1998, having followed a BEd or PGCE course. 18,140 (73 per cent.) entered full or part-time teaching in England by 31 March 1999 and a further 150 (0.6 per cent.) were teaching in Wales, as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
QTS following BEd or PGCE awarded in 1998	24,740	—
Not in service by 31 March 1999	6,450	26
In service in England by 31 March 1999		
Maintained schools	17,110	69
Independent schools	800	3
Other[1]	230	1
Total in service by 31 March 1999	18,140	73
In service in Wales	150	0.6
Total in service in England or Wales	18,290	74

[1] Includes further and higher education

Other teachers with QTS following a BEd or PGCE, not recorded above, may have had service in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or parts of the independent or HE sectors that are not members of the TPS.

AS Levels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what procedures are in place to ensure consistency of marking for AS levels *(a)* within and *(b)* between examination boards. [1959]

Mr. Timms: The procedures to ensure the consistency of marking of AS levels within awarding bodies are contained in the GCSE and GCE A/AS Code of Practice. A copy of this document, published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and its counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland, has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The QCA monitors compliance with this Code of Practice. It also looks at consistency between awarding bodies on a sample basis each year. In addition, the QCA has established an international panel of experts to review the QCA's arrangements for maintaining A level standards against best practice.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils have entered for the AS level examination this year. [1960]

Mr. Timms: The total number of students who have entered to sit the AS level examination in England and Wales will not be available until the autumn. However, there have been over 800,000 subject entries for AS examinations this summer. Many students will have entered for more than one subject.

Vocational GCSE Courses

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates her Department has made of the number of teachers required for the new vocational GCSE courses. [1962]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This autumn's annual review of the teacher training targets will take account of any likely additional demand for teachers as a result of the new vocational GCSE courses.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what qualifications will be required for teachers of each of the new vocational GCSE courses. [1963]

Mr. Timms: Teachers delivering vocational GCSEs in maintained secondary schools will be required to have Qualified Teacher Status. While there will be no further statutory requirements concerning qualifications, headteachers will be expected to match teachers' backgrounds and experiences as closely as possible to the subjects on offer. A comprehensive training and support programme will be available to ensure teachers are well prepared for, and supported during, the delivery of courses.

Secondary School Admissions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on admissions procedures to secondary schools. [1665]

Mr. Timms: We introduced a new admissions framework for all schools in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Its aim was to promote parental choice and make the admissions system fairer and easier for parents. A new statutory requirement was imposed on admission authorities requiring them to consult each other annually, before determining their admission arrangements. Where local agreement cannot be reached, admission authorities can object to an independent Schools Adjudicator or, where appropriate, to the Secretary of State.

School admission arrangements are decided locally and admission authorities are free to choose what arrangements to use, although they must be clear, fair and objective and operated in a reasonable manner in line with guidance contained in the Code of Practice on School Admissions.

Parents have the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel if refused a place at their preferred school.

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under what criteria local authorities may set up pupil referral units. [1667]

Mr. Timms: Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) can be established by local education authorities under section 19(2) of the Education Act 1996 to educate young people who are unable to attend school because of illness, exclusion or

otherwise. Education authorities must tell the Secretary of State whenever they set up or close a PRU, although there are no formal opening or closing procedures. However, before opening or closing a PRU there should be reasonable consultation locally, including with other PRUs in an area. The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1996 apply to PRUs with certain modifications. PRUs do not have to provide: a head teacher's room; playing fields; or staff accommodation for teachers to use for both work and social purposes. Education authorities may provide such accommodation, particularly for PRUs that offer full-time education on the premises. Education authorities must also ensure that PRU accommodation meets health, safety and fire regulations, and that it is suitable for education.

Primary Schools

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the *(a)* optimum number and *(b)* minimum number of pupils at which a primary school can provide a balanced education; and if she will make a statement. [2123]

Mr. Timms: There are good schools of all sizes. Delivery of a balanced curriculum depends on the organisation of the school and the skills and professionalism of the staff. We are supporting high standards in schools by effective inspection and targeted increased resources.

Where schools have declining rolls and a large number of empty places, their future should be reviewed, particularly in cases where suitable alternative provision is easily accessible.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she plans to take to reduce primary school class sizes for those aged eight years and over. [2144]

Mr. Timms: Following increases in the amount of education funding we have made available to schools and local education authorities since 1997, the average class size for primary pupils aged eight and over has fallen for the second consecutive year; it is now 26.7. We intend to continue to improve funding to schools and by 2003–04 the average funding per pupil will have risen by £750 in real terms since 1997–98; schools may use this to reduce class sizes for junior pupils if they see that as a priority. In addition, we have announced that £73 million is being made available this year specifically to ensure that infants transferring to junior class continue to benefit from small classes.

Teachers' Employment Rights

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the employment rights of teachers facing *(a)* redundancy and *(b)* redeployment. [2200]

Mr. Timms: Although rare, teachers can face redundancy and redeployment when the need for their work at a particular school ceases or diminishes. Nevertheless, they enjoy the same general employment rights under the law as employees in other occupations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Net Metering

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will undertake a review of current arrangements affecting net metering for renewable energy. [1679]

Mr. Wilson: The issue of how best to value the export of energy to local electricity networks, including the specific issue of net metering, was examined by the Embedded Generation Working Group, who issued their final report recently. The Working Group concluded that further work on this issue was required and made a number of recommendations on how this might be progressed. We shall be making an announcement shortly on how the recommendations of the Embedded Generation Working Group will be taken forward.

In May, the then Energy Minister wrote to electricity suppliers and distribution network operators asking them to consider improving net metering terms for small scale domestic renewable energy generators, including electricity from photovoltaics. A number of responses have been received and the Department will be considering what further action can be taken in the light of the conclusions that emerge.

Information and Consultation Directive

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what impact her Department expects the Information and Consultation Directive to have on competitiveness; and if she will make a statement. [2161]

Ms Hewitt: The directive allows for flexible information and consultation procedures which can be adapted to meet the needs of individual employers. As such it will help foster partnership at work, thereby improving competitiveness.

UK Productivity

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of her Department's measures over the last Parliament in respect of the targets for raising UK productivity. [295]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* During the last Parliament the Government set out their comprehensive strategy for meeting the productivity challenge in "Productivity in the UK: The Evidence and the Government's Approach", which was published alongside the November 2000 pre-Budget Report. The Government have also published major White Papers on enterprise, skills development and on science and innovation policy.

The Government's policy is based on the twin principles of delivering macroeconomic stability, to allow firms and individuals to invest for the future, and implementing microeconomic reforms to remove the barriers which prevent markets from functioning efficiently.

During the last Parliament the Government introduced a number of measures aimed at raising UK productivity consistent with the twin policy approach; for example we:

encouraged enterprise and innovation, including through the tax system, with reductions in corporation tax and capital gains tax, the introduction of R&D tax credits for small firms and 100 per cent. first year capital allowances for SMEs investing in ICT equipment;

created the Regional Development Agencies to drive forward growth in every region;

strengthened the competition regime via the Competition Act 1980;

increased real investment in the UK science base to reverse years of decline and encouraged business innovation through significant knowledge transfer funding including for the Higher Education Innovation and University Challenge Funds and Faraday Partnerships;

made substantial investments in education and training;

created the Small Business Service and Manufacturing Advisory Service to improve the services and environment for small firms;

launched the joint CBI/TUC productivity campaign;

instituted a new regulatory structure to promote competitiveness in the energy supply industry.

The Government are clear that having set a sound framework for investment and growth, further radical reform is needed to tackle the challenge of enterprise and productivity. To this end, the Government recently published "Productivity in the UK: Enterprise and the Productivity Challenge" which sets out measures to remove obstacles to innovation and competition and to create an enterprise culture, open to all. We are introducing measures to reform the competition regime, to encourage small businesses to start, innovate and grow, and to raise the quantity and quality of investment in the public and private sectors.

Icelandic Trawlermen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been received under the compensation scheme for former Icelandic trawlermen; how many duplicate applications there were; how many applications have been paid to date; and how many have been rejected. [1064]

Nigel Griffiths: The figures as at 22 June 2001 are as follows:

	Number
Total applications received	11,000
Duplicates	2,173
Passed for payment	2,436
Rejected	1,323

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications for compensation made to the Icelandic trawlermen's scheme have been referred to her for decision on the entitlement of those who continued in fishing; and when she hopes to reach a conclusion on those cases. [1065]

Nigel Griffiths: Some 905 claims from men who continued fishing on former Icelandic water trawlers after 1979 have been identified. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has received representations that these claims should be brought within the scope of the scheme. She is currently considering this issue.

Export Licences (Israel)

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences were issued, broken down by category, for military and security equipment to Israel *(a)* between 29 September and 31 December 2000 and *(b)* between 1 January and 31 May. [1616]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of military equipment is controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule I of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended (commonly known as the Military List).

Between 29 September and 31 December 2000, seven Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and no Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued covering the export to Israel of goods on the Military List. Between 1 January and 31 May 2001, 84 SIELs and no OIELs were issued covering the export of goods on the Military List to Israel.

Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the tables in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

This information could not be broken down in the manner requested as the equipment covered by most entries in the Military List could be used for military or security purposes.

Individual licences issued between 29 September and 31 December 2000 covering the export to Israel of goods on the military list

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued covering goods with this rating*
ML2	1
ML4	1
ML5	3
ML10	1
ML16	1
ML18	1

Individual licences issued between 1 January and 31 May 2001 covering the export to Israel of goods on the military list

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued covering goods with this rating*
ML3	1
ML4	11
ML5	27
ML9	3
ML10	21
ML11	6
ML13	1
ML15	3
ML16	3
ML18	2
ML21	2
PL5017	2
PL5031	2
End-use	2

This information does not cover any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

In addition, Israel is a permitted destination on certain Open General Export Licences covering the export of goods on the Military List; copies of all Open General Export Licences are placed in the Library of the House.

Ilisu Dam

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has received a copy of the Environmental Impact Assessment report for the Ilisu project in Turkey; and if she will make a statement. [2466]

Ms Hewitt: We have now received the Environmental Impact Assessment Report for the Ilisu project. A copy of the Report is being placed in the Library of both Houses.

I am very well aware of the great public interest which exists in this project, and the associated application for export credit cover from ECGD. ECGD are therefore arranging for a copy of the Executive Summary of the EIAR to be placed on their website (www.ecgd.gov.uk). Copies of the CD-ROM of the full report can be obtained by writing to Ilisu Project, ECGD, PO Box 2200, 2 Harbour Exchange Square, London E14 9GS enclosing a cheque for £5. ECGD will also be providing, free of charge, a copy of the Executive Summary.

Any comments on the Ilisu Dam project in the light of this report received by ECGD by 7 September 2001 will be taken into account by Ministers in their decision on whether or not to grant ECGD support for the project. Comments may be made in writing to the above address, or by e-mail to ilisueiar@ecgd.gov.uk.

A decision about export credit support requires very careful consideration. I shall therefore be seeking expert advice on the EIAR and consulting my ministerial colleagues, before taking a decision. Until this process is complete, we will not be commenting on the report.

Miners' Pension Rights

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to announce her decision in respect of the entitlement of sacked miners to pension rights. [1336]

Mr. Wilson: I am well aware of the level of interest in this long running issue. I hope to be in a position to announce my decision before the summer recess.

South West Regional Development Agency

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the impact of the South West Regional Development Agency on the economy of north Dorset. [662]

Alan Johnson: The South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA) has been in existence for two years and has been working with inherited programmes supporting economic, social and community regeneration within the South West Region.

The SW RDA has been encouraging and promoting the economy of the area and has taken the approach of working in partnership with a substantial range of partners within the sub-region. In north Dorset these have included: Dorset County Council, north Dorset District Council, Town/Parish Councils, Business Link Dorset (now BL Wessex) and Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Training and Enterprise Council (now Learning and Skills Council), housing associations, private sector businesses/developers and many more. The outcome of successful partnership working has been to introduce an integrated economic/social/community development process. Details of these arrangements and of specific projects supported by the RDA are available in the Library of the House.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* budgets and *(b)* administrative costs were for each of the regional development agencies in England for each financial year since their establishment; and what their planned budgets and administrative costs are for the next two years. [1434]

Alan Johnson: The table shows the Regional Development Agencies' *(a)* net budget for expenditure on programmes and *(b)* their administration budget for the financial years 1999–2000 to 2001–02.

The RDAs' net budgets collectively are planned to be £1,430 million for 2002–03 and £1,580 million for 2003–04. These have yet to be divided up between the RDAs, or between programme and administration.

	1999–2000		*2000–01*		*2001–02*[2]	
	Programme budgets[1]	*Administration*	*Programme budgets*[1]	*Administration*	*Programme budgets*[1]	*Administration*
One North East	99,385	9,585	111,749	10,513	139,832	10,103
North West	175,361	11,837	179,379	13,876	243,153	14,044
Yorkshire Forward	132,656	7,795	158,624	8,284	202,614	9,989
East Midlands	47,844	6,941	69,781	7,377	74,343	7,488
Advantage West Midlands	97,624	7,421	115,397	8,352	140,656	8,793
East of England	26,627	4,570	38,205	4,849	51,411	5,836
South East	70,498	5,196	81,658	6,343	89,708	6,643
South West	26,151	7,255	60,071	8,380	59,490	9,099
London	—	—	264,347	6,009	267,672	9,470

[1] The programme figures are net of receipts that the RDAs recycle.

[2] Approved to date

Hawk Jet

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Indian Government concerning the BAE Systems bid to supply Hawk jets; and what is the value of the BAE bid. [1307]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

The Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry have been supportive of BAE Systems' bid to supply Hawk to India. Visits have been made by Government Ministers from both MOD and DTI during the past 18 months. These visits have provided valuable opportunities to assure the Indian Government of HMG's support for a greater co-operation between UK and Indian defence companies, including on the BAE Systems Hawk proposal.

The value of the bid is a matter between BAE Systems and the Indian Government.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Early-day Motions

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the President of the Council what the cost was of printing and publication of EDMs in the last 12 months *(a)* in total, *(b)* per week and *(c)* per day. [2014]

Mr. Kirkwood: I have been asked to reply. House of Commons printing and publishing charges are volume related and calculated in arrears by financial year. Final figures for EDM costs are therefore available only for FY 2000–01 and amount to approximately £443,000. This figure does not include electronic publication costs associated with EDMs, which are not separately identifiable from overall electronic publishing costs.

There were 35 sitting or part-sitting weeks; and 159 sitting days in FY 2000–01, from which can be derived average costs for EDM printing and publishing of approximately £12,660 per sitting week and £2,786 per sitting day.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

First Junior Chancery Treasury Counsel

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the occasions on which First Junior Chancery Treasury Counsel were employed by the Department of Trade and Industry between 5 April 1999 and 4 April 2000, indicating the commencing dates, durations and purposes. [1451]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply

The First Treasury Junior (Chancery) is appointed to work exclusively on Government business. Between 5 April 1999 and 4 April 2000 he worked on 36 Department of Trade and Industry matters. Like others, the Government seek and receive their legal advice in confidence. All such advice is covered by legal professional privilege and is therefore exempt from disclosure. In the circumstances it is inappropriate to give the further particulars requested.

PRIME MINISTER

Disability Issues

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will define departmental and ministerial responsibilities for disability issues. [1642]

The Prime Minister: Maria Eagle, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, has responsibility for civil rights for disabled people, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Disability Rights Commission, for disability benefits, and for the promotion and co-ordination of disability issues across Government. Practice on the allocation of responsibility for disability matters in other appropriate Departments varies.

Work Permit Applications

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he made, and by which officials on his behalf, to *(a)* the Department for Education and Skills and *(b)* the Department for Culture, Media and Sport regarding the applications for work permits by Mr. Hector Sam and Mr. Carlos Edwards. [2090]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, no representations have been made on my behalf in respect of these matters.

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Government have for a public inquiry into the handling of the foot and mouth crisis. [2176]

Mr. Luff: To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish an independent public inquiry into all aspects of the Government's handling of foot and mouth disease. [2199]

The Prime Minister: There will be an inquiry to ascertain the lessons that can be learned from the foot and mouth outbreak. Its nature will be a matter for decision later: the immediate priority remains the eradication of the disease.

Climate Change

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) of 21 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 1W, if he will provide details of the new high-level group on climate change. [1774]

The Prime Minister: The EU-US summit of 14 June agreed to a proposal by the EU Presidency to establish a high-level group on climate change. I understand that a mandate for the group has not been finalised, but that it is envisaged that it will act as a channel for the EU and US to exchange information and maintain contact on important climate change issues. It is envisaged that the EU would be represented by the Troika.

Performance and Innovation Unit

Derek Twigg: To ask the Prime Minister what additional projects are planned for the Performance and Innovation Unit; and if he will make a statement. [2335]

The Prime Minister: I have asked the Performance and Innovation Unit to undertake a further project to review the legal and regulatory framework for charities and the wider voluntary and community sector and bring forward proposals for reform.

The Government are committed to working in partnership with charities and the voluntary sector to strengthen their contribution to the health and dynamism of the society and the economy. The project will consider how the regulatory and legal framework could better enable existing organisations to thrive and grow; encourage the development of new types of organisations where needed; and ensure public confidence.

The PIU will report in the winter. The sponsor Minister will be Baroness Morgan.

EU Institutions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to bring forward proposals to define and limit the powers of European Union institutions; and if he will make a statement. [1452]

The Prime Minister: The declaration on the future of the Union (Declaration 23) attached to the treaty of Nice lists:

"the precise delimitation of powers between the European Union and member states reflecting the principle of subsidiarity"

as one of the issues to be addressed by the inter-governmental conference in 2004.

The declaration also states that these discussions should be preceded by a deep and wide debate with all those representing public opinion. That debate has already begun. As I said in my speech in Warsaw in October 2000, the future shape of the institutions should concentrate on delivering real benefits to people in the areas that matter most to them. They should also ensure that the EU becomes more transparent, accountable and relevant.

Voting Systems

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister by what date he will carry out a review of the new voting systems for elections to *(a)* the Scottish Parliament, *(b)* the National Assembly of Wales, *(c)* the European Parliament and *(d)* the London Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [1453]

The Prime Minister: We said we will keep the situation under review and we will do so. No decision has yet been made on the precise timing of any formal review process.

Government Annual Reports

David Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to agree to requests for him to give evidence before a Select Committee on the Government annual reports; and if he will make a statement. [1847]

The Prime Minister: By long-standing convention, Prime Ministers have not given evidence to Select Committees. I regularly answer questions from members at Prime Minister's questions.

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if former members of Cabinet Committees are required to submit political diaries and memoirs for clearance by the Cabinet Office prior to publication. [1975]

The Prime Minister: The ministerial code states that former Ministers are required to submit their manuscript to the Secretary of the Cabinet and to conform to the principles set out in the Radcliffe report of 1976 (Cmnd 6386). These principles are drawn to the attention of Ministers when they are appointed and a note of them is included in the Directory of the Civil Service Guidance. Copies of the Directory are in the Libraries of the House and the text is available on-line at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/guidance.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what restrictions govern the publication of minutes of meetings of the Joint Cabinet Committee held in the last Parliament. [1977]

The Prime Minister: Details of the proceedings of all Cabinet Committees, including the Joint Cabinet Committee, are exempt from disclosure for 30 years under the internal discussion and advice exemption of the code of practice on access to government information.

Appointments Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his reply of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 17W, on the Appointments Commission (1) what categories of individuals other than those ennobled in order to enter the Government as Ministers will be recommended by him for a peerage without reference to the House of Lords Appointments Commission; [2154]

(2) if he will place in the Library correspondence with the House of Lords Appointments Commission concerning his practice of recommending some peerages without reference to the Commission. [2155]

The Prime Minister: With the exception of peerages created to enable individuals to serve as Ministers, all recommendations that I make to the Queen are referred to the House of Lords Appointments Commission for scrutiny. The final decision on whether to recommend those names, however, rests with me, unlike those recommendations proposed by the Commission itself.

Gothenburg Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what communications he has had with his Swedish counterpart in respect of the shooting with live ammunition of demonstrators at the European Summit in Gothenburg. [1759]

The Prime Minister: Since I left Gothenburg, I have had no communication with the Swedish Prime Minister, Goran Persson, about the policing of the violent rioting at the recent European Council meeting there. This is a

matter for the Swedish authorities. I understand that the Swedish Government have set up a commission to investigate all of the events surrounding the riots.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister which Department is responsible for overall monitoring of each Department's performance in relation to its public service agreements; and if he will make a statement. [1454]

The Prime Minister: Ministers in charge of Departments are responsible for delivering their public service agreements. I shall continue to hold regular meetings to take stock of progress against key objectives on crime, education, transport and health, with the support of the new delivery unit. The Committee on Public Services and Public Expenditure (PSX), chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and supported by HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office, has overall responsibility for monitoring performance on public service agreements.

DEFENCE

CHARM 3 Proof Firing Programme

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the CHARM 3 proof firing programme at Dundrennan in Kirkcudbrightshire. [2394]

Dr. Moonie: Due to the foot and mouth restrictions no firings are currently taking place at the Kirkcudbright range in Scotland. The results from the proof firings for the earlier batches of the CHARM 3 round have shown a consistently high standard of quality and performance. No changes are being made to the manufacturing process for the few, final batches and, based on advice from MOD's technical, safety and commercial experts, it has been agreed that the final firings can be waived. Further proof testing while the ammunition remains in service may be required, but this has yet to be confirmed.

There will still be a need for some CHARM 3 firings at Kirkcudbright. These firings relate to two safety trials for the Challenger 2 tank. The first is a worn barrel trial which is needed to establish with absolute certainty the amount of wear that can be permitted within a barrel while still being confident that the round can be fired safely. The second relates to trials prior to the acceptance of a new charge for A1 climatic conditions (very hot and dry). These safety trails could require the firing of an estimated maximum of 120 rounds.

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies and organisations which submitted expressions of interest in the provision of facilities management for the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory; when he will issue invitations to tender; and when tenders will be due. [848]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 June 2001]:* The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) has advertised a future requirement for facilities management services in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* (OJEC) and the MOD "Contracts Bulletin". Expressions of interest detailing financial and relevant commercial experience were invited and respondents given the appropriate period in which to submit information in accordance with EC Procurement Directives. These advertisements generated significant response from potential suppliers. I am withholding details of potential suppliers under Exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to government information.

The anticipated date for release of invitation to tender documents was identified in the OJEC and MOD bulletin notices as 31 July 2001.

As Dstl is still in the process of defining its requirements of facilities management services, interested parties have been advised that invitations to tender will not be released before 1 October and that a revised date of release will be notified in due course. A four-month response period is to be allowed. Accordingly, tenders are anticipated in the period of spring 2002.

In accordance with MOD guidance, organisations invited to tender will be listed in the MOD "Contracts Bulletin" when invitations are issued.

Defence Diversification

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the timetable is for, and what progress has been made on, establishing a Defence Diversification Council. [2202]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 57W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer).

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to establish funding to encourage technological innovation for defence diversification purposes. [2201]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) encourages the widest possible exploitation of defence technology by the civil sector. Since its establishment in 1999, the Defence Diversification Agency has fulfilled this role by encouraging, fostering and facilitating the cross fertilisation of technology between the UK defence and civil sectors. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 57W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). We have decided to bring the Defence Diversification Agency into the MOD head office where it will be best placed to continue to deliver defence diversification following the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency public-private partnership and the formation of the new company QinetiQ on 1 July 2001. We have no plans to change the roles and responsibilities of the Defence Diversification Agency nor to establish a separate technological innovation fund.

Future Joint Combat Aircraft

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors underlay his decision to rename the future carrier borne aircraft programme the future joint combat aircraft programme. [1596]

Mr. Hoon: The previous future carrier borne aircraft (FCBA) title dated from the period before the 1998 Strategic Defence Review when the programme was envisaged as a Sea Harrier replacement only.

The decision to rename the FCBA programme as future joint combat aircraft acknowledges that Joint Force 2000 will operate from land bases as well as aircraft carriers. The name change also reflects ministerial signature in January this year of the UK/US memorandum of understanding which recognised that the joint strike fighter has the best potential to replace the current force of both Harriers and Sea Harriers.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in relation to the memorandum of understanding between the UK and United States Governments to participate in the next development phase of the joint strike fighter. [1595]

Mr. Hoon: The current JSF concept demonstration phase continues to make excellent progress. Following signature of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) to cover the UK's entry into the engineering and manufacturing development (EMD) phase of the joint strike fighter programme in January this year, the process to select a single company to be awarded the EMD contract has been proceeding to schedule. As a result of our decision to sign the MOU, UK personnel are fully involved in this process. The plan remains to award the contract in October.

RAF Air Tanker Programme

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the RAF air tanker programme. [2139]

Dr. Moonie: The future strategic tanker aircraft will replace the RAF's fleet of VC10 and TriStar air-to-air refuelling and air transport aircraft from around 2007. This will provide the RAF with a modern fleet that will ensure that our forces have truly global reach.

The programme is at the vanguard of smart acquisition, and the integrated project team is forging innovative partnerships with industry to develop a public-private partnership solution to the requirement. Initial bids for a PFI service are due in today prior to a detailed negotiation and assessment phase. We are currently planning to make a final investment decision around mid-2002.

Future Large Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which types of aircraft are expected to operate in the future large aircraft carriers. [2138]

Dr. Moonie: The types of aircraft aboard the future aircraft carriers will depend upon the operational circumstances at the time. However, the CVF will have the capacity to operate a wide range of aircraft, including the future joint combat aircraft; future organic airborne early warning platforms; and helicopters in a variety of roles, for example, attack, anti-submarine warfare and support.

Chatham Dockyard Radiation Workers

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects former Chatham dockyard radiation workers to receive an offer of compensation under the no fault scheme for former radiation workers. [1949]

Dr. Moonie: There are two cases involving ex-Chatham dockyard radiation workers that have been assessed by the British Nuclear Fuels compensation scheme for radiation-linked diseases as eligible for compensation. The level of compensation due in both cases is still being assessed and, following completion of this exercise, offers of settlement will be made. It is not possible to predict precisely when this will be. However, in an effort to move matters forward, my Department would be prepared to consider reasonable requests for interim payments of damages in both of these cases.

Missile Defense

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria will govern whether the United Kingdom joins the United States Administration's missile defence programme. [1773]

Mr. Hoon: The US has not yet decided how it will seek to proceed with missile defence and has not put forward specific proposals for UK involvement. We have made clear that we would consider any such proposals carefully, in the light of circumstances at the time.

Aston Down

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish the date of the offer and the amount received by his Department from Serco for the purchase of the MOD site at Aston Down; [1349]

(2) what proposals his Department has for the future use of MOD Aston Down. [1350]

Dr. Moonie: The former Defence Storage and Distribution Centre at Aston Down, which closed on 31 March, is surplus to requirements and is currently on the market for sale by public competition. The site is being advertised in the property press and the closing date for bids is 24 August. It has not been sold to Serco.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in upgrading the prisoner database; and what response has been given to the recommendation of the Searches on the Person Review concerning the statistical recording and monitoring of strip searches. [978]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service management board is to consider a proposal for upgrading the prisoner database—local inmate database system (LIDS)—later this year. The proposal for LIDS is to put the existing database onto a more modern computer system to improve sustainability and operational flexibility.

The requirement for statistical recording and monitoring of strip searches has been submitted to the Prison Service information technology (IT) provider, to consider whether inclusion in the LIDS upgrade is the most appropriate way of meeting this requirement.

Asylum Seekers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose application for asylum has been refused have been moved from their settled address to another area while their appeal is dealt with since the setting-up of NASS. [1124]

Angela Eagle: This information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only through examination of individual case records.

As a matter of policy and practice, the national asylum support service (NASS) will move an asylum seeker it is supporting from their settled address only if the asylum seeker has requested it or there are exceptional circumstances which necessitate moving the asylum seeker.

Asylum seekers transferring to support from NASS because they have received a negative decision on their application or because they have reached the age of 18 will normally be moved from their current accommodation into NASS accommodation unless there are overriding reasons for supporting them in their existing accommodation.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the asylum support stakeholder group to meet; and if he will make a statement about its role. [1123]

Angela Eagle: The aim of the group as originally constituted was to act as a consultative forum at the time the asylum support scheme to be administered by the national asylum support service (NASS) was being set up. The asylum support stakeholder group has not met since NASS went live on 3 April 2000.

Currently, responsibility for formation of stakeholder groups rests with individual local authority regional consortiums responsible for asylum support issues.

Plans are being made to establish a new national forum on asylum support for consulting with interested parties.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications have been *(a)* rejected and *(b)* rejected as a result of being incorrectly completed in each year since 1995. [1469]

Angela Eagle: Information on the number of initial decisions to refuse refugee status from 1995 to 2000 is given in the table. Data on the number of refusals resulting from incorrectly completed applications are unavailable. However, such cases fall into the category of non-compliance, covering, for example, failure to provide further evidence as required, failure to respond to invitations to interview and failure to complete a statement of evidence form correctly or within the time allowed. Data on non-compliance are included in the table.

My hon. Friend may also be interested to know that in May 2001 79 per cent. of initial decisions were upheld on appeal.

Applications for asylum in the UK refused refugee status from 1995 to 2000

	Refusals[1]	
Year	*Total*	*Non-compliance*
1995	21,300	2,085
1996	31,670	2,015
1997	28,945	3,615
1998	22,315	2,995
1999[2]	11,025	1,085
2000[2]	76,850	26,630

[1] All data have been rounded to the nearest five

[2] Data for 1999 and 2000 are provisional, and exclude decisions made under backlog criteria

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it remains his policy to end the use of prisons to hold asylum seekers by October. [1466]

Angela Eagle: The Government remain committed to their long-term strategy of reducing the use of prison accommodation to hold immigration detainees. However, even in the long term, for reasons of geography, security and control, there will continue to be a need to hold some detainees in prisons. The use of the dedicated detention facilities managed by the Prison Service at Haslar, Rochester and Lindholme does not at present have a set duration. The temporary use of 500 additional places made available by the Prison Service in a number of local prisons is being reviewed and the timing of the withdrawal of immigration detainees from these prisons is the subject of discussions with the Prison Service.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the percentage of substantive family applications which received an initial decision within two months in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [1599]

(2) what was the average time taken for an initial decision to be made on asylum applications by single applicants without dependants in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [1598]

Angela Eagle: Information regarding the average time taken to make an initial decision is not available for the whole of 2000.

Nearly two thirds (63 per cent.) of new substantive family applications lodged in the period of 1 April 2000 to 31 December 2000 had an initial decision within two months.

The average time taken for an initial decision to be made on asylum applications by applicants without dependants for decisions made in the period of October to December 2000, was 14 months.

Information on the average time taken to make an initial decision, separately identified for family and single applicants is not available for 1998 and 1999.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of asylum applications included dependants in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [1597]

Angela Eagle: The information is given in the table. This information for 1998 and 1999 is published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletins "Asylum Statistics",

copies of which are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Estimated proportion of applications which include dependants[1]

	Percentage
1998	13
1999	[2]20
2000	[2]10

[1] Percentages are based on the cases for which the information is recorded

[2] Provisional figures

HMP Garth/HMP Wymott

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on reductions in the number of prison officers at HMP Garth and HMP Wymott. [2022]

Beverley Hughes: As part of the substantial settlements which the Prison Service received from the Treasury under the comprehensive spending review and spending review 2000, the service is required to deliver 1 per cent. cashable efficiency savings each year on its baselines. Following studies by the Prison Service's management consultancy service, the governors of Garth and Wymott are seeking to agree with the Prison Officers Association a package of efficiency measures including regrading and civilianisation. The proposed reduction at Wymott is 18 prison officer posts and at Garth 10 officer and two senior officer posts, to be partly offset by increases in civilian staff and operational support grades. The governors are satisfied that these changes can be introduced without endangering the safety of staff or prisoners or the security of the establishments.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will increase the monitoring of the running of HMP Garth and HMP Wymott. [2024]

Beverley Hughes: All prison establishments are regularly monitored by area managers against over 40 key performance targets, and the deputy director general personally reviews performance monthly. Area managers visit every establishment at least eight times a year and therefore there are no plans to introduce monitoring for Garth and Wymott over and above the current level already provided.

Double Jeopardy Rule

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for changes to the double jeopardy rule to apply retrospectively; and if he will make a statement. [1498]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government's manifesto included a commitment to reform the double jeopardy rule in cases involving murder and we will do so when parliamentary time allows. Details of the legislation will be announced when any Bill is published.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of the representations made to him during the period of public consultation on possible changes to the law on sexual offences. [2218]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Mr. Cameron McArthur

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 31 May (Ref. 10266/1) from the hon. Member for Northavon regarding Mr. Cameron McArthur. [1790]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member about Mr. McArthur on 27 June.

Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost was in the last year of a place in each prison in *(a)* the prison estate and *(b)* privately run establishments; and if he will make a statement. [2113]

Beverley Hughes: The average cost per place for each Prison Service and privately run establishment for the financial year 2000–01 is listed in the tables.

(a) Prison Service establishments

Prison name	*Cost per place (cash)*
Acklington	15,083
Albany	20,007
Ashwell	15,623
Askham Grange	19,353
Aylesbury	23,392
Bedford	22,449
Belmarsh	32,822
Birmingham	21,487
Blantyre House	19,346
Blundeston	21,869
Brinsford	22,606
Bristol	33,029
Brixton	27,750
Brockhill	31,058
Buckley Hall	17,735
Bullingdon	17,744
Bullwood Hall	27,991
Camp Hill	19,153
Canterbury	47,944
Cardiff	23,328
Castington	23,742
Channings Wood	18,212
Chelmsford	21,966
Coldingley	19,596
Cookham Wood	26,696
Dartmoor	20,999
Deerbolt	18,910
Dorchester	30,407
Dover	19,918
Downview	19,210
Drake Hall	14,873
Durham	31,806
East Sutton Park	19,590
Eastwood Park	22,266
Elmley	19,001

(a) Prison Service establishments

Prison name	*Cost per place (cash)*
Eriestoke	18,772
Everthorpe	17,845
Exeter	29,242
Featherstone	18,733
Feltham	26,361
Ford	11,608
Foston Hall	28,064
Frankland	34,888
Full Sutton	37,591
Garth	19,478
Gartree	24,233
Glen Parva	22,479
Gloucester	28,963
Grendon	22,089
Guys Marsh	16,365
Haslar	16,777
Hatfield	22,931
Haverigg	18,517
Hewell Grange	13,815
High Down	25,700
Highpoint	18,801
Hindley	21,463
Hollesley Bay	23,790
Holloway	37,376
Holme House	16,343
Hull	20,803
Huntercombe	24,038
Kingston	24,834
Kirkham	14,588
Kirklevington	14,346
Lancaster	22,471
Lancaster Farms	22,408
Latchmere House	13,717
Leeds	29,774
Leicester	36,566
Lewes	19,686
Leyhill	19,461
Lincoln	25,534
Lindholme	23,226
Littlehey	15,805
Liverpool	20,827
Long Lartin	33,376
Low Newton	31,716
Maidstone	19,823
Manchester	28,558
Moorland	18,466
Morton Hall	18,967
The Mount	15,046
New Hall	25,573
North Sea Camp	15,265
Northallerton	35,174
Norwich	23,606
Nottingham	19,539
Onley	19,181
Parkhurst	24,462
Pentonville	22,625
Portland	20,308
Preston	29,166
Ranby	17,218
Reading	30,226
Risley	18,680
Rochester	20,464
Send	19,371
Shepton Mallet	26,599
Shrewsbury	24,946
Stafford	16,786
Standford Hill	16,136
Stocken	15,881
Stoke Heath	19,597
Styal	25,240
Sudbury	13,635
Swaleside	16,864
Swansea	27,439
Swinfen Hall	21,464
Thorn Cross	20,886
Usk	24,300
The Verne	15,977
Wakefield	25,703
Wandsworth	20,294
Wayland	15,170
Wealstun	16,112
Weare	17,375
Wellingborough	16,516
Werrington	44,668
Wetherby	21,728
Whatton	16,844
Whitemoor	40,006
Winchester	24,195
Woodhill	29,721
Wormwood Scrubs	18,028
Wymott	19,082

(b) Privately run establishments

Prison name	*Cost per place (cash)*
Altcourse	57,063
Ashfield	38,906
Blakenhurst	22,845
Doncaster	25,640
Forest Bank	28,637
Lowdham Grange	29,713
Parc	39,058
The Wolds	26,874

Buckley Hall prison returned to Prison Service management in June 2000. Rye Hill prison opened in January 2001 and is excluded because only part-year data are available. The data in the tables are not comparable with the Prison Service key performance indicators (KPI) cost per place because headquarters overheads are not included in the establishment figures. Public prisons' cost per place data are not comparable with private prisons' data as their cost includes an element of capital repayment. These data will shortly be published in the Prison Service annual report and accounts 2000–01.

Fire Alarms (Humberside)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of cases where fire alarms were present in dwellings on fire in 2000 they *(a)* raised the alarm, *(b)* operated but failed to raise the alarm and *(c)* failed to operate altogether in the Humberside fire authority area. [1470]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The information relates to fires in dwellings where a smoke alarm was present that were attended by the Humberside local authority fire brigade in 1999. 2000 data are not yet available.

In 38 per cent. of cases the smoke alarm operated and raised the alarm.

In 15 per cent. of cases the smoke alarm operated but failed to raise the alarm.

In 47 per cent. of cases the smoke alarm failed to operate.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Overseas Territories (Citizenship)

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to introduce a bill granting British citizenship to the citizens of the British Overseas Territories; and if he will make a statement. [1784]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Overseas Territories Bill, which will grant British citizenship to all British dependent territories citizens in qualifying territories, was given a First Reading in the House of Lords on 21 June. The Second Reading is scheduled for 10 July. The Bill was published on 22 June. Copies of the Bill, with explanatory notes, are available from the Libraries of both Houses.

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he or his Department has had recently with the Government of Sudan regarding the treatment of Sudanese Christians. [1355]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to be deeply concerned by the suffering of all in the Sudan, regardless of religious or ethnic background. Christians do have specific concerns, which we take up with the Government of Sudan bilaterally and through the EU. In recent weeks, our ambassador in Khartoum has discussed our concerns with a number of leading Sudanese politicians, including the Vice-President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Religious Affairs and the Governor of Khartoum State. He has also held a meeting with Archbishop Marona, the leader of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. This is part of a continuing dialogue on a key issue for human rights, and peace, in Sudan. Church issues are also an important part of the agenda of the EU/Sudan political dialogue. In London, my officials keep in close touch with representatives of the British Churches with an interest in Sudanese affairs.

Nice Treaty

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if the Government will delay ratification of the Nice treaty until the Republic of Ireland can ratify the treaty; [2204]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications of the outcome of the Irish referendum on the future of the Nice treaty. [2208]

Peter Hain: I refer to the right hon. Gentleman to my answer of 28 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 167W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the clauses in the treaty of Nice which are essential to EU enlargement. [2207]

Peter Hain: The Nice treaty as a whole is essential for enlargement. The enlarged EU we want cannot work effectively without the changes that Nice makes to the EU's institutions and procedures. All member states are agreed that Nice opens the way for enlargement, and that, with the entry into force of the treaty, the EU will have completed the institutional changes necessary for the accession of new member states.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on the future of the Nice treaty of one member state's inability to ratify it. [2205]

Peter Hain: In order for the treaty of Nice to enter into force it must be ratified by all 15 member states in accordance with their constitutional requirements.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to hold a referendum on UK ratification of the Nice treaty following the Irish referendum. [2209]

Peter Hain: The treaty of Nice can come into force only if it is ratified by all member states in accordance with their own constitutional requirements. In the UK, this means that Parliament must pass legislation to amend the European Communities Act 1972. Parliament will decide whether or not to accept the Nice treaty, as it did for the Single European Act, Maastricht and Amsterdam.

Arms Trade

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policies his Department will adopt at the UN conference in New York in July on the trade in small arms and light weapons; and if he will make a statement. [1860]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government attach great importance to supporting efforts to reduce the uncontrolled spread and use of small arms and light weapons.

The UK and its European partners have consistently maintained that the forthcoming UN conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects should adopt a politically binding programme of action containing concrete measures to deal with both the supply and demand side of the trade. The UK has made substantial contributions to proposals put forward by the EU on key areas of the programme of action. These include:

- export control and export licensing criteria;
- marking and tracing and brokering where the EU hopes for progress towards a commitment regarding the elaboration of a legally binding instrument;
- management of stockpiles and surpluses, and destruction;
- disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DD&R) of ex-combatants;
- assistance for implementation of concrete measures agreed on, with a view to improving the situation on demand side, through weapons collection and destruction, capacity-building for border control, customs and law enforcement etc.

We believe that the conference should not be seen as the end but the start of a process, which must be actively followed up. The EU has supported the proposal of the preparatory committee chairman, Ambassador Dos Santos, for a major review conference in 2006, with meetings of states on a bi-annual basis to consider the national and regional implementation of the agreed programme of action.

The Government also acknowledge the important role which NGOs and civil society can play in this field. We are working to see their interests reflected in the conference's programme of action and in its follow-up.

Mr. Ian Stillman

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the case of Mr. Ian Stillman who was recently jailed in northern India. [1855]

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations HM Government have made to the Government of India regarding the detention of Mr. Ian Stillman; what assurances have been received from the Indian authorities about the health and well-being of Mr. Stillman; and if he will make a statement. [2219]

Mr. Bradshaw: Consular staff are monitoring Ian Stillman's welfare closely. They were successful in arranging his transfer to a jail more suited to his special needs. They will continue to ensure that he receives adequate medical treatment.

The Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about Mr. Stillman's welfare at a meeting on 26 June with Prime Minister Vajpayee's principal secretary, and also our hope that his appeal will be heard swiftly. We will continue to speak to the Indian authorities.

Drugs Trade Conference

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the conference on the global economy of illegal drugs held in London on 25 and 26 June. [2017]

Mr. Bradshaw: This conference was the first attempt in an international gathering to address aspects of the economy of the illegal drugs trade. The conference attracted over 200 participants from 60 countries, and leading speakers in their fields. The conference looked at a number of key interrelated areas in the illegal drugs economy, including factors influencing production of illegal drugs; middle markets and how best to attack them; and the wider corrosive impacts of the drugs trade internationally, including its impact on livelihoods, governance, environment, legitimate trade and conflict. The conference also addressed the relationship between the drugs trade and other areas of illegal economic activity. These are important issues for the UK's drugs strategy and for our wider foreign policy, which we intend to follow up in the coming months.

Colombia

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Colombian Government concerning paramilitary incursions into peace village communities in the Cacarica region of Colombia. [2019]

Mr. MacShane: The British embassy in Bogota is in regular contact with the Colombian authorities on the safety and protection of vulnerable groups, including the peace communities. On 27 June, the Colombian ambassador to London wrote to me in order to outline the measures that his Government are taking to protect displaced communities in the Cacarica river basin as they return to their homes. He also assured me that the Colombian Government are aware of the need to strengthen the protection mechanisms for a civilian peace scheme in the region, and will adopt the measures necessary to protect vulnerable communities there. Also on 27 June, British embassy officials met members of the San Francisco peace community close to Cacarica, and experiencing similar serious problems, to listen to their concerns first hand. The UK and Dutch Governments are sponsoring a project to build a refuge in the town of Rio Sucio where members of the peace community can stay.

We remain very concerned about the activities of all the illegal armed groups in Colombia. We have called upon the Government of Colombia to continue their efforts to combat paramilitarism effectively and to continue taking concrete action to dismantle such groups by arresting, prosecuting and punishing all those involved.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground

11. **Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he next intends to meet Bob Kiley to discuss progress towards a partial privatisation of the London Underground. [661]

Mr. Byers: There is no question of privatising, or part privatising, the Tube. The Tube is a public service and the public sector should own and run it.

The current Tube is not good enough. It desperately needs modernising. Of course there is a role for the private sector—working for the public sector London Underground. Together they will deliver the massive improvements that are needed for a better, more reliable and more secure Tube.

I am not prepared to put safety on the Tube at risk. I therefore intend that there should be a double safety veto. Our proposals for the Tube will not go ahead unless:

First, HSE accept the new safety case for London Underground's new structure, and

Second, HSE accept the new safety case to be applied to the involvement of the private sector.

In addition under my proposals, London Underground will run the Tube and retain responsibility for safety. I shall be making this clear to Mr. Kiley when I meet him later today.

Leeds Supertram

12. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the funding of the Leeds Supertram. [663]

Mr. Jamieson: Funding arrangements for the Leeds Supertram have now been agreed. I am delighted that the Government will be making a very substantial contribution towards the capital costs of this project, which are estimated at £487 million. It is another example of our delivery of the step change in public transport set out in the 10-Year Plan.

Roads (North-west England)

13. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve the road infrastructure of the north-west of England. [664]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is currently taking forward four major road schemes in the north-west of England and 12 route management studies. In addition, the local transport plan settlement for this year allocated some £84.5 million for local roads—an increase of 75 per cent. over the last year.

"Transport 2010: the 10-Year Plan"

14. **Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards implementing the proposals in "Transport 2010: the 10-Year Plan". [665]

Mr. Spellar: The 10-Year Plan came into effect in April at the start of the new financial year. It is too early to draw conclusions about progress, but we remain firmly committed to the outcomes and targets it contains. We are setting in place mechanisms to secure and monitor delivery, and will produce a first progress report next year as part of the first review of the plan.

Regeneration Finance

15. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to widen access to regeneration finance. [666]

Ms Keeble: The Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal sets out a programme to use mainstream funds to combat deprivation and regenerate marginalised neighbourhoods—and there will be increases of over £30 billion to these programmes over the coming three years.

Neighbourhood renewal will focus those resources on combating deprivation and meeting the needs of local people—and local people will have a say in how they are used through Local Strategic Partnerships. We recognise, though, that in the areas with the most severe deprivation extra resources will be needed to kick-start this process. This is why we have introduced the £900 million Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, as well as the Community Chests and Community Empowerment Fund to help local people get involved in the regeneration of their neighbourhoods.

Labour Relations (Transport Industry)

16. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the state of labour relations in the transport industry. [667]

Mr. Spellar: We believe that problems at work should be resolved by constructive negotiation; accordingly we are pleased that the RMT and almost all of the relevant train operators were able to avoid a dispute planned for Monday 25 June and tomorrow, 4 July, and that the recent dispute which led to industrial action on the London Underground has been resolved with the RMT and ASLEF. I will also be meeting representatives of employers and unions in other parts of the transport industry.

Railtrack

17. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding the future of Railtrack. [668]

Mr. Spellar: The Statement of Principles agreed on 2 April between the Government and Railtrack set out a new agenda for the company and a new working relationship with the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority. Railtrack is now implementing the reforms and restructuring of its organisation agreed as part of the new deal.

M6 Multimodal Study

18. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the M6 Multimodal Study will be published. [669]

Mr. Spellar: This study of the M6 between Birmingham and Manchester started in December 1999. The study is due to report to both the West Midlands and North-West Regional Planning Bodies in the autumn.

Planning Laws

19. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations his Department has received concerning reform of planning laws; and if he will make a statement. [670]

Ms Keeble: The Department receives regular representations making proposals for changes to planning laws.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has received in the last 12 months concerning reform of planning laws; and if he will make a statement on the Planning Green Paper. [1431]

Ms Keeble: The Department receives regular representations making proposals for changes to planning laws. It is proposed to publish a Green Paper in the autumn on the steps that might be taken to improve the operation of the planning system.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will make a statement on reorganising the planning system. [1654]

Ms Keeble: It is proposed to publish a Green Paper in the autumn on the steps that might be taken to improve the operation of the planning system.

Regional Government

20. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for elected regional assemblies. [671]

27. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation for regional government in England; and if he will make a statement. [678]

Dr. Whitehead: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on regional government in England.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to publish *(a)* Green and *(b)* a White Paper on regional government in England. [1324]

Mr. Raynsford: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on regional government in England.

No date has been set for publication.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the proposed regional assemblies in England outside London will levy a precept on council tax. [1280]

Mr. Raynsford: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on regional government in England. This will include proposals on the funding of regional assemblies, including whether they should have preaccepting powers.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has received in the last 12 months concerning the creation of regional assemblies. [1297]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has received a number of representations from organisations and members of the public on the creation of regional assemblies.

Council Tax (Park Homes)

21. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to reform the council tax system in respect of park homes. [672]

Dr. Whitehead: We are aware of concerns of park home owners and other occupiers of low value properties about the council tax bands. We intend to publish a White Paper on local government finance later this year, and decisions on any reforms of the council tax system will be made in the context of the White Paper.

Cullen Inquiry

22. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to follow up the recommendations of the Cullen inquiry. [673]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Commission published Part 1 of Lord Cullen's Report into the Ladbroke Grove train crash on 19 June. I have asked them to ensure that the 89 recommendations are acted upon, and to report back to me within six months. The Chair of the HSC has asked the industry to tell him within a month how they intend to take forward the recommendations.

Fire Brigade (Shropshire)

23. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Fire Brigade cover in north Shropshire. [674]

Dr. Whitehead: Responsibility for providing fire services in north Shropshire rests with Shropshire and Wrekin fire authority. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering an application from the authority under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 which includes the replacement of two pumping appliances by one with a larger crewing capacity at both Whitchurch and Market Drayton. He will not grant approval unless satisfied that national fire cover standards will be maintained.

Rural Rail Services

24. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for the improvement of rural rail services. [675]

Mr. Jamieson: Our aim is to bring new life and more passengers to rural rail services. The Strategic Rail Authority's Rail Passenger Partnership scheme is providing funding for new or improved local services. The SRA is also encouraging Community Rail Partnerships to promote rural lines locally and in the wider tourist market.

Local Government Funding

25. **Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress he is making in reviewing local government funding formulae. [676]

Dr. Whitehead: September's local government finance Green Paper set out our plans for reform of the revenue grant distribution system to local authorities. An analysis of the 16,000 plus responses we received on this and other issues was published on our website in March. A White Paper setting out our decisions on the way forward will be published later this year.

26. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform the system of standard spending assessments. [677]

Dr. Whitehead: September's local government finance Green Paper set out our plans for reform of the revenue grant distribution system to local authorities. An analysis of the responses we received on this and other issues was published on our website in March. A White Paper setting out our decisions on the way forward will be published later this year.

New Transport Infrastructure

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans

he has to reform the planning regulations and the Transport and Works Act 1992 to speed up the decision-making process on new transport infrastructure. [1029]

Mr. Spellar: We intend to announce shortly measures to streamline planning procedures for major infrastructure projects, which include safeguarding opportunities for public involvement in the process.

We shall also shortly be embarking on a fundamental review of Part 1 of the Transport and Works Act 1992 with the aim of identifying any scope for improving and speeding up the process for authorising guided transport projects.

Railway Industry

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the Government's policy regarding the ownership and structure of the railway industry. [1018]

Mr. Spellar: The framework provided by the Transport Act 2000 is now in place to enable the Government's objectives for rail in the 10-Year Plan to be achieved. We will work with the industry to drive up performance and to identify obstacles to progress, and we wish the industry to focus on these objectives rather than on another structural reorganisation.

Transport Projects

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give details of contracts undertaken by his Department with private firms for transport projects which do not contain a clause to recompense public funds in the event of a re-financing deal entered into by the private partner. [1024]

Mr. Spellar: The table sets out the information requested.

PFI contract (contracting authority in brackets)	*Date of contract signature*	*Does contract contain clause to recompense public funds in the event of refinancing by the private sector?*	*Notes*
Channel Tunnel Rail Link	February 1996	No	DTLR would directly benefit from any refinancing through a reduction in the requirement for an operating subsidy in future years
Birmingham North Relief Road (Highways Agency)	February 1992	No	Finance for the Birmingham Northern Relief Road has yet to be finalised
A69 Carlisle to Newcastle (Highways Agency)	January 1996	No	—
A1(M) Alconbury to Peterborough (Highways Agency)	February 1996	No	Refinancing not relevant due to use of bond finance
A419/A417 Swindon to Gloucester (Highways Agency)	February 1996	No	Refinancing not relevant due to use of bond finance
M1-A1 Lofthouse to Bramham Link Road (Highways Agency)	March 1996	No	Refinancing discussions in progress with Highways Agency
A50 Stoke to Derby (Highways Agency)	May 1996	No	—
A30/A35 Exeter to Bere Regis (Highways Agency)	July 1996	No	—
A19/A168 Dishforth to Tyne Tunnel (Highways Agency)	August 1996	No	This contract has been refinanced and Highways Agency will obtain a share of the benefit
M40 Denham to Warwick (Highways Agency)	October 1996	No	Refinancing discussions in progress with Highways Agency
MOT Computerisation (Vehicle Inspectorate)	February 2000	No	—
Traffic Control Centre (Highways Agency)	March 2001	Yes	—

Strategic Rail Authority (Consultants)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a list of the technical and financial consultants currently employed by the Strategic Rail Authority, the nature of the assignment for each consultant, and the value of each contract. [1025]

Mr. Spellar: Since its inception on 1 February 2001 the Strategic Rail Authority have used the following technical consultants with an awarded contract value. It should be noted that contract values do not necessarily equate to expenditure in this financial year.

Consultant	*Project*	*Contract value (£)*
AEA Technology	PTE Passenger Fares analysis	5,900
	Light Rail Franchising	105,000
	Analysis of Passenger Rail Fares	13,000
	Thameslink report	6,250
	South London Metro Study	48,000
	Calculation of Passenger Miles	2,500

Consultant	Project	Contract value (£)
Babtie Group Ltd.	DDA funding at stations	39,975
Booz Allen and Hamilton Ltd.	West Coast Mainline enhancement and Renewal	10,000
	BAFO evaluation	36,850
	WCML U monitoring	47,250
	General Economic and technical advice	50,000
CJ Associates	Six tracking at Paddington study	59,840
Entec UK Ltd.	High Speed Line study	29,780
GIBB Ltd.	Island Line replacement	38,000
	Buxton-Matlock reopening	22,816
	East Anglia mapping	15,000
	Planet model extension	99,933
	Old Oak Common study	2,750
Máunsell Ltd.	London East West study	123,935
	North London Line engineering	46,611
MDS Transmodal	Neutral Grant scheme	78,190
	CTRL	28,770
	Transpennine Market Research	33,170
	Freight Strategies study	6,000
Mott McDonald	Orbirail study	164,000
	East West study	48,950
Mouchel Consulting Ltd.	Central Railway	32,541
MVA Ltd.	Northern Rail	26,420
	High Speed Line (infrastructure)	91,900
	East West study	36,910
Oscar Faber	Greater Manchester Strategic Rail study	99,250
Ove Arup and Partners	Appraisal methodology for Rail Freight	86,000
	Impact of planned and proposed infrastructure work	70,000
	Review of sensitive lorry miles	60,000
	Heathrow new train services	33,000
	High Speed Line (infrastructure)	30,000
Radical Ltd.	Freight Strategy study	105,350
Sinclair Knight Merz	Freight Strategy study	118,500
Total		1,952,341.00

The SRA have also used the following technical consultants on a call-off basis.

Consultant	Project
AEAT	General technical advice
Babtie Group Ltd.	CTRL technical advisers
	Thameslink 2000 advisers
	General technical advice
Booz Allen and Hamilton Ltd.	CSC franchise replacement
	SWT franchise replacement
	Performance renegotiation
	Transpennine Franchise study
First Class Partnership	General technical advice
GIBB Ltd.	Rail Passenger Partnership
	Strategic Scenario testing
	Thameslink replacement
	General technical advice
Halliburton Brown and Root Ltd.	Transpennine Express Project
Interfleet Technology	Mark One rolling stock replacement study
MDS Transmodal	General technical advice
Mott McDonald	Economic advice
	General technical advice
MVA	Thameslink replacement
	ECML infrastructure
	General technical advice
Oscar Faber	General technical advice
Ove Arup and Partners	Wales and Borders replacement
	General technical advice
Symonds Group	Freight grant adviser
WS Atkins	General technical advice

The SRA are currently using the following financial advisers on a call-off basis.

Consultant	Project
KPMG	Financial adviser
Lazard brothers and Co. Ltd.	Financial adviser
Marsh UK Ltd.	Financial adviser (insurance issues)
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Financial adviser (external auditors)

Parish and Town Councils

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many applications for the abolition of parish or town councils he has received from district or unitary authorities in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these applications he has granted. [1142]

Dr. Whitehead: The Local Government Act 1972 contains no provision for the abolition of parish councils. However, this legislation provides for the dissolution of parish councils where the population of a parish falls below 150. Dissolution in such circumstances is carried out by order of the district council. We have no record of any dissolution orders.

The Local Government Act 1992 made provision for the abolition of parishes by the Secretary of State following a recommendation by the Local Government Commission. No parishes were abolished as a consequence of the structural review of local government during 1992–97.

In implementing recommendations made by district councils under Part II of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 the Secretary of State has abolished five parish councils, all in 1999, as follows:

The East Lindsey (Parishes) Order 1999—the common parish council for the three parishes of Saltfleetby All Saints, Saltfleetby St. Clements and Saltfleetby St. Peter was abolished to be replaced by a single new parish and parish council of Saltfleetby.

The Mid Sussex (Parishes) Order 1999—the parish councils of Clayton and Keymer were abolished to be replaced by a new single parish council of Hassocks.

The Tandridge (Parishes) Order 1999—the parish council of Lingfield and Dormansland was abolished to be replaced by two new parish councils, one for each of the villages.

The West Lindsey (Parishes) Order 1999—on the creation of the parish of Brookenby from part of the parish of Stainton le Vale, the parish council of Stainton le Vale was abolished to be replaced by a new parish council of Brookenby and a parish meeting for Stainton le Vale.

Public Transport Information System

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress in implementing a national public transport information system. [1420]

Mr. Jamieson: Traveline, the national public transport information system, is now available throughout Great Britain. It provides route and timetable information for bus, coach, tram, underground, train, ferry and metro through a national-rate call to a single telephone number—0870 608 2 608.

I am delighted that transport operators and local authorities have worked in partnership to deliver Traveline, with the support of central Government. Traveline will form part of our Transport Direct initiative. Transport Direct will allow people to plan their journeys and to compare routes and prices.

M6 (Staffordshire)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will rule out the widening of the M6 motorway between junctions 11 and 16 in Staffordshire. [1333]

Mr. Jamieson: Options for dealing with the problems on the M6 between junctions 11 and 16 are currently the subject of the MIDMAN multi-modal study on which the final report will be made later this year. It would be premature to make any statements on widening before the report is complete.

Rail Safety (Shenfield)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the signals passed at danger incidents at Shenfield in the last two years. [1474]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advise that there has been only one SPAD incident at Shenfield in the last two years. This occurred on 9 November 1999, when a First Great Eastern passenger train over-ran signal L487 by three yards. The cause of this incident was linked to driver misjudgment of the trains braking.

Railways

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the process is of allocation of funds from *(a)* the Railway Development Fund and *(b)* the Freight Strategy. [1400]

Mr. Jamieson: The concept of the Railway Modernisation Fund is outlined in the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Agenda. Further details will be provided in its Strategic Plan, to be published in November.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what moneys have been allocated to Scotland from the Freight Strategy. [1399]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Freight Strategy includes a number of infrastructure schemes with relevance to Scotland and the new funding schemes will be applied on a GB-wide basis.

In addition the Scottish Executive have responsibility for the administration of the Freight Facilities and Track Access Grant schemes in Scotland.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions over how many years the Freight Strategy is to run. [1398]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Freight Strategy is designed to deliver growth over the period of the Government's 10-Year Plan but also looks to provide sustainable growth beyond the 10-year horizon.

Empty Homes

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to allow local authorities a discretionary power to levy 100 per cent. council tax on long-term empty homes within their area; and if he will make a statement. [1471]

Dr. Whitehead: In the Rural White Paper last November, we set out proposals to consult on giving local authorities discretion on applying the 50 per cent. discount for second homes. We are considering whether the principle of greater local discretion could be extended to long-term empty homes as well.

Municipal Incinerators

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has received in the last 12 months concerning planning permission for the construction of new municipal incinerators; and if he will make a statement. [1285]

Ms Keeble: Some 1,304 representations (including 237 as signatures on a petition) concerning 14 sites, either where planning permission has been granted or there are proposals for future development, have been received. Two of the sites relate to applications for waste to energy incinerators at Belvedere and Edmonton, in the London boroughs of Bexley and Enfield respectively, where the applications have been made to my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 because they are proposed to generate more than 50 megawatts.

Departmental Merger Costs

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated administrative cost was of the merger of the Departments of the Environment and Transport in 1997. [1430]

Dr. Whitehead: The costs and benefits of the merger in 1997 of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport were set out in the DETR Merger Group Report published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in August 1997. Estimates of expenditure, including those elements designed to modernise the working methods and service delivery of the new Department and to take advantage of best practice, for example in IT and financial management systems, are set out in the table.

Expenditure area	*£ million*
Measures to link office automation systems	0.1–0.2
Measures to move to a single office automation system	3–6
Measures to move to a single financial management and accounting system	6–9
Conversion of parts of an HQ building to provide flexibility	0.35
Measures to co-locate Ministers and supporting staff	0.2
Co-location of Finance divisions	0.05
Co-location of Personnel divisions	0.05–0.08

EU Committee of the Regions

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have to (i) address and (ii) visit the EU Committee of the Regions. [1298]

Dr. Whitehead: Neither my right hon. Friend nor his ministerial colleagues within this Department currently have any plans to address or visit the EU Committee of the Regions.

Electoral Law

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to change the electoral system *(a)* in the Greater London Authority, *(b)* for the election of directly elected mayors and *(c)* for the election of local councillors. [1281]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have no plans to change these electoral systems.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the electoral system planned for the election of regional assemblies in England outside London. [1275]

Mr. Raynsford: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on regional government in England. This will include proposals on the electoral system for regional assemblies.

Empty Council Housing

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the change in the amount of empty council housing in England. [1294]

Ms Keeble: Figures showing the level of empty council housing need to be seen in the context of local authorities' overall strategies for addressing deprived areas, and areas of low demand. In this respect an increase in properties awaiting demolition may be a relevant factor. It is clearly important that local authorities turn round empty properties which are available for letting, whether immediately or after minor repairs, as quickly as possible.

Housing

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to give an equity stake to residents in *(a)* council housing and *(b)* non-municipal social housing; and if he will make a statement. [1328]

Ms Keeble: The Government are committed to examining the ways in which social tenants might gain a stake in their homes. A range of options for how this might be done and the issues that these raise are now being considered. The current intention is to consult more widely once this work is further advanced, probably in the autumn.

Departmental Restructuring

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many civil servants were employed by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in April 2001; and how many it is anticipated will be employed by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions once departmental restructuring is completed. [1467]

Dr. Whitehead: At 1 April 2001 the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Central) (DETR (C)) employed 4,044 staff. We estimate that once restructuring is complete, the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Central) ((DTLR (C)) will employ approximately 3,400 staff subject to final decision on the number of support staff to transfer. This figure also takes account of staff movements between DTLR, Home Office and Department of Trade and Industry which follow from Machinery of Government changes made after the election. Neither figure includes staff employed by DTLR in Government Offices.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated administrative cost is of the recent changes to the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. [1432]

Dr. Whitehead: Costs incurred so far on changing the Department's name amount to £25,250. No major systems costs associated with machinery of government changes have been incurred. Work of a short-term nature to implement the transfers of responsibilities is in hand, involving staff at various levels and in a number of

different areas of the Department. No central record is kept of the time spent and no estimate of the staff cost is therefore available. However, these costs are not significant.

Regional Chambers

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* budgets and *(b)* administrative costs were for each of the regional chambers in England for each financial year since their establishment; and what their planned (i) budgets and (ii) administrative costs are for the next two years. [1276]

Mr. Raynsford: The eight regional chambers have been established voluntarily by bodies representing the interests of each region. The Government proposed earlier this year to provide £15 million for the chambers over a three year period to enable them to strengthen their role in the regions. It is hoped to make a further announcement about this soon; otherwise, their costs and budgets are a matter for the chambers and their members.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the responsibilities are of each Minister in his Department. [1327]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) has seven Ministers:

The right hon. Stephen Byers, Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions;

John Spellar MP, Minister for Transport;

Right hon. Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local Government;

Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC, Minister for Housing and Planning; and

David Jamieson MP, Sally Keeble MP and Dr. Alan Whitehead MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretaries.

Full details of individual portfolios are set out in a DTLR press notice published on 12 June, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the trend in the number of priority homeless acceptances in England since 1997. [1293]

Ms Keeble: The number of households accepted by local housing authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need during the 12 months prior to March 2001 was 113,590. That is 2.5 per cent. higher than the number of households accepted during the 12 months prior to March 1997 110,810.

It is greatly to the credit of local housing authorities that they have been able to meet their statutory obligations to help those who are homeless and in most need of accommodation, and they are to be congratulated.

The underlying reason for the increase in acceptances is a shortage of affordable accommodation in some areas, especially London and the south-east. This shortage follows a significant cut in housing resources, when the 1992–97 Government cut total capital investment in housing from £3.9 billion in 1992–93 to planned spending of only £1.5 billion in 1997–98. High property prices in a very buoyant housing market, particularly in these areas, may also have contributed to an increase in homeless acceptances by reducing the availability of low cost affordable accommodation.

The Government have substantially increased the resources available for housing investment to tackle the significant problems they inherited. The housing resources provided for the current year, of around £3.3 billion, are twice the amount made available for 1997–98, and further significant increases are planned for the next two years. As part of this, we have nearly doubled the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme with an additional £872 million aimed at building more affordable social housing. Our target is to provide at least 100,000 new or improved homes for low-cost renting or ownership through the Approved Development Programme and other programmes between April 2001 and March 2004.

QE2 Centre

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the operating loss or profit of the QE2 Centre was in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [1326]

Dr. Whitehead: The operating surpluses for the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre Trading Fund were:

Year	*£*
1997–98	687,000
1998–99	48,000
1999–2000	216,000
2000–01	159,000

Further information on the Centre can be found in its Annual Report and Accounts for each of the above years, copies of which have been placed in the House Libraries.

Postal Voting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set up an investigation into the working of the new postal voting arrangements in the recent general election. [1663]

Dr. Whitehead: The Electoral Commission, which was established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, will publish a report shortly on various aspects of the administration of the general election, in accordance with section 5 of the Act.

Home Zones

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the home zones currently in operation. [1659]

Ms Keeble: My Department is monitoring eight home zone pilots in England. The schemes are in Ealing, Lambeth, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth and Sittingbourne. The pilots are at different stages of development, and works are planned to commence in all the schemes by the end of the year.

Local authorities are free to take forward home zones outside of the monitoring process. We are aware that home zones have been completed in Birmingham, Tower Hamlets and Luton, and are being implemented in Hertford and Bristol. A number of local authorities included proposals for home zones in their local transport plans.

Airport Slots

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to reform the allocation of take-off and landing slots at UK airports so as to introduce market mechanisms into allocating such slots; and if he will make a statement. [1366]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government said in their consultation document "The Future of Aviation", published in December 2000, that they believe that the establishment of a transparent market in slots would be a means of improving the use of slots at congested airports. However, the allocation of slots is subject to European regulation. The European Commission published proposals for a new regulation on 20 June. These do not include the use of market mechanisms for allocating slots, although the Commission has said that it intends to undertake research into the subject. The Government will be consulting the industry about the proposals.

Motor Vehicle Crashes

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the number of sleep-related motor vehicle crashes in each of the last 20 years. [1935]

Mr. Jamieson: Statistics on the main contributory factors in road accidents are not available. Research on behalf of the Department indicates that for car drivers in particular, driver fatigue may have been a principal factor in around 10 per cent. of accidents across the road network in Great Britain.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he proposes to publish new draft regulations regarding the siting of mobile phone masts and base stations; and if he will make a statement. [1787]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 20W.

Beacon Status (Councils)

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will invite councils to apply for beacon status. [2334]

Mr. Raynsford: We will publish an Application Brochure tomorrow, inviting councils to apply by 2 October. Copies of the brochure will be placed in the Library of the House.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

People's Panel

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has for the People's Panel. [1939]

Mr. Leslie: We are currently considering the future role of the People's Panel.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the cost of the People's Panel for each year for which the figures are available. [1938]

Mr. Leslie: For the year 1998–99, the cost to all Departments for research and consultation employing the People's Panel was £459,000, for 1999–2000 the cost was £321,190 and for 2000–01 the cost was £525,865.

TREASURY

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs there were in the manufacturing industry in May *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [1641]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Redwood, dated 3 July 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of manufacturing jobs in May 1997 and May 2001 (1639).

Information for May 2001 is not yet available but will be published in table 6 of *the Labour Market Statistics First Release* on 18 July 2001, copies of which will be placed in the House of Commons Library. In May 1997, there were 4,160,000 manufacturing jobs (seasonally adjusted).

The table below shows the number of employee jobs in manufacturing for April 1997 and April 2001 for comparative purposes.

Thousand

UK	*Number*[1]
April	
1997	4,152
2001	3,867

[1] Seasonally adjusted

These estimates are based on the results of regular sample surveys of employers which count the number of employee jobs. The data are published in Statbase on the National Statistics website *www.statistics.gov.uk./statbase/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=342* under series identifier YEJL.

Euro

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his preferred rate of entry is for the pound against the euro. [1640]

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the optimum value of sterling in relation to the *(a)* DM, *(b)* euro and *(c)* dollar at which it would be most beneficial for the

United Kingdom to enter the euro, provided that all other elements of his five economic tests are met; and if he will make a statement. [2106]

Mr. Boateng: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest. The Government have said that the rate at which sterling would enter the single currency would need to be consistent with economic fundamentals in the UK and compatible with sustainable convergence between the UK and other euro area economies.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the responsibilities and role are of *(a)* regional chambers, *(b)* local authorities, *(c)* regional development agencies and *(d)* the EU Committee of the Regions in the national handover plan and preparing for the euro. [1402]

Mr. Boateng: A full list of all the organisations involved in changeover planning was set out in the second outline national changeover plan, which was published in March 2000. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the constitutional implications of United Kingdom membership of the European single currency; and if he will make a statement. [1861]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor's October 1997 statement on EMU acknowledged that to share a common monetary policy with other states represents a major pooling of economic sovereignty. It also stated that if the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous, there is no constitutional bar to British membership of EMU.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* membership of each meeting of the cross-policy committee on preparations for the European single currency over the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [1862]

Mr. Boateng: The cross-party advisory group on preparations for the euro is an informal group which acts as a channel for the exchange of information and develops cross-party awareness of the continuing preparations for the euro. Given the importance of preparations for the euro, every parliamentary party is invited to be represented on the group. The group has met six times since its first meeting on 19 June 2000, the last being on 8 March 2001.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his forecast is for the balance of payments in goods for the current year. [1639]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor's most recent forecasts for the UK economy were published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2001 (HC 279). Forecasts for trade in goods and services and the balance of payments can be found on pages 171–175, tables B5-B7.

Annuities

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the age limit by which annuities have to be purchased. [1361]

Mr. Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to section 5.66 to 5.69 of the economic and fiscal strategy report published on Budget day, copies of which are in the Library. This sets out the Government's view on annuity pension arrangements.

Building Society Ballots

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the procedures for ballots which may result in the de-mutualisation of societies. [1364]

Mr. Boateng: None.

Equitable Life

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he estimates the Financial Services Authority inquiry into Equitable Life will be completed; [1779]

(2) if he will set up an inquiry into the regulation of Equitable Life for the 10 years prior to 1 January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [1849]

Mr. Boateng: Arrangements for the publication of the report on the regulation of the Equitable will be made when the report is completed and handed to HMT. We will decide whether any further action is necessary in the light of this report.

Gold Sales

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tons of gold have been sold by the Bank of England since he instructed it to do so; and what has been the average price secured from these sales. [1449]

Mr. Boateng: Since the gold sales programme was announced in May 1999, as part of the restructuring of the United Kingdom's foreign currency reserves, 295 tonnes have been sold. The average price secured at the 12 auctions held to date is $273.09 per ounce.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total number of euros purchased by the Bank of England is since he instructed it to invest 40 per cent. of the proceeds of gold sales in this currency; and what has been the average purchase price. [1450]

Mr. Boateng: The proceeds from sales of gold are invested, over a period of time, in interest-bearing foreign currency assets, in broadly the same proportion as currently held in the net foreign currency reserves, as part of the Bank of England's day-to-day management of the United Kingdom's foreign currency reserves.

Currency Dealings

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of jobs which would be lost in currency dealing in the City of London if the pound were abolished. [1612]

Mr. Boateng: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest. The Government have said that the Treasury will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament.

Renewable Energy (VAT)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current VAT regime affecting renewable energy materials and their installation. [1365]

Mr. Boateng: A reduced rate of 5 per cent. was introduced last year on the supply and installation, in residential accommodation, of goods whose primary purpose is to save energy. Energy-saving materials sold direct to the public are not included in the list of goods and services to which, under agreements with our European partners, a reduced rate of VAT may apply. The Government are in favour of extending the reduced rate to cover these DIY installations and have raised this with the European Commission.

Kingscrest Case

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision of the London VAT tribunal in the Kingscrest case on the implementation of free nursing care and the affordability of fee levels. [1700]

Mr. Boateng: The decision of the VAT and duties tribunal in the Kingscrest Associates Ltd. and Montecello Ltd. case does not impact upon nursing care. The Government are of the view that the care of vulnerable people provided by residential homes should not be subject to VAT and are considering how best to challenge this decision.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend VAT regulations to clarify the VAT status of care homes following the recent decision of the London VAT tribunal in the Kingscrest case. [1699]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are of the view that the care of vulnerable people provided by residential homes should not be subject to VAT and we are considering how best to challenge this decision.

IR35

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on what advice is now being offered by individual Inland Revenue officers to those businesses that may be affected by IR35. [1363]

Dawn Primarolo: Genuine businesses are not affected by IR35. IR35 applies only where, if it were not for the interposition of an intermediary such as a service company, the worker would be an employee of the client. The Inland Revenue provides a free service to anyone who wants advice on the application of the IR35 rules. This includes providing opinions on contracts of engagement and a dedicated IR35 helpline. There is also extensive material freely available on the Inland Revenue IR35 website. Full details about how to use the opinion on contracts service are available on the Inland Revenue website.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had recently with the professional contractors group over the subject of IR35. [1362]

Dawn Primarolo: None. Inland Revenue officials have met with members of the professional contractors group executive to discuss practical issues arising out of the application and operation of the IR35 legislation.

Property (Zero Rating)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce zero rating on house improvements and adaptations; and if he will make a statement. [1313]

Mr. Boateng: Agreements with our European partners mean that we cannot introduce any new zero rates.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy of zero rating new property developments; and what plans he has to introduce VAT on such developments. [1312]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to put VAT on new housing.

Public Service Agreements

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what ways public service agreements negotiated to date enjoin Government Departments to raise the quantity and quality of regulatory impact assessments. [1645]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public service agreements (PSAs) focus on outcomes; the Cabinet Office has a specific PSA target to ensure that rigorous regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) are undertaken. Revised guidance on how to complete RIAs was issued to all Departments in August 2000 and followed up by a series of seminars for policy officials within each of the main regulatory Departments.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many, and what percentage, of public service agreements negotiated to date contain an explicit commitment to deregulation and a reduction in administration. [1644]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public service agreements (PSAs) focus on outcomes; PSAs give Departments powerful incentives to deregulate and reduce administration, where sensible, in order to achieve those outcomes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Service

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland Prison Service published its 2001–04 corporate and business plan; and what performance targets have been set for 2001–04. [2363]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Prison Service's corporate and business plan for 2001–04 was published

on 29 May 2001. The following key performance targets have been set for 2001–04:

1. To achieve 100 per cent. security for top and high-risk prisoners.
2. To achieve 99.7 per cent. security for medium and low-risk prisoners.
3. To reduce the number of staff assaulted by prisoners to less than the 2000–01 ratio of 6.8 per 100 prisoners.
4. To reduce the number of prisoners assaulted by prisoners to less than the 2000–01 ratio of 8.8 per 100 prisoners.
5. To establish baselines for weekly average hours of constructive activity attendance per prisoner for each prisoner group and set targets and system of measurement for 2002–03.
6. To ensure an average minimum of 60 per cent. of the eligible prison population, including life sentence prisoners, is working to a sentence plan.
7. To achieve an average minimum of five days development and training per member of staff.
8. Representation in recruitment competitions of:
   (a) women;
   (b) Roman Catholics; and
   (c) Other under-represented groups.
9. To ensure expenditure is within the budget allocated.
10. To reduce the difference in cost per prisoner place between Northern Ireland and England and Wales by 5.7 per cent. by March 2002.
11. To lay the Annual Report and Audited Accounts before Parliament prior to the summer recess.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning the reopening of footpaths near areas infected with foot and mouth. [33]

Alun Michael: Over 16,000 letters have been received during recent months on foot-and-mouth-related issues. It is not possible to say precisely how many of these concern the reopening of footpaths, although we estimate the number to be in the region of 1,000. Ministers have also met representatives of a range of interested parties, including users of footpaths, farmers and land managers; to discuss path reopening and the issue has been discussed at several meetings of the rural task force.

A range of representations concerning the reopening of footpaths have been received by letter and in meetings with a wide range of interested parties, including users of footpaths, farmers and land managers. This subject has been discussed at several meetings of the rural task force. In the immediate vicinity of cases of foot and mouth disease, the Government have taken a precautionary approach through the 3 km closure requirement and the power given to local authorities to impose a blanket ban on the use of footpaths in a specific area where that is considered appropriate. Many representatives have sought the lifting of such blanket bans where they are no longer needed and I have announced the intention to end this power except where a local authority can show it is needed in order to maintain the effectiveness of efforts to eradicate foot and mouth disease. I hope to make a further announcement shortly following the current consultation with local authorities.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will encourage county councils not to lift restrictions on the use of footpaths in areas where farmers remain unable to move their stock as a result of foot and mouth disease control measures; and if she will make a statement. [39]

Alun Michael: As part of our strategy for rural recovery, we want to see footpaths and other rights of way reopened wherever it is safe to do so. I refer the hon. Member to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 21 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 166–86. My right hon. Friend also announced a significant relaxation of movement restrictions on livestock to help the farming industry by enabling more normal trade to take place. In both cases the action taken reflects an assessment of the disease risk involved in easing restrictions. While we are determined to do everything possible to eradicate foot and mouth disease, we also have to do all we can to enable rural businesses to return to normal working, and this must include an end to footpath closures where they are no longer needed.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of foot and mouth disease on businesses in the United Kingdom and the adequacy of existing Government measures in responding to those effects. [16]

Alun Michael: We have commissioned a series of regional surveys on the economic impact of foot and mouth disease, and we are planning further follow-up work including local area surveys. Members of the rural task force were briefed on the survey work and we will continue to keep them up to date. The general picture emerging from the surveys is very varied, with some areas and types of business displaying serious losses and others largely unaffected.

Many small rural businesses affected by foot and mouth disease are benefiting from the measures we have introduced. Over 11,000 affected businesses have now had cash benefits either through deferral of tax payments, hardship rate relief, or grants from the RDA business recovery fund. We are keeping the operation of each scheme under review in consultation with the rural task force.

A report on the impact on businesses in the west midlands, published last week, showed that 80 per cent. of the companies surveyed had not sought help or advice and 60 per cent. had made no change in their business and marketing. We will redouble our efforts to encourage all rural businesses to use the sources of advice and help which the Government are making available via regional development agencies and their local partners.

Sewer Flooding

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the outcome of her discussions with Ofwat about possible remedies following sewer flooding last year. [1479]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* Discussions between the Department and Ofwat about the various causes of, and remedies for, sewer flooding are continuing. As set out in its forward programme, Ofwat is

examining companies' systems for prioritising work and dealing with flooding incidents. Ofwat will publish its conclusions for consultation early in 2002.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of implementing the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 on dog owners walking in the New Forest. [866]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 will require persons exercising a right of access under the Act to keep any dog on a short lead during the period March to July, and at any time in the vicinity of livestock. The Act also allows for further restrictions on dogs to be imposed in certain circumstances. However, the new right will not apply to any land with existing statutory rights of access (such as commons in former urban boroughs and districts), nor will it interfere with any use of land which takes place with the implied or explicit consent of the owner. The Act will enable any more relaxed regime of controls on dogs in the New Forest or elsewhere to continue with the consent or tolerance of the owner of the land.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations are planned prior to the implementation of the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in the New Forest. [865]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* There are a number of provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which require my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make regulations before they are brought into force. In particular, a consultation paper was issued in March on proposals for regulations under section 11 of the Act to enable the Countryside Agency to prepare draft maps of open country and registered common land. We are now considering the comments received and we expect to lay regulations during the summer recess. We expect to consult on a framework for regulations under part V of the Act relating to the establishment of local access forums with a view to laying regulations in the autumn. We shall also be consulting widely on regulations on other provisions in part I of the Act, as well as on regulations relating to part II (rights of way).

Environmental Improvements

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to reduce the level of *(a)* graffiti, *(b)* litter, *(c)* fly-posting and *(d)* the illegal dumping of waste; and if she will make a statement. [813]

Mr. Meacher: The Government place a high priority on improving the quality of the local environment.

(a) Graffiti—In addition to using the penalties available under the Criminal Damage Act 1971, the most effective way to tackle vandalism is through co-ordinated preventive action at local level involving all of the relevant agencies such as local authorities, schools and voluntary bodies as well as the police. The police and local authorities now have a statutory duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to develop crime reduction partnerships. Police school liaison officers cover vandalism during regular visits to primary and secondary schools. The Government support the idea of Youth Action Groups in England and Wales and many have tackled issues like vandalism and graffiti. The Government are working with Crime Concern, the DfEE and the Youth Justice Board to develop the concept of these groups into the wider community.

(b) Litter—The Government grant funds to the Tidy Britain Group (TBG) who are the Government's recognised agency for litter abatement. TBG provides local authorities and others with advice on effective litter control techniques including design, sitting and maintenance of bins.

In addition, the Local Government Act 1999 introduced the new "duty of best value" from 1 April 2000. This requires that local authorities seek continuous improvement in the way they carry out their functions such as dealing with litter.

In March I announced three new initiatives to address litter within a wider context:

Local Environmental Quality Pathfinder Programme—This involves up to 50 local authorities developing innovative Local Environmental Codes of Best Practice to tackle issues such as litter, fly-tipping and graffiti. £1 million has been secured for this programme, which is being co-ordinated by TBG on behalf of DEFRA.

Voluntary Code of Practice for Fast Food Traders—Leaders of the fast food industry will work with DEFRA on a new, demanding code of conduct for the fast food industry. It will be based on best practice for preventing and clearing up litter in and around fast food outlets, minimise packaging, and support the use of recycled and environmentally friendly materials.

Review of legislation—A new advisory group with all relevant stakeholders is being set up to review the existing legislation and make recommendations to government about the changes and additions that are required. The review will cover: litter in water; storage and collection of trade waste; the provision and use of civic amenity sites; fly tipping; the management of trade wastes, litter on private land; and making it easier for local authorities to prosecute offenders.

(c) Fly-posting—In October 2000 we published a Good Practice Guide to help local planning authorities control fly-posting.

(d) Illegal dumping of waste—The action being taken by the Government on illegal waste disposal was set out most recently in the Government's response to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's Report on the Environment Agency (CM 4832—paragraphs 55–60).

Carbon Sinks

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role is played by carbon sinks in the Government's climate change strategy. [818]

Mr. Meacher: The UK already has policies in place which are consistent with its responsibilities under the United Nations framework convention on climate change to protect and enhance carbon sinks, such as forests. The Government continue to support the planting of new woodland. The total uptake by sinks from UK agriculture and forestry is projected to increase from around 1.7 per cent. of UK carbon dioxide emissions in 1990 to

2 per cent. in 2010, although not all of this could be counted towards the UK's commitment under the Kyoto Protocol. If the present rate of increase in tree cover continues, afforestation since 1990 could save 0.6 MtC in 2010.

Adhesive Labels

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has made of the change in annual cost to the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry of the Environment Agency's reclassification of backing paper as packaging material; and if she will make a statement; [1241]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of the Environment Agency's reclassification of backing paper as packaging material on the competitiveness of the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry. [1240]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency recently issued guidance clarifying that backing paper of labels should be treated as a packaging material. The Environment Agency has estimated that the cost in 2001 to the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry as a whole will be in the order of £430,000. The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) should not place UK business at a competitive disadvantage in the domestic market given that imported packaging is equally obligated. Similarly, packaging which is exported from the UK is not obligated under the UK packaging Regulations.

Aarhus Convention

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans the Government have to implement the 1998 Aarhus convention; and when they intend to introduce legislation to effect this; [817]

(2) what plans the Cabinet Office has to introduce *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary legislation to strengthen environmental freedom of information. [805]

Mr. Meacher: The majority of the Aarhus convention's requirements (the UNECE convention of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters) are already implemented in the UK. As with other international treaties, implementation of the convention is through a mixture of legislative measures and administrative actions.

The powers needed to amend existing legislation in order to deliver the remaining requirements of the convention have already been taken in England. For instance, section 74 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 contains a power to implement the convention's access to environmental information provisions. The Government intend to use these powers to replace the current Environmental Information Regulations (SI 1992/3240).

Implementation of the convention is a devolved matter. The Government intend to ratify the Aarhus convention as soon as all parts of the UK have implemented its requirements.

The Government remain strongly committed to the Aarhus convention and its underlying principals.

Energy Efficiency Rating

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ensure that *(a)* the energy efficiency rating of a home and *(b)* advice on how to improve it is made available to potential house purchasers at the point of sale; and if she will make a statement. [1318]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

As set out in our manifesto, we are committed to making it easier for people buying and selling homes through a new seller's pack. Recognising that a real opportunity exists for improving the energy efficiency of a home when it is purchased, and fully supporting the provision of energy efficiency information to home buyers, we propose to include in the seller's pack an energy rating and advice on how the energy efficiency of the property might be improved. The necessary legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Poverty

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his definition is of poverty. [1131]

Malcolm Wicks: Information relating to poverty can be found in the second "Opportunity For All" report; "One year on: making a difference", (CM4865). Our next report is due for publication in the autumn.

Benefits (Children)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of increasing Child Benefit and the Child Allowance in Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for each child aged three or under by *(a)* £10, *(b)* £15 and *(c)* £20. [1569]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Proposed increase	*£ million*
£10	1,350
£15	2,050
£20	2,700

Notes:
1. Expenditure is based on the caseload given by the February 2001 Child Benefit administrative data.
2. The cost is for one year.
3. The figure is rounded to the nearest £50 million.

Benefits

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of increasing Child Benefit and the Family Premium in Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit by *(a)* £10, *(b)* £20 and *(c)* £30 for each family in which there is at least one child aged three or under. [1566]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the table.

Proposed increase	*£ million*
£10	1,150
£20	2,300
£30	3,500

Notes:
1. Expenditure is based on the caseload given by the February 2001 Child Benefit administrative data.
2. The cost is for one year.
3. The figure is rounded to the nearest £50 million.

Exchange Trading Schemes

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice his Department offers to individual officers on how to treat benefit claimants who are also engaging in local exchange trading schemes. [1353]

Malcolm Wicks: Guidance for Benefits Agency staff on the treatment of people engaging in local exchange trading schemes is contained in the "Decision Maker's Guide", a copy of which is in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the granting of Jobseeker's Allowance to jobseekers with temporary national insurance numbers. [1126]

Malcolm Wicks: If a person does not have a national insurance number and makes a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance, their local Benefits Agency office should invite them to attend an evidence of identity interview and complete the relevant documentation for the allocation of a national insurance number to be considered. Provided the person's identity can be verified their claim for Jobseeker's Allowance will be treated in the normal way.

Temporary national insurance numbers are designed only for use by employers who send their returns to the Inland Revenue electronically, and do not know a new employee's national insurance number.

Housing Benefit

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of council house occupiers are claiming Housing Benefit in Stockton, South; and how many people in Stockton, South in total are claiming Housing Benefit. [1092]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested as Housing Benefit data for the parliamentary constituency of Stockton, South are not available. Such information as is available is as follows.

At February 2001, a total of 12,800 people were claiming Housing Benefit in Stockton on Tees borough council, 8,600 of whom were local authority tenants.

Information on the number local authority tenancies in existence in each authority is not collected by central Government.

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to reform Housing Benefit in respect of amalgamating the tax and benefit systems. [1085]

Malcolm Wicks: Our long-term aim is to make structural changes to Housing Benefit and its interaction with the tax system. The final design of Pension Credit and the new tax credits, and how they will interact with Housing Benefit, will be set out in due course.

However, our immediate priority is to continue to improve the administration of the current Housing Benefit scheme.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average length of time is for a Housing Benefit application to be processed, broken down by local authority. [933]

Malcolm Wicks: From April 2000, local authorities in England and Wales have been collecting data against best value performance indicators for the speed, accuracy, cost and security of their Housing Benefit services. Analogous performance indicators have been set by the Accounts Commission for Scottish authorities.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions expects to publish this summer unaudited and estimated data for 2000–01 against all best value performance indicators in respect of English authorities. Final results will be published once this provisional data have been fully analysed.

Prior to the introduction of best value, the Audit Commission collected data for the last six months of 1999–2000 on the average length of time taken by English and Welsh authorities to process new Housing Benefit claims. This information is set out in two reports: "Local Authority Performance Indicators 1999–2000—Council Services Compendium For England", published on 10 January 2001, a copy of which is in the Library; and "Local Authority Performance Indicators In Wales, 1999–2000", published on 26 March 2001.

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason Working Families Tax Credit is taken into account in full when calculating Housing Benefit. [1089]

Malcolm Wicks: Housing Benefit (HB) is an income-related benefit and most types of income are generally taken fully into account when calculating entitlement. This applies equally to the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), which is intended to help meet ordinary living costs. To disregard WFTC when calculating HB entitlement would result in double provision from the Government for the same basic living costs.

However, limited situations exist where WFTC is partly disregarded in the assessment of HB. People who work 30 hours a week or more and who have children may get a partial disregard of WFTC if their earnings are very low. In addition, people with relevant child care costs which cannot be fully met from earnings can have the balance of those costs disregarded.

Pensioner Poverty

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 35W, on pensioner poverty, if he will set out how the Government have ensured that no pensioner has to live on less than £92.15 a week. [1560]

Mr. McCartney: The significant increase in the Minimum Income Guarantee and the increase in the lower and upper capital limits in April together with our successful publicity campaign ensure that no pensioner has to live on less than £92.15 a week. We will continue to work in partnership with the voluntary sector and local authorities to find ways of identifying and encouraging those who are likely to benefit from the Minimum Income Guarantee to claim.

Working Age/Pensioner Organisations

Kali Mountford; To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the new organisations for people of working age and pensioners will be established. [2393]

Mr. Darling: The Government are establishing a new business for people of working age, Jobcentre Plus, and a new service for pensions and pensioners, the Pension Service.

Jobcentre Plus will bring together the Employment Service with the working age part of the Benefits Agency to deliver a single, integrated service to people of working age and employers. The Pension Service will provide a unified, better and more modern service for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

The first Jobcentre Plus offices will be launched in the autumn. Beyond that, we intend that Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service will formally come into existence as national organisations from 1 April 2002. The Benefits Agency and the Employment Service will therefore cease to exist at the end of this financial year on 31 March 2002.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what evidence he has about the impact of age discrimination in restricting employment opportunities; and if he will make a statement. [259]

Mr. McCartney: There is a wealth of UK and European research which has tried to measure the effect of age discrimination, but it is difficult to give a robust statistical analysis of its extent and impact. Research is inevitably based on people's own perceptions of employment related age discrimination. Initial findings from the evaluation of the code of practice on age diversity in employment indicate:

around one in four older people believe that they have experienced age discrimination in relation to an actual or possible job at some point in their working lives; and

the use of age criteria in job selection has halved from 27 per cent. to 13 per cent. since the code was launched in June 1999.

These initial findings were published in March in "Age Diversity: Summary of Research Findings", copies of which are in the House Library.

The Government are continuing to promote vigorously age diversity in the workplace through the age positive campaign, which highlights the business benefits of an age diverse work force. This includes: three national and regional awards initiatives, which serve to publicise and reward achievements and examples of good practice; direct mail campaigns targeting selected industry sectors; and the placing of articles in trade sector and regional press. Later this year we are launching an age diversity website, which will provide information and guidance and include a discussion forum.

As part of the work on taking forward the development of clear and effective employment legislation on age by 2006, the Government have set up an age advisory group of key social partners to help in identifying the issues that need to be addressed. The group, which includes representatives from the CBI, TUC, Age Concern, CIPD and Employers Forum on Age, will also be offering advice on further ways of achieving the changes in culture that will contribute to the success of tackling age discrimination.

Disability Living Allowance

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of appeals against refusal of an award of Disability Living Allowance were successful; and how many appeals were made in each of the last three years. [2203]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) appeal decisions

	Total appeals received in the Appeals Service[1,2]	*Successful appeals following hearing by Appeals Service (percentage)*[3,4]
1998	47,025	14,900 (32%)
1999	49,857	16,200 (32%)
2000	57,522	20,800 (36%)

[1] Figures are based on 100 per cent. data from DLA computer system.

[2] Figures relate to appeals due to refusal of benefit or dissatisfaction with award.

[3] Figures are based on 5 per cent. data and relate to 12 months ending November.

[4] Successful appeals do not include successful appeals against the rate or period of an award of an existing award.

Notes:

1. It is likely that the increase in the appeal success rate between 1999 and 2000 (an increase from 32 per cent. to 36 per cent) results from the introduction of DMA in late 1999, together with the pressure of the recovery that followed during 2000. DMA introduced a number of changes to the decision-making process, including a move away from a mandatory review prior to the appeal going forward, to a reconsideration as part of the appeal procedure. Decisions appealed against are now routinely reconsidered, but we are aware that some decision-makers need time to become proficient in the new procedures following DMA implementation.

2. The figures quoted in the reply relate only to refusals of DLA. It is worth noting that the total figure for all DLA appeals shows no significant change in overturn rate in the same period.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions

Annuities

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what investigations his Department is undertaking into the effectiveness of annuities. [1354]

Mr. McCartney: We have the issue under general review, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made clear in his Budget statement.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the number of pensioners in Wales eligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee. [1584]

Mr. McCartney: The latest estimate is that around 97,000 pensioners in Wales are benefiting from the Minimum Income Guarantee. An estimate of the number of pensioners eligible but not claiming is not available.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Pensioners are defined as where the claimant, and/or partner are aged 60 or over.
3. Figure is rounded to the nearest hundred and is expressed in thousands.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, February 2001.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the number of overseas visitors to Britain in each quarter since May 1997. [140]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Quarterly figures for the number of visits to the UK from overseas are published by the Office for National Statistics as part of the international passenger survey. From May 1997, they are as follows:

Thousand

Year/Quarter	*Visits*
1997	
2	6,447
3	8,168
4	5,961
1998	
1	4,804
2	6,834
3	8,027
4	6,080
1999	
1	5,046
2	6,799
3	7,913
4	5,636
2000	
1	4,993
2	6,733
3	7,923
4	5,541
2001	
1	[1]4,920

[1] Estimated

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the funding made available to promote tourism in each regional tourist board area by its regional development agency. [1780]

Dr. Howells: We have contacted the Department for Trade and Industry to request some of the information required, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letters in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are employed on the Dome site; and in what capacity. [84]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) currently employs 66 people at the Dome site in the following roles:

	Number
Chairman's/Finance Director's Offices	7
Decommissioning	6
Finance	17
Legal	3
Human Resources	5
Information Technology	4
Press Office	3
Support	21

With effect from 1 July 2001, the number of people employed by NMEC was reduced to 31.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what are the total *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* security and *(c)* other continuing costs of the Dome; and if she will make a statement. [131]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has advised that its budgeted costs for June for the Dome and site on which its stands are as follows:

Maintenance: £72,000

Security: £70,000

Other site costs: £344,000

(including rates at £300,000 which have since been refunded).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on how many occasions officials of the Health and Safety Executive have visited the Dome since December 2000; and what the purpose of the visit was in each case. [85]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Officials from the Health and Safety Executive visited the site in January (at the invitation of the New Millennium Experience Company) to discuss its decommissioning programme and on 26 February as part of a routine inspection.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many court judgments have been made against the New Millennium Experience Company; and if she will list *(a)* settled and *(b)* pending court actions. [79]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* There have been seven county court judgments issued against the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), all of which were settled by 31 December 2000. Judgment

against the company was awarded in an overseas action by a Belgian sub-contractor relating to a small contractual claim. This was paid in April 2001. In addition, an employment dispute resulted in a court action against NMEC for a small contractual claim. This has also been paid. NMEC has recently, out of court, settled court actions brought against it by a construction contractor and by an engineering company. The details of these claims are commercially confidential.

There are two cases currently involving pending court actions. One is a dispute with a lighting maintenance company, and the other arises from a trademark dispute.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the value of legal fees *(a)* invoiced and *(b)* paid by the New Millennium Experience Company in relation to settled or pending court actions. [83]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The value of legal fees paid to date by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) in respect of settled court actions against the company is circa £186k. The company is still awaiting final reconciliation of legal fees in relation to these cases.

Royal Armouries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the finances of the Royal Armouries. [81]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Following restructuring of the Royal Armouries' relationship with their private sector partner in July 1999, additional grant-in-aid of £1 million per annum has been made available to cover the cost of the responsibilities transferred. The additional grant support is conditional on improvements in management and efficiency which are now being implemented as an essential component of the Royal Armouries' strategy for the future. Further grant has been made available to enable free access for children and the over-60s at the Royal Armouries' Leeds museum from 1 April 2001, and for adults from 1 December. The Royal Armouries is operating within its agreed budget and is so far on track to meet its major visitor and revenue targets for the year 2001–02.

Religious Broadcasting

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to enable religious organisations to obtain a local digital licence. [1573]

Dr. Howells: The recent White Paper "A New Future for Communications" announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local terrestrial digital radio licence.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is regarding the change from analogue radio licences to digital licences for *(a)* Christian broadcasters and *(b)* non-Christian broadcasters. [1574]

Dr. Howells: Religious bodies are currently disqualified from holding digital radio licences. The recent White Paper "A New Future for Communications" announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local digital licence and invited comments on relaxing the ownership of other licences by such bodies. We are currently considering the responses. The Government will publish details of their proposals in a draft Bill as announced in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with United Christian Broadcasters about their desire to obtain a new licence. [1661]

Dr. Howells: None. However, the former Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), met with representatives of United Christian Broadcasters several times. The last meeting was on 4 April.

School Sport

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has had with the Department of Education and Skills in relation to increasing the number of hours spent on sport in schools. [2151]

Mr. Caborn: DCMS and DfES have been working closely together to deliver a significant amount of investment to allow greater opportunity for young people to spend more time on sport in and outside of schools. Work to date includes the school sport co-ordinators programme, NOF's opportunities for young people: PE and sport in schools initiative, space for sport and arts and the action points on education contained within the Government's plan for sport, published earlier this year. In June, my officials met colleagues at DfES to discuss the framework for enabling schools to offer two hours of high quality PE and school sport to their pupils, as set out by the Prime Minister on 11 January this year. We will continue to work together to bring about improvements in physical education and in the time spent by children in sport and other forms of physical activity.

S4C

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Under-Secretary will next meet the senior management of S4C. [1756]

Dr. Howells: I am due to visit S4C in Cardiff on 10 July.

Cricket

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to prevent further crowd trouble at international cricket matches. [1718]

Mr. Caborn: Following my meeting on 27 June with representatives of English cricket and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office, I have today appointed a review group to consider recent problems of disorder at cricket matches and make recommendations on practical measures for ensuring the safety of spectators and players. The group will be chaired by a senior official from my Department, and will include representatives of the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the cricket authorities. A representative of the Football Licensing Authority will

join the group to provide expert guidance on issues of stadium safety. I expect the group to report to me within six weeks.

Free Television Licence Scheme

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to extending the free television licence scheme to all pensioners. [2137]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such discussions. The Government have no plans at the present to extend free television licences to pensioners below the age of 75.

Football Transfers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the football authorities on proposed changes to the transfer system. [1662]

Mr. Caborn: I will be having introductory meetings with a number of football's governing bodies over the next few weeks, including the Football Association, the FA Premier League, the Football League and the Nationwide Conference. These discussions will cover a range of issues, among which will be the proposed changes to the international transfer system, on which FIFA and UEFA reached an in-principle agreement with the European Commission on 5 March. The Government support the sport's UK governing bodies in working with the international football authorities towards a new transfer framework which fully protects the interests of smaller clubs.

National Stadium

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 37W, if the review of the Wembley Stadium project being undertaken by Mr. Patrick Carter covers the re-inclusion of an athletics facility. [1789]

Mr. Caborn: The terms of reference for the review published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 25 July 2001 specifically excluded athletics from the scope of the review of the national stadium being undertaken by Patrick Carter.

Office of Communications

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to create a shadow office of communications prior to reform of broadcasting and media legislation. [1781]

Dr. Howells: As announced in the Queen's Speech on 20 June, a draft communications Bill will be published later this session. In the meantime we are looking at practical measures to ensure that the office of communications is able to assume regulatory functions as quickly as possible after that Bill receives Royal Assent.

Children's Hospices

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what will be the impact on children's hospices of the new opportunities funds. [1843]

Mr. Caborn: The new opportunities fund is currently developing a new grants programme for children's palliative care services. The programme, worth £48 million in England, will fund community, respite and bereavement services. It will provide grants to support new activities and to sustain existing good quality services which require a specific and time limited intervention. Children's hospices may be providers of these services, as may statutory sector providers and partnerships.

The new opportunities fund is currently consulting on the best way to deliver the programme and is required to commit the resources to projects by 2004.

The fund is also developing palliative care programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, although the split between services for children and services for adults has yet to be decided. The focus of the programme is currently the subject of consultation.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Jurors (Expenses)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the out-of-pocket expenses of jurors. [1418]

Mr. Wills: The financial loss and subsistence allowances paid to jurors are reviewed on an annual basis. The increase from the most recent review came into effect on 4 June of this year.

"Making Decisions"

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she plans to introduce legislation to implement the proposals in "Making Decisions" (Cm 4465). [1476]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government recognise the need for a fundamental reform of mental incapacity law and will therefore introduce legislation to implement the proposals in "Making Decisions" when parliamentary time allows.

HEALTH

NHS Trust Core Targets

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definitions he has set for green, amber and red performance for NHS trust core targets for 2001–02. [2210]

Mr. Hutton: The core targets for 2001–02 can be found in the NHS plan. The criteria that will be used to assess traffic light national health service performance during 2001–02 have yet to be determined.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reform the law relating to medical negligence claims; and if he will make a statement. [49]

Ms Blears: The current system for dealing with clinical negligence claims is distressing, costly and time consuming, both for patients making claims against the National Health Service and for those defending claims, including doctors, nurses and other NHS staff involved. The need for reform—to address the spiralling costs, the length of time taken to resolve claims and the proportion of costs taken up in legal charges—is clear, and was reflected both in last year's NHS plan and in the Government's election Manifesto. We are currently considering how best to take this forward and will announce our plans in due course.

Vaccines

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the vaccines and their manufacturers licensed since 1986 which contain thiomersal *(a)* which were administered in the routine vaccination programme for children and *(b)* which were available for non-routine vaccination for children. [784]

Ms Blears: All childhood vaccines licensed since 1986 which have ever contained thiomersal as an excipient are listed in the table. Some of these vaccines no longer contain thiomersal as an excipient because it has been removed from the finished vaccines. The table is annotated to identify which vaccines have been used or are used as part of the childhood immunisation schedule and have been centrally purchased by the Department of Health.

MA specific/product name	*Licence holder/company name*	*Current MA status*	*MA date first granted*
PL 10592/0118 Fluarix vaccine injection	Smithkline Beecham plc	Granted	27 February 1998
EM 13767/0002 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—1 syringe pack without needle	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0005 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—1 syringe pack with attached needle	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM13767/0006 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—1 syringe pack with separate needle	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0007 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—5 syringe pack without needles	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0008 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—5 syringe pack with attached needles	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0009 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—5 syringe pack with separate needles	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0010 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—10 syringe pack without needles	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0011 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—10 syringe pack with attached needles	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 13767/0012 Triacelluvax vaccine injection—10 syringe pack with separate needles	Chiron S.P.A.	Granted	11 January 1999
EM 15970/0001 Primavax vaccine injection	Pasteur Merieux MSD	Granted	5 February 1998
PL 00003/0318 Wellcome pertussis vaccine injection BP	The Wellcome Foundation Ltd.	Cancelled	21 February 1994
PL 00025/0295 H-B Vax II Paediatric vaccine 5ug hepatitis B surface antig	Merck Sharp and Dohme Ltd.	Cancelled	14 December 1993
PL 00039/0444 Evans adsorbed tetanus vaccine BP	Medeva Pharma Ltd.	Cancelled	28 January 1994
PL 00039/0445 Evans diphtheria and tetanus vaccine adsorbed BP[1]	Evans Medical Ltd.	Cancelled	22 December 1993
PL 00039/0462 Fluvirin vaccine injection EP	Evans Medical Ltd.	Cancelled	25 August 1994
PL 00039/0466 Evans diphtheria vaccine absorbed BP 60IU/ml[1]	Medeva Pharma Ltd.	Cancelled	29 November 1994
PL 00039/0467 Evans absorbed diphtheria and tetanus vaccine injection BP[1]	Medeva Pharma Ltd.	Cancelled	30 November 1994
PL 00039/0473 Evans adsorbed tetanus vaccine BP injection 40IU/0.5ml	Medeva Pharma Ltd.	Cancelled	30 November 1994
PL 00039/0474 Evans adsorbed diphtheria tetanus and pertussis vaccine BP (Trivax-AD)[1]	Evans Medical Ltd.	Cancelled	14 September 1994
PL 00039/0486 Fluvirin vaccine injection	Evans Medical Ltd.	Cancelled	25 August 1995
PL 00039/0489 Trivax-AD vaccine injection[1]	Medeva Pharma Ltd.	Cancelled	29 January 1997
PL 00039/0490 Fluvirin vaccine injection	Evans Medical Ltd.	Cancelled	23 August 1996
PL 00095/0292 Pnu-imune polyvalent pneumococcal vaccine injection 25mg/antigen/0.5ml	Cyanamid of Great Britain Ltd.	Granted	6 January 1997
PL 00095/0321 Pnu-imune polyvalent pneumococcal vaccine injection	Cyanamid of Great Britain Ltd.	Granted	28 September 2000
PL 00512/0109 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Duphar Laboratories Ltd.	Cancelled	16 August 1993
PL 00512/0112 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Duphar Laboratories Ltd.	Cancelled	2 August 1993
PL 00512/0116 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Duphar Laboratories Ltd.	Cancelled	22 August 1994
PL 00512/0125 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Solvay Healthcare Ltd.	Cancelled	25 August 1995
PL 00512/0142 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Solvay Healthcare Ltd.	Cancelled	15 August 1996
PL 00512/0146 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Solvay Healthcare Ltd.	Cancelled	14 August 1997
PL 00512/0156 Influvac sub-unit vaccine injection	Solvay Healthcare Ltd.	Granted	16 March 1998
PL 00512/0170 Batrevac vaccine injection	Solvay Healthcare Ltd.	Granted	14 June 2000
PL 01511/0058 Anthrax vaccine (Alum precipitated sterile filtrate)	Department of Health	Granted	6 January 1994
PL 04788/0013 Connaught labs tetanus vaccine adsorbed injection (at least) 40IU	Connaught Laboratories Ltd.	Cancelled	2 November 1994
PL 04788/0019 Connaught laboratories influenza inactivated vaccine prefilled dose syringe 0.5ml	Connaught Laboratories Ltd.	Cancelled	1 September 1994
PL 06745/0043 Pasteur merieux adsorbed diphtheria tetanus and pertussus vaccine BP pasteur[1]	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	5 October 1993
PL 06745/0046 Dip-Tet vax (adsorbed diphtheria and tetanus vacc BP pasteur M)[1]	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	3 December 1993
PL 06745/0055 Diftavax vaccine injection[1]	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	10 November 1993
PL 06745/0056 Act-Hib DTP injection 0.5ml dose[1]	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	28 July 1995
PL 06745/0067 MFV-Ject injection	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	25 August 1995
PL 06745/0068 Merieux inactivated influenza vaccine injection BP	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	25 August 1995
PL 06745/0080 Merieux inactivated influenza vaccine	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	23 September 1996
PL 06745/0081 Pasteur Merieux inactivated influenza vaccine injection BP	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	28 August 1996
PL 06745/0083 Pasteur Merieux MSD adsorbed tetanus vaccine injection	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	1 January 1997
PL 06745/0085 Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd. inactivated influenza vaccine split virion BP injection	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	8 September 1997
PL 06745/0086 Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd. inactivated influenza vaccine split virion BP injection	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	8 September 1997
PL 06745/0097 H-B-Vax II paediatric vaccine injection 5mcg/0.5ml	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	1 January 1999
PL 10592/0015 Engerix B vaccine injection 20mcg/ml	Smithkline Beecham plc	Granted	10 November 1993
PL 10592/0038 Fluarix 15ug vaccine 0.5ml (containing 15ug Haemagglutinin)	Smithkline Beecham plc	Cancelled	9 May 1994
PL 10592/0052 Fluarix vaccine injection	Smithkline Beecham plc	Cancelled	19 August 1994
PL 10592/0065 Fluarix vaccine injection	Smithkline Beecham plc	Cancelled	25 August 1995

MA specific/product name	Licence holder/company name	Current MA status	MA date first granted
PL 10592/0094 Fluarix vaccine injection	Smithkline Beecham plc	Cancelled	10 September 1996
PL 10592/0111 Fluarix vaccine injection	Smithkline Beecham plc	Cancelled	18 August 1997
PL 13767/0004 Agrippal vaccine injection	Chirson S.P.A.	Granted	8 March 1999
PL 18532/0017 Evans vaccines absorbed tetanus vaccine 40IU	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 February 2001
PL 18532/0018 Evans vaccines adsorbed tetanus vaccine 80IU/ml	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 January 2001
PL 18532/0019 Evans vaccines adsorbed diphtheria vaccine 60IU[1]	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 February 2001
PL 18532/0020 Evans vaccines absorbed diphtheria and tetanus injection[1]	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 January 2001
PL 18532/0021 Evans vaccines absorbed diphtheria and tetanus injection[1]	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 January 2001
PL 18532/0022 Trivax-AD vaccine injection[1]	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 February 2001
PL 18532/0023 Trivax-AD vaccine injection[1]	Evans Vaccines Ltd.	Granted	1 February 2001
PL 10592/0153 Triplerix-HIB vaccine injection	Smithkline Beecham plc	Granted	27 August 1999
PL 16033/0002 Chiron Behring Begrivac vaccine injection	Chiron Behring Gmbh and Co.	Cancelled	19 September 1997
PL 16033/0001 Behring DTP vaccine injection[1]	Chiron Behring Gmbh and Co.	Granted	13 August 1997
PL 16033/0004 Chiron Behring adsorbed tetanus vaccine	Chiron Behring Gmbh and Co.	Granted	21 January 1998
PL 16033/0005 Chiron Behring adsorbed diphtheria and tetanus vaccine[1]	Chiron Behring Gmbh and Co.	Granted	21 January 1998
PL 06745/0079 ACT-HIB DTP D.C. vaccine injection[1]	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	17 January 1997
EM 04560/0009 Tritanrix-HB vaccine injection—3ml monodose vial	Smithkline Beecham Biological SA	Granted	19 July 1996
EM 04560/0010 Tritanrix HEPB vaccine injection—10ml multidose vial	Smithkline Beecham Biological SA	Granted	19 July 1996
PL 15747/0003 Epaxal berna injection 500 RIA	Istituto Sieroterapico Berna S.R.L.	Granted	14 December 1999
PL 06745/0095 Pasteur Merieux MSD inactivated influenza vaccine split virion injection	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	23 March 1998
PL 06745/0105 Pasteur Merieux MSD inactivated split virion influenza vaccine	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	11 June 1999
PL 0003/0312 tetanus vaccine BP in simple solution TET/VAC	The Wellcome Foundation Ltd.	Cancelled	21 February 1994
PL 00025/0295 H-B Vax II Paediatric vaccine 5ug hepatitis B surface antig	Merck Sharp and Dohme Ltd.	Cancelled	14 December 1993
PL 00025/0320 HB-VAX II vaccine injection 40mcg/ml	Merck Sharp and Dohme Ltd.	Cancelled	23 October 1997
PL 06745/0045 TETAVAX vaccine BP Pasteur Merieux	Aventis Pasteur MSD Ltd.	Granted	30 November 1993
PL 06745/0057 MFV-JECT vaccine injection	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	10 August 1993
PL 06745/0060 MFV-JECT	Pasteur Merieux MSD Ltd.	Cancelled	8 August 1994

[1] Has been/is used as part of the childhood immunisation schedule and the vaccine has been centrally purchased by Department of Health.

Note:
All other vaccines are non-routine

Dudley Group of Hospitals

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the periods of time patients have to wait for beds in the accident and emergency department and medical assessment unit of the Dudley Group of Hospitals. [927]

Yvette Cooper: The data for most recent period, March to May 2001, show that patients in the accident and emergency department waited for the following periods for admission in percentage terms:

	Percentage
Admitted within two hours	85.9
Admitted two to four hours	6.4
Admitted over four hours	7.7

Source:
The Dudley Group of Hospitals National Health Service Trust

The Medical Assessment Unit does not record data on patients waiting for admission as patients are frequently discharged home, or to other types of care, as well as being admitted to hospital.

A combination of continued emergency pressures, industrial action and delayed discharges have contributed to the current pressure on services, including length of wait in the accident and emergency department.

However, the industrial action ended on 22 May 2001, and in regard to delayed discharges, Dudley Health Authority has recently identified £100,000 of non-recurrent funds to alleviate immediate pressures in the short term. The local health and social services agencies are involved in discussions to seek solutions for medium to longer term.

Renal Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of renal services at Chorley and South Ribble District General Hospital. [1087]

Mr. Hutton: The north-west region has received a capital funding allocation of £1.248 million in 2001–02, to commission 20 new haemodialysis stations and treat at least 80 additional patients. The Lancashire and South Cumbria zone has submitted a proposal to establish a 12-station facility at Chorley and South Ribble District General Hospital; this is one of three bids from across the region and a national decision is expected shortly.

Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there were in the Royal Berkshire and Battle hospitals in Reading in May 1997; how many there are now; and how many are forecast for June 2004. [1605]

Ms Blears: Bed statistics are collected by National Health Service trusts, not by individual hospital sites. Figures on the average daily number of beds for each NHS trust are published annually in "Bed Availability and Occupancy: England", copies of which are in the Library.

Forecast figures at trust/health authority level are not collected centrally. The NHS Plan states an increase of 2,100 general and acute beds for England by 2004.

Acute Beds

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute beds were available in the NHS in England in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* June 2001; and how many are forecast for June 2004. [1607]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally in the format requested. We do not have bed availability data for specific dates as the returns are made on a financial year basis.

The latest released figures are for the year 1999–2000. Figures on the average daily number of available acute beds in England are available in the annual publication "Bed availability and occupancy—England", copies of which are available in the Library.

The National Health Service Plan states an increase of 2,100 general and acute beds for England by 2004.

NHS Trusts (Discretionary Capital)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what allocation has been made for discretionary capital for each NHS trust in the eastern region in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* in 1999–2000. [1481]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Approved capital schemes for trusts in eastern region

£000

Trust	*1999–2000*	*2001–02*
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	9,513	1,369
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust	462	14,111
Bedford Hospital NHS Trust	—	1,860
Bedford and Luton Community NHS Trust	—	1,198
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust	568	—
Lifespan Healthcare NHS Trust	848	—
Local Health Partnerships NHS Trust	400	—
Hinchingbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust	—	1,361
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust	—	1,135
New Possibilities NHS Trust	1,620	2,290
Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	—	1,825
Mid Essex Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	—	18
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	—	1,764
Papworth Hospital NHS Trust	—	3,272
Southend Hospital NHS Trust	—	900
Southend Community NHS Trust	1,710	—
West Herts Community Health NHS Trust	1,200	—
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust	567	2,175
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	—	1,432

Source:
NHS Executive Eastern Figures

Cottage Hospitals

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision of convalescent and respite beds and the maintenance of cottage hospitals; and to what extent his policy is expressed by targets and guidance to health authorities. [1650]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* Intermediate care is a key part of the Government's programme to promote independence, particularly for older people. The NHS Plan set a target of 5,000 extra intermediate care beds by 2003–04, some of which will be in community hospitals. The Plan also set a target for extending carers' respite services, benefiting a further 75,000 carers, and those they care for, by 2003–04.

National Cardiothoracic Transplant Service

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 75W, how much time will be allowed for public consultation following the publication of the Government's proposals for the future of the national cardiothoracic transplant service; and what period of time he estimates will be needed between a final decision on the location of the national transplant units and implementation in April 2002. [1848]

Mr. Hutton: People and organisations will be allowed 12 weeks to comment on the document setting out our proposals for the future of the national cardiothoracic transplant service. Once the final decision on the site of the fourth centre has been taken, all reasonable steps will be taken to make the necessary changes to the service by April 2002.

Health Visitors

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to regulate the role of health visitors. [1360]

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to include health visitors on the Nursing and Midwifery Council; and if he will make a statement. [1854]

Mr. Hutton: Health visitors will continue to be regulated as part of the nursing and midwifery professions. The draft legislation establishing the new Nursing and Midwifery Council recognises their special contribution to public health and contains several safeguards for health visiting. Health visitors will have a separate register, protection of their professional title and be guaranteed equal representation on the council with nurses and midwives, and from each United Kingdom country.

Student Nurses

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the review of student nurse methods of support, including bursaries, is expected to be completed and reported. [1356]

Mr. Hutton: Officials undertook a review of support arrangements for National Health Service funded students last year. As a result Ministers considered a range of options for change to the existing arrangements, taking full account of representations received from students, their representative bodies and others. The 10.4 per cent. across-the-board increase in the basic rate of bursary, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced shortly after the Budget, was one of the outcomes of the review of student support. It is the biggest increase in bursaries since their introduction in the late 1980s and provides diploma level students (who make up the majority of the student nurse population) with an extra £500 per year.

Further bursary changes will come into effect in September providing extra help with accommodation and travel expenses for students attending practice placements.

Ministers continue to take a close interest in the effective operation of student support arrangements.

Care Homes

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his discussions with care providers regarding the proposals contained in "Fit for the Future?". [1358]

Jacqui Smith: The "Fit for the Future?" consultation exercise finished on 21 January 2000 and the finalised National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People were published on 2 March this year. These standards were extensively consulted on and my hon. Friend the Minister of State met with providers and their representatives on several occasions to discuss the proposals, in addition to the meetings and correspondence dealt with by officials.

In setting these standards we listened to the concerns of providers and produced a sensible set of standards that give providers a reasonable time to adapt, and achieved the support of national organisations representing consumers and providers. We made a number of specific changes to the proposed standards in response to the concerns raised in the comments we received. I am confident that these decisions will ensure that any improvements in the quality of care homes necessary will be achieved smoothly, and that stability in the care homes sector and sufficient capacity is maintained while changes are made.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of care homes that have closed over the last year, by health authority area, and estimate the reduction in care places accordingly. [1357]

Jacqui Smith: Around 1,500 residential care homes for adults and 360 private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics in England closed during the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000. However, it should be noted that during the same period, there were around 1,900 new registrations of residential care homes and 350 of nursing care homes. Information is not available centrally on the number of care places associated with closures or new registrations. Details of closures or new registrations by local and health authority area are available in the report entitled 'Activity, workload and resources of local authority, health authority and joint inspection units: summary results of a survey in England 1999–2000' which was published on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/regandinspect2.htm.

Medical Careers (Women)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the career structures of women in medicine. [1782]

Mr. Hutton: We value highly the contribution women make to medicine, and are already committed to providing the necessary support to assist them in combining work with home life. The Improved Working Lives Standard sets a model of supportive and flexible employment practice. National Health Service organisations will be required to achieve accreditation against the Standard by April 2003, demonstrating that they are improving the working lives of staff.

Hospital Hygiene

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government are taking to *(a)* improve hospital hygiene and *(b)* reduce hospital-acquired infection. [1788]

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in improving hygiene in hospitals; and how many hospitals have been visited by the Commission for Health Improvement in 2001. [2018]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan set out how we intended to improve standards of cleanliness and hygiene in National Health Service hospitals. A clean hospitals programme was launched in 2000, when £31.9 million was allocated directly to NHS trusts to begin a series of sustainable improvements to hospital cleanliness and the broader patient environment. Patient environment action teams (PEAT) were established to assess NHS trusts against 19 elements which define the patient environment. These elements include entrances and reception areas, visitors' and ward toilets, and cleanliness and decoration throughout the hospital. PEAT teams made two assessment visits. The first was to "spot check" the quality of the patient environment and to assess what needed to be done to raise standards; the second was to evaluate the improvements made and to determine whether the hospital had been successful in bringing standards to a higher level.

The NHS has made substantial progress since the assessments were completed, and major improvements in levels of cleanliness have been made in a relatively short space of time. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the results of the clean hospitals programme in a press release on 10 April 2001. The official report has now been published, showing that the percentage of hospitals now showing a good or acceptable standard of cleanliness is over 93 per cent. The tangible improvements that the NHS has achieved in the short-term are the basis for sustainable year-on-year improvements in the future. We will continue to support NHS trusts in raising standards further. A further allocation of £30 million has been provided to allow NHS trusts to build upon the positive outcomes achieved to date, and ensure a clean hospital environment in the future.

The NHS Plan states that the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) will monitor and report on standards of cleanliness in hospitals. CHI and NHS Estates are currently discussing how best to monitor progress and ensure that hospitals continue to maintain acceptable standards of cleanliness.

Trust chief executives are responsible for ensuring that there are high standards of cleanliness and hygiene in hospitals. From April 2001, all NHS trusts are required to comply with the new National Standards of Cleanliness for the NHS. These new standards form part of the Performance Assessment Framework and will ensure that higher standards are achieved and maintained in the future.

It is a core requirement for NHS organisations to have effective systems in place to prevent and control hospital acquired infection (HAI). Evidence-based multi-professional guidelines for the prevention of HAI, commissioned by the Department, were published in January 2001. Additionally, all hospitals have been required to take part in national surveillance of HAI from April 2001 and data will be published from April 2002.

The Commission for Health Improvement has visited 34 hospitals between 1 January and 29 June 2001.

PFI Schemes (NHS)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS Private Finance Initiative schemes have been selected to pilot the management of NHS ancillary staff from the private sector. [2213]

Mr. Hutton: Pilot schemes, whereby ancillary services staff could retain their National Health Service employment terms but be managed by the private sector, are being conducted at three private finance initiative projects currently in procurement. These are at Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust, South West London Community NHS Trust (Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton) and Havering Hospitals NHS Trust.

Prozac

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the development of suicidal tendencies in patients taking Prozac; if he will instruct the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines to review this matter; and if he will make a statement. [1853]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not commissioned any recent research into the area of suicidal tendencies with Prozac.

As with all medicines the safety of Prozac is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the independent expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM). In June 2001, the CSM considered the available data, including recent research on the issue, and concluded that study data do not support an association between fluoxetine and suicidal behaviour. However, due to the anecdotal reports of suicidal behaviour associated with fluoxetine, the CSM recommended that the issue should be kept under review and doctors and patients should be warned to be vigilant for suicidal thoughts and behaviour in the early stages of treatment. Patient information for Prozac, and that of other medicines in this class has been amended to include wording to this effect.

This issue is being closely monitored by the MCA and will be further reviewed by the CSM in July 2001.

Elective Procedures

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elective procedures have been cancelled by each hospital trust in the south-east region since 1 January 2000. [1653]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect information in the format requested. The Department collects information on the number of elective operations cancelled at the last minute for non-medical reasons, and breaches of the standard to admit patients within one month following such cancellations. Figures are collected on a quarterly basis at health authority level and routinely placed in the Library. The latest figures cover the five quarters up to Quarter 4 (January to March 2001) of the 2000–01 financial year.

Children's Hospices

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the children's hospices in England indicating for each the *(a)* level of Government money provided for running costs and *(b)* proportion of each hospice's total annual running costs the Government grant represents. [1842]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 4 July 2001

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the contracts of employment of the Chairman, Chief Executive and Board members of the Strategic Rail Authority are due to expire. [1013]

Mr. Spellar: The appointments are due to expire as follows:

	Expiry date
Sir Alastair Morton (Chairman)	31 March 2002
Mike Grant (Chief Executive)	30 April 2004
Lew Adams	31 October 2001
Professor Begg	31 March 2002
Willie Gallagher	30 April 2002
David Grayson	30 April 2002
Ann Hemingway	30 April 2002
David Jeffries	31 October 2001
Pen Kent	31 October 2001
Jeremy Mayhew	30 April 2002
David Quarmby	31 October 2001
Janet Runin	30 April 2002
Kevin Small	30 April 2002

Sir Alastair Morton has agreed that he will step down as soon as a new Chairman is appointed. The process for appointing his successor has already begun, and an appointment will be made as quickly as possible within the rules for public appointments of this kind.

The appointments of Lew Adams and David Quarmby were originally due to expire on 30 June 2001, and those of David Jeffries and Pen Kent on 31 July 2001. All have accepted short extensions to their appointments to 31 October 2001.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the Strategic Rail Authority to publish its Strategic Plan. [1012]

Mr. Spellar: The draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) issued for consultation by the Secretary of State on 29 June would require the SRA to publish a first overall strategy in November 2001.

Air Traffic Controllers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many air traffic controllers are at present in training; how many controllers are needed to initiate the new NERC Centre at Southampton; and when he expects to receive details of training schemes proposed by the new private partners of NATS. [1015]

Mr. Spellar: 370 student air traffic controllers are currently undergoing training at NATS College of Air Traffic Control, or at operational units. In addition, around 50 controllers are being trained on the new Swanwick systems at any one time.

365 controllers will be needed to bring NERC into operation next January.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement for the NATS PPP requires the key shareholders to agree a business plan within four months of the start of the PPP. This will include a training strategy.

Rail Franchises

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to announce *(a)* the completion of contract negotiations for the new (i) Chiltern, (ii) South Central and (iii) South West Trains rail franchises and *(b)* the preferred bidders for the East Coast Main Line and Transpennine franchises. [1026]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) will conclude negotiations and sign franchise agreements with the preferred counterparties for the new Chiltern, South Central and South West Trains rail franchises as soon as it can resolve all outstanding issues.

Announcements will be made on the East Coast Main Line and Transpennine franchises as soon as possible.

Freight

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of freight went by *(a)* road and *(b)* rail in May (i) 1993, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 2001. [1613]

Mr. Byers: The figures are not available in the form requested.

Heathrow

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with British Airways concerning plans for a runway to be built along the northern perimeter of Heathrow airport. [1310]

Mr. Jamieson: As the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), made clear on 6 June 2000, *Official Report*, columns 203–04W, it is premature to comment on what options are being considered in the South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) study. Following completion of the study there will be a public consultation on the options arising from it.

During the course of the study we have had discussions with, and representations from, a wide range of organisations, including British Airways, about new runways in the south east of England.

Best Value

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will state the estimated cost of the administration of Best Value in the fire service in the last financial year; [1283]

(2) how much public money has been allocated for administrative costs associated with Best Value in the fire service in the forthcoming year. [1292]

Mr. Raynsford: Fire total standard spending was increased by 3.5 per cent. to £1,463 million for 2001–02. The settlements took account of information on spending pressures provided by the local authorities Fire Service Expenditure Forecasting Group. Best Value administration was not identified as a separate significant pressure in the group's most recent report. Information on overall costs for the fire service is not held centrally. The scale of costs is likely to be different for county fire authorities compared with single-service fire authorities, like East Sussex, which are Best Value authorities in their own right. Additional items of expenditure for single-service fire authorities include publication of Best Value performance plans and distribution of summary plans to local households.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the review of planning policy for mobile phone masts. [1478]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 20W.

Energy Efficiency

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will require tailored energy efficiency advice to be provided to people buying a new home. [1814]

Dr. Whitehead: Under the Building Regulations, builders are required to calculate the energy rating of a new home and to place a notice of the energy rating there. In addition, we are proposing to make it a new requirement of the Building Regulations that builders should provide occupiers of new homes with information on operation and maintenance of the heating and hot water services in ways that would help to optimise energy consumption.

Cycling

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to require local authorities to produce cycling strategies. [1731]

Mr. Spellar: All local highway authorities in England (excluding London) were asked to produce a cycling strategy as part of their local transport plans (LTPs) last year. This should identify gaps in the local network and potential improvements to the cycling infrastructure. Almost all authorities subsequently included strategies for cycling as part of their LTP submissions. Initial monitoring suggests that the strategies will result in considerable additional provision for cycling. The London boroughs will be expected to implement the policies for cycling contained in the Mayor's Transport Strategy, which is due for publication in the summer.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the Government plan to take forward their cycling strategy. [1658]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The Government are committed to quadrupling the number of cycling trips, from a 1996 base, by 2012, and in the 10-Year Transport Plan, we have set an interim target of tripling the number of cycling trips between 2000 and 2010. The local transport settlement provided £8.4 billion of Government funding which will help to promote sustainable transport measures, including cycling. The cycling strategies in local authorities' local transport plans will provide opportunities to improve the cycling infrastructure and make cycling more accessible.

Action is being taken to effectively market the key messages of the National Cycling Strategy (NCS). An NCS website has been launched and a promotional video has been produced. A series of cycling seminars has just been concluded across England, which provided a good opportunity for local authorities, major employers and health and education practitioners to come together.

We are also re-organising the way the National Cycle Forum, which co-ordinates progress on the NCS, works. The current Forum will be reconstituted, meeting annually to review progress on delivering the NCS, and to set the policy agenda for the year ahead. An executive board is to be established with the task of securing NCS objectives and developing broad policies established by the NCF. The NCS Board will be 8–10 people strong. We have advertised for a Chairperson, and are considering the applications at present.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what monitoring system his Department has in place to ensure that single regeneration budget programmes are delivered in line with the objectives set in the original bids; and if he will make a statement. [2124]

Ms Keeble: My Department's monitoring system requires Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Partnerships to set out the objectives of their bids in annual Delivery Plans. The Regional Development Offices (RDAs) monitor Partnerships' progress in delivering their schemes, normally each quarter, against Key Indicators of Performance which are recorded in Delivery Plans. The RDAs also undertake periodic reviews of SRB Schemes to assess overall progress.

In their recent Corporate/Business Plans, RDAs set out regional priorities and activities and key outputs for the SRB in 2001–02. They will report on achievements in their 2002–03 Plans.

Informal Public Spaces

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is towards land used as informal open public space being developed for housing purposes; and if he will make a statement. [2119]

Ms Keeble: The Government's policy is set out in the draft revision of Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 17—Sport, Open Space, and Recreation. This makes

it clear that existing open space should not be developed for housing or other forms of built development in urban areas, unless the planning authority's assessments undertaken in accordance with guidance in PPG17 shows the land to be clearly surplus to requirements.

Surplus Farmland

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the hectarage of farmland which is surplus to agricultural requirements but cannot be used for any alternative purpose due to *(a)* local plans and *(b)* greenbelt zoning. [2130]

Ms Keeble: Consideration of whether to grant planning permission for the alternative use of agricultural land is a matter in the first instance for local planning authorities taking into account their development plan policies and national guidance. National planning policy for the countryside is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 7: The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development. PPG7 was recently amended to encourage local planning authorities to be more supportive of farm diversification projects that are consistent in their scale with their rural location.

PPG2 sets out national planning policies for green belts and identifies those uses of land within green belts that may be appropriate.

Election Turnout

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what studies he is undertaking into the turnouts for elections in different countries and the reasons behind the differences in turnouts; and if he will make a statement; [1694]

(2) what research he has commissioned into the low turnout in the recent general election; and if he will make a statement; [1693]

(3) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* undertaken into the costs and benefits of introducing compulsory voting for elections in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1695]

Dr. Whitehead: No research has been commissioned or undertaken to investigate the costs and benefits of introducing compulsory voting nor into turnouts for elections in other countries. As to the low turnout in the recent general election, the Electoral Commission is undertaking a review of the conduct of that election. The Government will give careful consideration to the findings once the report is presented to Parliament.

Disability Discrimination Act

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reasons airlines and air carriers are exempted from the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1996; and what plans he has to bring them within the terms of the Act. [1806]

Ms Keeble: As travel by air is a predominantly international mode of transport, it was considered more appropriate to develop standards at international level for access to air travel for disabled people.

My Department was closely involved, both through the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), in drawing up the relevant advice for the aviation industry. We have more recently been working with the UK industry—airlines, airports and travel agents—and with our disability advisers, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, to draw up a voluntary code of practice for the industry on meeting the needs of disabled passengers. The draft Code on which we have been consulting over the last few months draws on the work of ICAO and ECAC. We hope to publish the final version later this year.

In responding to the Disability Rights Task Force report we also announced our intention to take a reserve regulation making power, when a suitable legislative opportunity arises, which could be used to give the Code statutory force if voluntary compliance proves ineffective. In addition, European airline and airport associations have recently agreed to commend a series of voluntary commitments on passenger rights to their respective members. Both the airline commitments and the airport commitments contain undertakings about the treatment of passengers with reduced mobility. We expect all major UK airlines and airports to adopt the relevant commitments, which will take effect from February 2002. Our Code of Practice will complement those commitments.

Planning Inquiries

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the changes he intends to make in the planning inquiry system; and what consultations his Department has had with non-governmental organisations on planning arrangements. [1769]

Ms Keeble: We introduced new rules for streamlining planning inquiries last August. We are monitoring the operation of the procedures.

Separately, we have consulted on proposals to streamline the processing of major projects through the planning system. The proposals include measures to improve the procedures for public inquiries into major projects. Of the 127 responses to the consultation, 71 were from non-governmental organisations. We shall announce how we intend to proceed as soon as practicable.

Transport Infrastructure

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of transport infrastructure in delivery of regeneration policies. [1767]

Ms Keeble: Development of transport infrastructure can have an important role to play in delivering regeneration. English Regional Planning Bodies are required by Planning Policy Guidance Note 11 to produce regional transport strategies to reflect the economic and regeneration needs of the region. Transport and regeneration (with the exception of some rail issues) in Wales are matters for the Welsh Assembly.

Civil Servants

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many civil servants were employed by *(a)* the Department of the Environment and *(b)* the Department of Transport in April 1997. [1803]

Dr. Whitehead: At 1 April 1997 the Department of the Environment (Central) employed 3,180 staff and the Department of Transport (Central) employed 1,777 staff. Both figures are expressed as full-time equivalents with part-time staff counted as a proportion of net conditioned hours worked.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to modify the planning system in respect of protection of sites of special scientific interest. [1772]

Ms Keeble: The Government are committed to ensuring that sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) receive a high level of protection through the planning system. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 included new and enhanced powers to improve the protection and management of SSSIs. We also intend to issue a revision of Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 (Nature Conservation) later this year for public consultation. In Wales, these matters are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's response to EU standards on noise pollution, with particular reference to noise abatement for those living close to motorways. [1657]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* As indicated in the reply of my predecessor's my right hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) of 30 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 306w, the Department has a continuing involvement in negotiating EU Directives in the reduction of noise emitted by new vehicles. These measures have already delivered a substantial reduction in noise levels from new vehicles and these measures will bring improvements as the vehicle fleet is renewed.

The Department was involved in negotiating an EU Directive to limit tyre noise, this being the dominant source of noise from traffic at speeds above 40 mph. The Directive was adopted very recently.

In addition, the 10-Year Plan for Transport, published in July last year, will enable the Highways Agency to install by 2011 quieter surfaces on over 60 per cent. of the national road network including all concrete stretches. The Highways Agency will also provide over the next 10 years other measures such as noise barriers in some of the worst and most pressing cases where there is no immediate need for the road to be resurfaced.

A303

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to dual stretches of the A303 in Somerset and Devon; and if he will make a statement. [1367]

Mr. Jamieson: The London to South Wales and the South West Multi Modal Study currently in progress is looking at solution to problems on the main transportation corridors in the study area, including the M3/A303/A30 corridor. The study's recommendations will be considered by the Regional Planning Bodies for the South West and the South East, which are both represented on the steering group for the study. Only then will any decisions be taken on the addition of schemes to the trunk roads programme.

Exeter to Waterloo Line

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the award of the new rail franchise for the Exeter to London Waterloo Line; and if he will make a statement. [1368]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority intends that the Exeter to Waterloo line be included in the new Wessex franchise for which they invited expressions of interest in November last year. This is at a relatively early stage. The SRA has announced seven pre-qualifiers from whom it intends to invite proposals for the new franchise.

Fylingdales

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency plans exist in the Department for a spill out into the North Yorkshire Moors National Park as a result of the construction of an X Band Radar at the Fylingdales site; and what proposals there are for expediting planning permission and holding a public inquiry. [336]

Ms Keeble: There are no such contingency plans or proposals.

Rural Services

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to increase the scope of business rate relief for rural services. [836]

Dr. Whitehead *[pursuant to the reply, 27 June 2001, c. 103W]*: The Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001 will extend the mandatory element of the village shop rate relief scheme to all food shops with rateable value of no more than £6,000, (and not £9,000 as stated) in a designated rural settlement with population up to 3,000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Council of Europe

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what meetings of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers he plans to be represented at ministerial level for the rest of this year; and if he will make a statement. [732]

Peter Hain: There is one Council of Europe Ministerial remaining this year, scheduled for 7–8 November. Ministers will consider nearer the time at what level the UK should be represented, on the basis of the substantive issues on the agenda.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was his reply to the inquiry of the Latvian Chair-in-Office of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the participation of parliamentarians in the national delegations to the General Assembly of the United Nations; and if he will make a statement on the composition of the UK delegation at the forthcoming session. [733]

Peter Hain: We do not appear to have received any inquiry from the Latvian Chairman in Office on the issue of participation of parliamentarians in national delegations.

HMG will consider favourably any proposal that Members of Parliament join the delegation when the assembly covers issues of particular concern to them, subject to accepting that any interventions could not be made in a personal capacity but would have to represent the views and policy of HMG.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will lead the delegation to the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and will attend parts of the General Debate. I shall also attend parts of the General Assembly. The rest of the delegation will comprise the British Permanent Representative, his staff, and officials from the FCO and other Government Departments.

Mercenaries

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resolutions on mercenaries were put before the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2001; which were adopted; and what position the EU delegation took on each. [980]

Peter Hain: The 57th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) adopted a resolution proposed by Cuba on "The use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination" by 35 votes to 11, with six abstentions. The UK, with Belgium and Germany, voted against the resolution. The other EU members of the CHR, (Spain, France, Italy and Portugal) abstained. While fully recognising the numerous dangers caused by mercenary activity, the UK does not believe that the CHR is the appropriate forum to address the issue. This was the only resolution on mercenaries tabled at the CHR.

UK Human Rights Committee

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Minister will attend the UN Human Rights Committee hearings on the UK Periodic report due to be discussed later this year. [981]

Peter Hain: The UK attaches importance to meeting its obligations to report on implementation of commitments under UN core human rights treaties. The UK's Fifth Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), submitted in 1999, was approved by Ministers. But in line with usual practice, there are no plans for a Minister to attend the Human Rights Committee examination of the UK report in October this year. Senior officials from the relevant Government Department will attend.

Western Sahara

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is regarding the recommendations contained in James Baker's report to the UN Security Council concerning the future of the Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [1438]

Mr. Bradshaw: We supported United Nations Security Council Resolution 1359 which was passed unanimously on 29 June 2001, which extended MINURSO's mandate until 30 November 2001. We fully support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General to invite all the parties to meet directly or through proximity talks, under the auspices of his Personal Envoy, James Baker, and encourage the parties to discuss the draft Framework Agreement and to negotiate any specific changes they would like to see in this proposal, as well as to discuss any other proposal for a political solution, which may be put forward to the parties, to arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement. We also affirm that while such discussions go on, the official proposals submitted by the Polisario Front to overcome obstacles preventing implementation of the Settlement Plan will be considered.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the indicative expenditure ceilings agreed in March 1999 of *(a)* an enlarged Community with six additional members and *(b)* the existing 15 member states. [1601]

Peter Hain: The Berlin European Council agreed ceilings for commitments for the existing 15 member states which amount to 644.8 billion euro over the period 2000 to 2006. It also agreed a total indicative amount of 58.1 billion euro for new member states up to 2006. All figures are in terms of 1999 prices.

Arms Trade

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in *(a)* the EU, *(b)* USA and *(c)* developing countries concerning the forthcoming UN conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. [1302]

Mr. Bradshaw: The first ever UN Conference on Small Arms in July will signal a step-change in the international community's efforts to combat the uncontrolled spread and misuse of small arms that are the primary instruments of death and injury in conflicts and criminal acts worldwide. The UK has been actively engaged in the conference process both in its national capacity and within the EU.

FCO has been in frequent and close consultation with EU partners, both bilaterally and through the regular EU working groups which discuss these issues.

We also have many formal and informal contacts with the UK, for example in various arms control regimes and working groups, through which officials are able to discuss the subject of small arms and light weapons and other related issues. We also had contact with the US during the meetings in the preparatory process for the conference itself.

The Government attach particular importance to contacts with developing countries, as these include a large number of states most affected by the effects of small arms and light weapons. In February this year the UK hosted a small arms and light weapons policy brainstorming seminar to which a wide selection of countries was invited. The then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), addressed that meeting. We also hold regular EU Troika meetings with SADC (Southern African Development Community), and participated in an EU/SADC meeting in the margins of the third PrepCom. In addition, the EU Presidency will be organising consultations between the EU and SADC, Latin American countries and others during the early stages of the conference. The subject has been a regular agenda item for a wide variety of bilateral meetings over the past year. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), discussed prospects for the conference with the South African Foreign Minister.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be attending the UN conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in July; and if he will make a statement. [1303]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will not be attending the conference. The United Kingdom will be represented by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, who has taken a close interest in the issue and in the preparatory process for the conference since it was initiated.

The UK attaches considerable importance to supporting efforts to reduce the uncontrolled spread and use of small arms and light weapons. It has actively undertaken numerous initiatives, bilaterally and in line with the 1998 EU Joint Action on Small Arms. These include:

on west Africa, work on the implementation of the ECOWAS Moratorium, focusing, in the UK-authored "next steps" report of 2000, on building political will;

on Cambodia, UK facilitation of an EU-funded visit in August 2000 by the Legal Adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister;

on southern Africa, UK support for EU moves to bolster the EU/SADC process and its regional action programme.

The UK also co-ordinated work leading to the November 2000 adoption of an OSCE Document on Small Arms, a significant regional contribution in itself and a major confidence-building step towards the UN conference.

The UK hopes that the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects will agree a practical and constructive programme of action with sufficient political support to give an impetus to sustained follow-up and implementation. We are working with our EU partners to this end.

China

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the resolution on China's human rights record at the next UN commission on human rights. [1739]

Mr. MacShane: No UN member state has yet announced an intention to table a resolution on China at the next session of the UN commission on human rights, to be held in Geneva in March and April 2002. We will consider with EU partners a common approach to any resolution nearer the time.

Council of the European Union

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for July and the major European Union events for the period between 31 July and December. [2510]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

July 10—ECOFIN Meeting—Brussels

Draft Agenda

1. Work Programme of the Presidency
   Presentation and public discussion
2. Adoption of provisional agenda
3. (poss) Adoption of "A" points list
4. Follow-up of the European Council of Göteborg
5. Public finances in the E.M.U.
   Report of the Commission
6. Fiscal policy of the European Union
   Communication of the Commission
   Orientation debate
7. Calendar of the Tax Package
   Adoption
8. Miscellaneous

PM Euro Group

Other business

5–6—Liège—Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council

13–14—Brussels—Regional Territories Council (Informal)?

16–17—Brussels—General Affairs Council

20—Brussels—Budget Council

23–24—Brussels—Agriculture Council

No agenda for the above are available yet.

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 August and December 2001 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Month	*Venue*	*Event*
September		
6–7	Bruges	External Trade Council (Ministerial Informal)
8–9	Genval	Gymnich
14–16	Leuven and Louvain-la-neuve	Environment Council (Ministerial Informal)
16–18	Alden Biezen	Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)
22–23	Liège	ECOFIN (Informal)
24–25	Brussels	Agriculture Council
27	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
27–28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council

Month	Venue	Event
October		
1	Brussels	Research Council
1	Brussels	European Union Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session (possible)
8	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
8–9	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
9	Brussels	Urban Metropolitan Policy Council (Ministerial Informal)
11–12	Brussels	Defence Council (Ministerial Informal)
15–16	Brussels	Transport and Telecommunications Council (possible)
16	Brussels	ECOFIN
19	Gent	European Council (Informal)
22–23	Brussels	Agriculture Council
25	Brussels	Fisheries Council
29	Brussels	Environment Council
29–30	Brussels	General Affairs Council
November		
5	Brussels	Cultural and Audio-visual Council
6	Brussels	ECOFIN
8	Brussels	Development and Co-operation Council
9	Brussels	European Union Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session
12	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs
15	Brussels	Health Council
16	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
19–20	Brussels	General Affairs Council
19–20	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19–20	Brussels	Capabilities Improvement Conference (Defence Ministers present)
21–22	Brussels	Budget Council (possible)
26	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
27	Brussels	Fisheries Council (possible)
29	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
December		
3	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
4	Bruges	Culture Council (Informal)
4	Brussels	ECOFIN
4	Brussels	Energy Council
5	Brussels	Industry Council
7–8	Brussels	Transport and Telecommunications Council
7–8	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10	Brussels	Research Council
12–13	Brussels	Environment Council
14–15	Brussels/Laeken	European Council
17–18	Brusse's	Agriculture Council
19–20	Brussels	Fisheries Council

British Overseas Territories (Citizenship)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to give British citizenship to the inhabitants of St. Helena and other former dependent territories. [1941]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Overseas Territories Bill, which will grant British citizenship to all British Dependent Territories citizens in qualifying territories, was given a first reading in the House of Lords on 21 June. The Second Reading is scheduled for 10 July. The Bill was published on 22 June. Copies of the Bill, with Explanatory Notes, are available from the Libraries of both Houses.

National Missile Defence

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with the Greenland Prime Minister on the ABM Treaty. [331]

Mr. Bradshaw: There have been no discussions between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Greenland Prime Minister on the ABM Treaty.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from pressure groups in *(a)* Denmark and *(b)* Greenland about the use of Thule bases for National Missile Defence. [338]

Mr. Bradshaw: I am not aware of any representations from pressure groups in Denmark or Greenland being made to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary about the use of Thule base for Missile Defence.

Passports

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the sale of passports in Eastern Europe by the Belgian Government; and if persons who have secured passports in this way have the right of entry into the UK. [2027]

Peter Hain: The Belgian MFA has carried out an internal inquiry into allegations made by a former employee of the Belgian Embassy in Sofia regarding the sale of visas at the Embassy. Although passports were not included in the allegations, we understand that the inquiry also looked into passports. The inquiry found no evidence to support the allegations and concluded that no rules had been broken. Separately, a judicial inquiry was launched in 1997 into the allegations and is still under way. It will be for the Belgian Procurator General to decide the outcome in this case.

Visas issued by the Belgian authorities allow access to the countries in the Schengen zone, which covers all EU countries except the UK and Ireland. They therefore do not permit entry to the United Kingdom, which maintains its own frontier controls and does not participate in Schengen visa arrangements.

TREASURY

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has carried out into *(a)* cost savings and *(b)* efficiency savings in total Government expenditure through the use of the Private Finance Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [1382]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information that has been requested is not kept centrally. The nature and diversity of PFI projects would make any global figure broken down in the way requested ambiguous.

However, there have been two substantive reports on PFI, since its inception, which have indicated that PFI is delivering value for money. The independent Arthur Andersen and Enterprise LSE Report stated the average percentage estimated saving against conventional procurement for the sample of projects they looked at, averaged 17 per cent. Also the NAO report on "PFI and value for money" found an average cost saving of 20 per cent. or just under £1 billion in total, across seven projects examined by the NAO up until December 1999. This saving is measured against the conventional procurement route.

Car-sharing

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the additional number of journeys made by car-sharing in 2002–03 as a consequence of introducing a new passenger rate for authorised car mileage in the March 2001 Budget. [1392]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are introducing a tax exempt rate of 5p per mile per passenger carried on a business trip from 2002–03 onwards to help employers encourage their employees to car-share wherever possible.

The Inland Revenue does not have a specific estimate of the additional number of journeys which will be made by car-sharing in 2002–03 owing to this, but will be evaluating the effects of this measure over time.

VAT (Cycle Helmets)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the demand for adult cycle helmets in the United Kingdom of his policy of removing VAT from the purchase of such helmets from 1 April; and if he will make a statement. [1390]

Mr. Boateng: No such assessment has been made.

Child Poverty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans to halve child poverty within 10 years, indicating the benchmarks against which this is to be measured. [1372]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's annual publication "Opportunity for All" sets out a full range of indicators against which we will monitor progress on our commitment to halve child poverty in 10 years and abolish it in a generation. Copies of the first two "Opportunity for All" reports are available in the Library. The next publication is due this autumn.

Spending Plans

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the annual rate of growth of total managed expenditure, in real terms, for each of the years 1999–2000 to 2003–04; what the assumptions are for such growth in real annual total managed expenditure for 2004–05 and 2005–06 contained in the March 2001 Financial Statement and Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [1381]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest Treasury projections for total managed expenditure for 1999–2000 to 2003–04 were published in Table C11 on page 199 of the March 2001 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

The assumptions underlying the real growth in total managed expenditure for 2004–05 and 2005–06 contained in the March 2001 Financial Statement and Budget Report are set out in paragraph C17 on page 186 of that document. Firm spending plans for these years will be set in the 2002 spending review.

Beer Duty

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the costs and benefits of introducing a reduced rate of duty on the beer produced by small breweries; and if he will make a statement. [1391]

Mr. Boateng: The last Budget announced the Government were minded to introduce a reduced rate of duty on the beer produced by small breweries and will be considering the scope for doing so in the course of this year. The costs and benefits of such a scheme will be considered as part of that process.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the per capita spending of all Government Departments in each of the regions and nations of the United Kingdom was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [2163]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02 (Cm 5101) offers a full analysis of public expenditure by country and region.

Company Cars

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 59W, on company cars, what assessment he has made of the impact of the loss to employees of company car tax concessions. [2084]

Mr. Boateng: The new company car tax system from April 2002 is designed to achieve lower levels of harmful emissions from cars. It does away with the reductions for driving higher levels of business mileage as this can be an incentive to drive unnecessary business miles. The reforms have been projected to have a broadly neutral effect on tax revenues, so in overall terms there is no loss to employees.

Many company car drivers will be paying less tax for the benefit of their company car under the new system. Having a company car with relatively low carbon dioxide emissions would help to ameliorate tax liabilities under the new system for any driver.

It is worth noting that we expect more drivers to take the opportunity of having a company car under the new rules. In fact the Inland Revenue has estimated that the reforms will lead to a net increase of around 200,000 company cars in the long term.

Foot and Mouth (Tourism)

David Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the loss in tax as a result of lost tourist industry income arising from the foot and mouth outbreak. [2192]

Dawn Primarolo: No robust estimates for the changes in tax revenues resulting from the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak on the tourist industry are available.

Contracts (Advertising)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what obligation is placed on public bodies in respect of *(a)* PPP, *(b)* PFI and *(c)* other financial arrangements, for advertising the relevant contracts in the (i) *Official Journal* and (ii) other publications of the European Community; under what article of which treaty and associated legislation any such requirement is made; what publication sets out the rules which must be followed in such agreements; and whether they apply equally to charitable and profit-making enterprises. [2133]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Contracting authorities/entities are required to call for competition for procurement contracts, above certain financial thresholds, in the Supplement to the *Official Journal of the European Communities* (OJEC). This includes PFI/PPP contracts where appropriate. Advertising in other publications is not mandatory, but must not pre-empt advertisement in OJEC.

This requirement arises from the EC procurement directives (which are based on principles of the EC Treaty). The principal legal basis was Articles 30, 57(2), 66 and 100a and the Directives have been implemented in the UK by the following Regulations (as amended):

The Public Works Contracts Regulations—SI 1991/2680

The Public Services Contracts Regulations—SI 1993/3228

The Public Supply Contracts Regulations—SI 1995/201

The Utilities Contracts Regulations—SI 1996/2911.

The application of these Directives/Regulations to charities and profit-making enterprises depends on whether they fall within the definition of state, regional or local authority or "body covered by public law" for the purposes of the Regulations. The Directives do not normally apply to charities and profit-making bodies unless they propose to award a works contract funded for the most part by a public body.

Business Costs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the size of the changes in *(a)* costs and *(b)* taxes applying to business since 1997. [1698]

Dawn Primarolo: Assessments of the risks, costs and benefits of new legislative proposals are made within Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs); information on taxation is in the Financial Statement and Budget Reports, both of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

VAT (Empty Homes)

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many empty homes will qualify for a reduction in VAT as announced in his Budget Statement 2001. [1948]

Mr. Boateng: Customs estimate that the reduced VAT rate for renovating empty homes should help to bring back into use up to 2,400 empty homes each year. Additionally, the Budget made a minor adjustment to the zero rate for the sale of renovated long-term empty houses, which from 1 August will benefit from relief if they have been empty for 10 years or more. This is expected to bring back into use up to 25 empty houses a year.

The measure has been warmly welcomed by the Empty Homes Agency.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what criteria owners of empty properties will qualify for a reduction in VAT when renovating their properties. [1955]

Mr. Boateng: A reduced 5 per cent. VAT rate applies to renovation work on an empty home that has not been lived in for three years or more.

The Government did not, however, want to disadvantage people who have to live in a house while renovating it. So if someone buys a house after it has been empty for three years or more and lives in it during the renovation work, the reduced rate applies to the building work provided it is completed within one year from the date the owner bought the house.

In addition, from 1 August, no VAT applies to the sale of a renovated house which has been empty for 10 years more.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Smuggling

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged and *(c)* given a custodial sentence for

smuggling goods across the Irish border in each of the past 10 years. [1072]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not available in this format.

Human Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the job description and personal specification are for the post of Senior Legal Adviser on Human Rights to the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and what bodies and institutions were consulted about *(a)* the terms of reference of this post and *(b)* the text and placement of the advertisement. [1100]

Mr. Browne: A copy of the application pack sent to applicants expressing an interest in the post has been placed in the Library. It contains the job description and personal specification. The Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission for Northern Ireland was consulted and the competition is being conducted in line with best practice.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will reply to the report of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission under section 69(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. [1717]

Mr. Browne: The Government were pleased to receive the report from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission under section 69(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We are currently considering the recommendations and will respond substantively as soon as possible.

Police Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the terms of reference are for the monitoring project being undertaken by Consensia to observe the recruitment process of the Northern Ireland police service; how many volunteers have been tasked to participate in this scheme; what the personal specifications were for volunteers; how they were selected; what the composition is of the monitoring teams, broken down by *(a)* gender and *(b)* perceived community origin; and what discussions took place with the civil service trade unions concerning the use of volunteer staff. [730]

Jane Kennedy: Observation of recruitment to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland is being undertaken by a pool of voluntary Community Observers, who are independent of Consensia and who are currently managed by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. They will become the responsibility of the Policing Board when it is established.

The role of the Independent Community Observers is set out in Regulation 10 of the Police (Recruitment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2001.

The personal specification for Independent Community Observers sets out the qualities and skills that potential candidates should possess. These are:

(a) effective oral and written communication skills;

(b) discretion and impartiality;

(c) the ability to work as part of a team; and

(d) the ability to make sound judgments.

Applicants for the roles were selected on the basis of the evidence they provided in their application form, and subsequently at interview stage, to demonstrate that they possessed these qualities and skills. A merit list was then compiled from which a pool of 63 Observers was selected.

Of that pool, 53 Observers were trained and commenced observing the recruitment process at the beginning of June 2001.

The breakdown of the pool of 53 Observers, in the format requested, is as follows:

Gender	*Number*
Male	23
Female	30
Total	53

Perceived community origin	*Number*
Protestant	26
Catholic	23
Other	4
Total	53

No discussions took place with the civil service trade unions concerning the use of volunteer staff. The process used was in accordance with best practice guidance for the selection and appointment of volunteers.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Temporary Classrooms (Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many temporary classrooms have been in use in Somerset in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [1386]

Mr. Timms: We do not have information on Somerset's temporary buildings at this level of detail. This information may be available from the local education authority.

In connection with the Department's arrangements for appraising asset management plans, we are, however, planning to publish later this year analyses of authorities' premises information for benchmarking purposes. These should include some information on temporary accommodation, although not on a year-by-year basis.

School Repairs (Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the backlog of school buildings repair and maintenance work in Somerset; and if she will make a statement. [1387]

Mr. Timms: Information on the backlog should be currently available from the local education authority.

Authorities' data on the repair and maintenance backlog, supplied as part of DfES' arrangements for appraising asset management plans, are being validated with a view to publishing analyses for benchmarking purposes later this year.

Further Education Colleges

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching staff have *(a)* been employed in further education colleges and *(b)* left further education in each of the last four academic years. [1629]

John Healey *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The number of teaching staff employed in FE colleges is shown in the table:

Number of teaching staff in FE colleges in England

Thousand

	Number
1995–96	134.7
1996–97	130.9
1997–98	141.8
1998–99	144.7

Notes:

1. The latest available data are for 1998–99
2. Information on the number of teachers who leave further education is not collected centrally

Tuition Fees

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the level of tuition fees in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement. [1637]

Margaret Hodge: Tuition fees at publicly funded institutions are uprated each year to take account of inflation.

Post-16 Capital Allocations

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the post 16-capital allocations will be announced. [1664]

John Healey *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department announced on 28 March 2001 that capital provision for further education would rise to £177 million in 2003–04. The base funding is £110 million in each of the years 2001–02 and 2002–03. Allocations to individual further education colleges are made by the Learning and Skills Council throughout the year in response to bids.

Sure Start

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the sure start proposals will be rolled out nationally. [1666]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Sure start works with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children. The Government's current plans are to establish 500 local programmes by 2004, in disadvantaged neighbourhoods throughout England. Of these, 260 programmes have been announced so far, of which 179 have now had their plans approved. We expect to announce further sure start programmes soon.

Rapid Response Fund

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will investigate the procedures by which companies and work forces can access the rapid response fund. [1678]

John Healey *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* We continually monitor the rapid response fund to ensure it is used as intended—to provide specialist advice, training and other support to people involved in redundancies that have a significant impact on the local labour market and where no alternative existing provision is available. Proposals are considered against a variety of criteria that include the impact of the redundancy on the local labour market, the level of partnership involvement, clear outputs and value for money. We also expect training proposals to be matched as far as possible to the needs of employers with vacancies so that people can move quickly into new jobs. DfES officials make every effort to ensure bids submitted via regional development agencies are processed as quickly as possible and provide an initial approval decision within three working days. The fund is designed to be as flexible as possible and, within the last year, we have introduced changes to increase its flexibility and make it more responsive to local needs. Demand is high and has increased significantly over the last six months.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to announce the findings of the early process evaluation and customer satisfaction surveys in relation to individual learning accounts. [1752]

John Healey: The findings of the early process evaluation and customer satisfaction surveys in relation to individual learning accounts will be published towards the end of September.

Digital Divide

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what policies she is pursuing to tackle the problem of the digital divide; and if she will make a statement. [1807]

John Healey: The Department is pursuing a range of measures to tackle the digital divide in order to help increase people's employability, to enable them to use new technologies to enrich their lives, and to encourage lifelong learning for all. Our measures help provide access and the skills needed for individuals to use information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly for those most at risk from exclusion. We are providing public access to new technologies and the internet through UK online centres. There are almost 1,500 centres now open, with 6,000 centres planned in total by the end of 2002. We are investing in wiring up communities in some of the most disadvantaged areas in England, enabling people to explore the internet in the comfort of their own homes and to develop skills, access job opportunities and become more involved in their communities. We are also

making progress in improving computer/pupil ratios, to ensure that in future all school leavers should be able to use and benefit from new technologies. 88 per cent. of all schools are now connected to the internet.

AS-Levels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils entered AS-level modules in January; and how many of those are retaking those AS modules. [1957]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* There is no information as yet on the number of pupils who sat the January AS unit tests. However, 214,384 unit entries were recorded from the analysis of the January results. The AS-level qualification is made up of three units: students may choose to sit all three unit tests in January or in June, or spread them throughout the year.

There is no statistical information on how many of the pupils who sat the AS units in January are retaking their modules.

PRIME MINISTER

Flooding (Torbay)

Q9. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit Galmpton, Torbay, to discuss flooding problems with residents. [717]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. I am aware that Galmpton has experienced flash flooding in recent years, and that this has caused distress and damage to local residents. Decisions on flood defence projects and their timing are the responsibility of local operating authorities, in particular the Environment Agency and local councils. I understand that the agency is currently discussing options for Galmpton with Torbay council, and will work with them urgently to address the situation.

National Missile Defence

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will discuss with President Bush unilateral proposals by the Rumsfeld Commission to delete article IX of the 1972 ABM treaty; [323]

(2) if he will have discussions with President Bush on a co-operative approach with Russia and China on Strategic Missile Defence. [324]

The Prime Minister: I will continue to engage constructively with President Bush across the range of issues relating to his ideas for limited missile defence systems and a new strategic framework. The President has made no decisions on specific missile defence systems or their deployment and is currently engaged in wide-ranging international consultation with allies, Russia, China and others on his ideas.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Bush the concept of invulnerability through military supremacy in relation to the weaponisation of space. [325]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. I believe that the conference on disarmament is the appropriate forum for discussion of issues relating to the military use of space, and support the creation of an ad hoc committee to discuss the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Putin the potential for the US policy on national missile defence to include a first strike capability. [327]

The Prime Minister: The US has made it clear that missile defence is envisaged as one element of a comprehensive strategy to deal with a new threat caused by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is not aimed at defending against the Russian strategic arsenal, still less at giving the United States the capacity to attack Russia. President Bush has made it clear that it no longer considers Russia an enemy. I have discussed missile defence and related issues with President Putin on a number of occasions, and expect to continue to do so.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of UK participation in US national missile defence on the *(a)* global moratorium on nuclear testing and *(b)* prospects of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty coming into force; [317]

(2) what assessment he has made of the consequences of British participation in national missile defence for the 1993 strategic arms reduction treaty, START 2 and the START regime. [320]

The Prime Minister: President Bush has made no decisions on specific missile defence systems or their deployment and we therefore do not know what UK participation may be sought. The US is also currently engaged in a wide-ranging international consultation process, including with Russia. On both counts it is therefore premature to make such an assessment.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with the Secretary General of the UN, President Bush's proposal for a first test of a space-based laser in 2012. [319]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will propose to the Presidents of *(a)* China, *(b)* France, *(c)* Russia and *(d)* the United States of America that the 1967 outer space treaty cover directed energy and laser weapons. [321]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to make such a proposal.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Bush the restructuring of the missile technology control regime in relation to political initiatives based on arms control and confidence-building measures. [322]

The Prime Minister: We remain fully committed to the MTCR and have regular contacts with MTCR partners, including the US, to maintain and strengthen the regime and ensure it remains effective in the fight against the proliferation of long-range missiles capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction. The MTCR will continue to be a mainstay of the effort to combat missile proliferation, alongside complementary political

initiatives such as the draft international code of conduct against ballistic missile proliferation in which the United Kingdom is also playing a key role.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss the position of modifications of non-ABM radars on UK territory with *(a)* Washington and *(b)* Moscow. [326]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with President Bush before he made his speech on 1 May 2000 about the future of the 1972 ABM treaty. [333]

The Prime Minister: I have discussed missile defence and related issues including the ABM treaty with President Bush on several occasions, both at our meeting at Camp David on 23 February and subsequently.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the dangers faced by the United Kingdom as a target for foreign powers, as a result of acquiescing in the construction of two new radomes at Menwith Hill. [334]

The Prime Minister: Two radomes have been constructed at RAF Menwith Hill as part of the European relay ground station for the space based infra red system, which is designed to detect the launch of ballistic missiles. This updates an existing system. We assess that the implications for the security of the UK have not significantly changed.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister what (1) discussions he has had with President Bush about the facilities to receive information for early warning and missile-tracking satellites at Menwith Hill ground relay station; [335]

(2) what discussions he has had with President Bush about the installation of X Band Radar at Fylingdales operating in the X-Ray Band of the electromagnetic spectrum; [337]

(3) what discussions he has had with President Bush for forward-deployed radars in relation to National Missile Defence. [315]

The Prime Minister: None. As President Bush and I both made clear following our meeting at Camp David on 23 February, the US Administration has not yet decided how it will seek to deploy missile defences. That remains the case.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set up a Royal Commission to examine the consequences and implications of British participation in the extension of war-fighting into space. [318]

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the economic and political implications of British participation in the US National Missile Defence system. [2298]

The Prime Minister: The US has not yet decided how it will seek to proceed with missile defence and has not put forward specific proposals for UK involvement. We have made clear we would consider any such proposals carefully taking into account all relevant factors in light of circumstances at the time, including their implications for the UK.

Pine Bay Joint Space Research Facility

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with the Government of Australia UK participation in the Pine Bay joint space research facility, in relation to information detected by satellites covering the southern Hemisphere. [339]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

NATO Expansion

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Putin the commitment not to expand NATO into the former Soviet Republics. [332]

The Prime Minister: NATO has made no commitment to Russia that it will not expand into the former Soviet Republics. In signing the NATO-Russia founding act in 1997, Russia acknowledged her commitment to:

> "respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states and their inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security."

Any decision on NATO enlargement will be based on the three criteria set out at the 1999 Washington Summit: the aspirant must be ready to join NATO; NATO itself must be ready to accept new members; any new enlargement must enhance overall European security.

NATO is committed to building and maintaining a strong working relationship with Russia, built on transparency and mutual respect. The regular meeting that takes place between NATO and Russia through the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) embodies this relationship.

Engagements

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 4 July. [2225]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today.

Disabled People

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on ministerial responsibilities for disabled people; and what arrangements he has made for cross-departmental consultation on issues affecting disabled people. [1864]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 92W. As the ministerial code makes clear, it is the responsibility of the initiating Department in any area of policy to ensure that proposals have been discussed with other interested Departments. Baroness Morgan has responsibility for cross-cutting equality issues.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Walton Group

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Solicitor-General what discussions the Crown Prosecution Service has held with Merseyside police serious fraud squad concerning the investigation of the Walton Group in relation to Exchange Flags Liverpool; and if she will make a statement. [1697]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office was consulted by the Merseyside police in October 2000 concerning allegations of fraud in relation to the Walton Group plc. An extended vetting inquiry followed including examination of available files and evidence as well as meetings with Merseyside police and English Partnerships.

After careful consideration, it was decided that there was insufficient evidence to justify an investigation under section 1 of the Criminal Justice Act 1987.

DEFENCE

Defence Military Assistance Fund

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the expenditure under the defence military assistance fund relating to *(a)* Zimbabwe, *(b)* South Africa, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Egypt, *(e)* Pakistan, *(f)* Indonesia, *(g)* Brazil, *(h)* Kuwait, *(i)* Malaysia, *(j)* Nigeria, *(k)* Oman, *(l)* Taiwan, *(m)* Thailand, *(n)* Turkey and *(o)* the United Arab Emirates for (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000 indicating separately the amounts used to support defence sales. [1309]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence's financial systems that were in place for the years in question cannot provide precise details of actual defence assistance fund (DAF) expenditure. (The DAF was formerly known as the defence military assistance fund—DMAF). However, the level of DAF funding approved and committed for each of the subject countries is known and is detailed as follows.

£

	Policy	*Sales*	*Total*
1997–98			
Brazil	26,200	262,200	288,400
Egypt	117,612	17,788	135,400
Indonesia	42,684	415,600	458,284
Jordan	164,400	0	164,400
Kuwait	66,222	4,978	71,200
Malaysia	37,279	261,200	298,479
Nigeria	0	0	0
Oman	826,891	450,100	1,276,991
Pakistan	63,500	0	63,500
South Africa	86,898	52,200	139,098
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	39,900	0	39,900
Turkey	148,636	6,964	155,600
United Arab Emirates	8,120	785,500	793,620
Zimbabwe	29,779	6,521	36,300
1998–99			
Brazil	0	124,000	124,000
Egypt	87,196	0	87,196
Indonesia	55,779	100,000	155,779
Jordan	295,511	65,600	361,011
Kuwait	16,354	149,000	165,354
Malaysia	238,850	63,700	302,550
Nigeria	76,000	0	76,000
Oman	1,048,552	608,300	1,656,852
Pakistan	94,433	10,000	104,433
South Africa	212,293	102,900	315,193
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	13,312	17,000	30,312
Turkey	113,212	0	113,212
United Arab Emirates	12,129	440,000	452,129
Zimbabwe	36,767	0	36,767
1999–2000			
Brazil	1,504	314,000	315,504
Egypt	15,378	2,500	17,878
Indonesia	15,249	0	15,249
Jordan	354,315	161,000	515,315
Kuwait	48,724	17,500	66,224
Malaysia	89,612	1,028,750	1,118,362
Nigeria	174,861	0	174,861
Oman	2,089,535	294,400	2,383,935
Pakistan	119,686	10,000	129,686
South Africa	938,261	193,000	1,131,261
Taiwan	0	0	0
Thailand	60,994	10,000	70,994
Turkey	483,000	0	483,000
United Arab Emirates	23,526	242,873	266,399
Zimbabwe	104,239	0	104,239

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment his Department has made of the risks posed by long-range missile attacks. [2296]

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library what risk assessment of ballistic missile attack on the UK from *(a)* North Korea, *(b)* Iran, *(c)* Iraq, *(d)* Libya and *(e)* Syria has been made; and what assessment has been made of the potential of these countries to develop inventories of (i) global medium-range, (ii) intermediate range and (iii) inter-continental range ballistic missile. [329]

Mr. Hoon: We assess that there is currently no significant ballistic missile threat to the mainland of the United Kingdom. We do, however, continue to monitor developments closely, particularly as they might affect deployed forces.

North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria all have ballistic missiles development and/or production programmes and have the potential to develop, or to obtain inventories of, longer-range ballistic missiles. North Korea and Iran already possess medium-range ballistic missiles and North Korea has the technology needed to develop ballistic missiles of intercontinental range.

Combat Effectiveness Gender Study

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the combat effectiveness gender study; and if he will make a statement. [1791]

Mr. Hoon: Work on the study into the effect of gender upon combat effectiveness has mainly been carried out by staff in the course of their normal business, and the costs have not therefore been recorded. Those costs that can be identified relate to work conducted on our behalf by contractors. This amounts to approximately £100,000.

National Missile Defence

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Danish Government about the use of Thule radar sites for national missile defence. [330]

Mr. Hoon: My Danish counterpart and I discussed missile defence in general terms when we met on 15 February 2001.

US National Ignition Facility

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British participation in the national ignition facility at the Laurence Livermore laboratory in the US. [316]

Mr. Hoon: The UK remains committed to participating in the US national ignition facility programme in order to gain access to a high powered laser which is a key element of our warhead stewardship programme.

RAF Training Flight Paths (Wind Farms)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of proposed wind farm developments in Moray on RAF training flight paths; and if he will make a statement. [1978]

Dr. Moonie: As there is potential for wind farms to interfere with radar, low flying and other communications, each wind energy proposal received by the Ministry of Defence is evaluated on a case-by-case basis by several specialists; this includes the assessment of the impact upon RAF training paths.

The Ministry of Defence supports fully the Government's renewable energy policy. However, we must ensure that the defences of the United Kingdom are not jeopardised and that our aircrews are able to conduct training safely. Of the eight proposals we have had, we had no objections to seven and one is currently being assessed. Owing to the commercial sensitivity of the information I am withholding details of the sites under exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to government information.

Anti-satellite Weapons

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of anti-satellite weapons, called parasitic satellites. [328]

Mr. Hoon: Small satellites do not yet constitute a credible capability as anti-satellite systems; such threats continue to be monitored closely. The effectiveness of anti-satellite weapons is best assessed on a case-by-case basis.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office Closures

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices closed each year for the last 20 years. [65]

Mr. Alexander: I understand from the Post Office that net post office closures in each of the last 20 years have been as follows:

Year ending	*Closures*
March	
1982	70
1983	104
1984	243
1985	395
1986	358
1987	94
1988	140
1989	41
1990	159
1991	233
1992	478
1993	202
1994	176
1995	175
1996	193
1997	163
1998	243
1999	233
2000	382
2001	547

I am informed by the Post Office that of the closures of the year ending March 2001, only four are permanent.

Enterprise Bill

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Enterprise Bill will include measures to implement the Cruickshank review recommendations on the establishment of a payments regulator. [1480]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The Enterprise Bill aims to encourage enterprise, strengthen competition laws and promote safeguards for consumers. As announced on 18 June, details of what will be included in the Bill will be published by the end of July.

Yorkshire and Humberside (Economic Growth)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take steps to ensure that the economy of the Yorkshire and Humberside region grows to the United Kingdom per capita average. [2166]

Alan Johnson: The regional development agency—Yorkshire Forward—was established in April 1999 to address the economic deficit in the region. Its regional economic strategy aims to create 150,000 new jobs by 2010 and achieve above UK and European average GDP growth each year.

In 2001–02, Yorkshire Forward has a programme budget of £213 million and a cumulative target of creating with partners up to 21,000 jobs. I will be working closely with Yorkshire Forward and its partners to ensure they deliver these improvements.

Newspaper/Magazine Distribution

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will refer newspaper and magazine wholesaling and distribution to the Competition Commission. [1680]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Under UK competition legislation, it is for the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate allegations of anti-competitive behaviour and if appropriate make a reference to the Competition Commission under the Fair Trading Act 1973 or take action under the Competition Act 1998.

Rural Sub-post Offices

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the help she provides to sustain small rural sub-post offices. [1677]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* We are committed to contributing towards the costs of universal banking services, which will be available at all post offices, and to providing transitional financial assistance to rural post offices. Decisions on the provision of this assistance will be taken in the context of advice from the Postal Services Commission expected in the autumn. In addition, we have announced a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where the traditional post office would otherwise close. Sub-post offices in small rural settlements are eligible for rate relief.

Miners' Compensation

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much compensation has been paid to coal health claimants. [2072]

Mr. Wilson: In respect of British Coal health claims, the Department has paid almost £0.5 billion in compensation.

Regulation

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 31W, how many regulations her Department has *(a)* introduced and *(b)* reviewed the operation and working of since May 1997; and if she will place copies of such reviews in the Library. [2158]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI has been responsible for the introduction of 496 statutory instruments since May 1997. Of these, we estimate three quarters have not imposed costs for business, and about a tenth have saved costs for business. A third of all the regulations introduced by this Department since 1997 have been licenses allowing companies to operate as public telecommunication providers.

We have kept the regulatory environment in all sectors under continual review since May 1997. There have been numerous reviews of regulations, and copies of relevant White and Green Papers are available from the House Libraries. I will write to the hon. Member with a full list as soon as possible and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets have been set for the reduction of regulation in those sectors of the utility industries where competition is fully developed; and if she will make a statement. [756]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government set the legal framework which places statutory duties on each of the regulators and consider the proper discharge of these duties is a matter for each regulator. It would therefore not be appropriate for the Government to set targets for the regulators.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 31W, if she will list *(a)* public consultations held under the Consultation Code, setting out the length of each consultation period and the reasons for consultations lasting less than 12 weeks and *(b)* regulations with an impact on business introduced under the new procedures setting out (i) the length of time between guidance being issued and the regulation taking effect and (ii) the reasons for guidance being issued less than 12 weeks before the regulation took effect. [2156]

Nigel Griffiths: The consultation code applies to all public consultations launched since January 2001. Consultations on the following subjects have consultation periods of at least 12 weeks which have not yet closed:

- changes to parental leave regulations.
- statutory guidance to the Gas and Electricity markets authority on Social and Environmental Objectives.
- Financial Penalties: Determination of turnover under the Utilities Act 2000.
- Removing the 20 partner limit from partnerships and limited partnerships.

Consultations on the following subjects launched since that date have no closing date:

- Reform of the EC competition regime.
- The impact of former coal mineshafts on the property market in Stoke-on-Trent.

One current consultation has a consultation period of one month. It is on proposed amendments to the Working Time Regulations 1998 to remove the annual leave qualifying period. This shorter period is necessary because of the need to remove uncertainty and to amend UK law as soon as possible following a judgment by the European Court of Justice. This judgment found that the existing provision in the Regulations is contrary to the working time directive.

Public consultations on the following subjects launched since 1 January have already closed, and the consultation period was at least 12 weeks:

- EC Directive 199/93 for electronic signatures.
- Proposals for regulations relating to fixed-term work.
- How the DTI should fulfil its obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.
- Proposed electricity safety, quality and continuity regulations.
- Possible amendments to the Equipment and Protective Systems intended for Use in Potentially Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 1996.
- Proposed changes to the consents process for offshore wind farms.
- EC Directive on Certain Aspects of the Sale of Consumer Goods and Associated Guarantees.
- Copyright and Visually Impaired People.
- EC Directive 71/98 on Legal Protection of Designs.
- Measuring Equipment (Direct Mass Flow Measuring Systems) Regulations.
- Oil and Gas Infrastructure Access Provisions and Voluntary Arrangements.
- Trading Disclosures.

Public consultations on the following subjects, launched since 1 January 2001 and now closed and lasting less than 12 weeks, were reconsultation, where there had already been at least one previous period of consultation on the substantive issues concerned:

Updating the law concerning directory entries (consultation in 1999 had shown widespread agreement among stakeholders, and this new consultation concerned matters of detailed implementation). The consultation period was one month.

Modification of the standard condition of gas and electricity licenses by the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority. This was a second consultation on the substantive issues, seeking further views from stakeholders on more detailed points. The consultation period was four weeks.

Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. Consultation was on draft regulations following two earlier consultations on the substantive issues. The consultation period was six weeks.

Consultations on the following subjects were not reconsultations, and the consultation periods lasted less than 12 weeks:

Draft Export Control and Non-Proliferation Bill. The consultation period in this case was eight weeks as most of the proposals in the draft Bill were the subject of previous consultation. In addition many of the issues consulted on related to secondary legislation. There will be an opportunity for further consultation during the Bill's passage through Parliament.

Proposed amendments to electricity supply licences. This consultation period lasted for four weeks, because of the urgent need to consult on the desirability of bringing forward legislation to provide for additional powers to safeguard against potential market abuse.

Guidance has been issued more than 12 weeks before the relevant regulation came into force in relation to the following regulations which have entered into force since 1 January 2001:

Patent Amendment Rules 2001.

The Noise Emission in the Environment by Equipment for Use Outdoors Regulations 2001. Guidance in this case had been published when the EC Directive was adopted, one year before the regulation came into force. Specific guidance on the regulation was published simultaneously with the regulations, four weeks before the regulation came into force.

Guidance on the following regulations was issued less than 12 weeks prior to the regulation taking effect:

Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations, due to the redrafting of the regulation in response to consultation responses.

The Non-automatic Weighing Instruments Regulations 2000. No new guidance was issued but the current guidance notes will be updated.

The Weights and Measures (Metrication Amendments) Regulations 2001. These regulations came into force on 8 February 2001 and guidance was sent to all relevant organisations on 11 and 25 January 2001. However these regulations state that new arrangements will enter into force finally in 2009.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 30W, what operational target date the Small Business Service was set for the establishment of an Index of Regulation; and what plans the Government have for the Small Business Service to introduce such an index. [2157]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service corporate plan 2000–01 to 2002–03 included a target to establish an index of the impact of regulation on small business by December 2000.

Rover Task Force

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will break down the amount of money spent from the Rover task force in each local authority area. [1996]

Mr. Wilson: The Rover task force funds projects across the west midlands, which assist with the long-term economic regeneration of the region. All parts of the west midlands will benefit from the investment in the region's long-term future. As it is a regional initiative, data were not recorded on a local authority basis.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if funding from the Rover task force will be provided for the volunteer bureau in Bromsgrove. [1987]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has now accepted the final report of the Rover task force, which sets strategic priorities for the automotive sector and economic regeneration of the region. The funding of £129 million has already been fully allocated to good quality business projects in the region and unfortunately there are no resources remaining. However there was no scope for funding projects from the voluntary sector.

Village Post Offices (Road Tax)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to allow village post offices to issue road tax licences. [249]

Mr. Alexander: Consideration is being given to increasing the provision of services through post offices and sub-post offices as part of developing the Government general practitioner facility.

Arms Exports

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce further legislation to control the export of arms from the UK; and if he will make a statement. [1856]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The Export Control Bill was introduced to Parliament on 26 June. This follows a comprehensive and detailed review by the Government of the existing legislative framework governing strategic export controls, taking into account the views of all interested parties. The Export Control Bill will replace the export control provisions of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939. The Bill contains new powers to strengthen the export control regime, sets out the purposes for which export controls can be imposed and provides for parliamentary scrutiny of secondary legislation made under the Bill.

German Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to make arrangements for the treatment and return of German plutonium research reactor fuel, currently at Dounreay, to Germany. [1770]

Mr. Wilson: I understand that UKAEA intend to return the Kalkar SNR 300 fuel, which is the majority of German plutonium research reactor fuel at Dounreay, before the end of 2001. There are no plans for treating the Kalkar SNR 300 fuel at Dounreay.

Renewable Energy

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to encourage regional development agencies to promote the *(a)* manufacture and *(b)* installation of renewable energy technologies. [1765]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The Department has provided financial support for regional studies of the potential for renewables throughout the UK. A number of the regional development authorities (RDAs) have been very actively involved in these assessments and some RDAs, including the Welsh Development Agency, have conducted their own studies with a focus on manufacturing and employment opportunities. On the basis of this involvement, the RDAs will be well placed to promote all aspects of renewable energy, in pursuance of regional targets.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Petrol Safety

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many petrol retailers have been prosecuted in each of the past five years for not reporting leakages from underground storage tanks. [1588]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency's prosecution database runs only from January 1999 and does not provide narrative in respect of prosecutions. The failure to report leakage from a storage tank would not therefore be specifically identified and case-by-case information would be disproportionately expensive to obtain. If leakage from a petrol tank occurred, a prosecution would be likely to be based on the leakage itself and the resulting pollution or a breach of a licence condition.

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average valuation price was per bovine in each week of the current foot and mouth epidemic. [790]

Mr. Morley: The information is not yet available in the form requested. The Department is currently preparing a database of detailed information on livestock valuations and I will right to the right hon. Member when I am able to provide the information.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many foreign vets, from which countries, have assisted the UK during the foot and mouth epidemic; and how many left the UK before receiving payment. [791]

Mr. Morley: Foreign veterinary assistance has been provided in two ways. Governments have loaned state veterinarians to the Department. Terms and conditions were agreed with the relevant authorities in each country prior to the vets travelling to GB. Their salaries continue to be paid by the authorities in their own country.

Other foreign vets have also been appointed as Temporary Veterinary Inspectors (TVIs). TVIs are paid a daily rate which is claimed retrospectively. The necessary details to allow payment of money due is requested at the time of appointment. Information concerning the timing of payments to individuals in relation to their date of departure from GB is not recorded.

To date 463 veterinarians from the following countries have provided assistance during the FMD outbreak:

Australia
Bulgaria
Canada
Cuba
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
USA.

The number of foreign TVIs appointed is currently 375 and they come from one of the following countries:

Australia
Austria
Belgium
Canada
Czech Republic
Denmark
Egypt
France
Germany
Greece
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Namibia
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Portugal
South Africa
Spain
Sweden
Zimbabwe.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many premises in Worcestershire were at any stage considered to be infected with foot and mouth disease; and of these, how many have subsequently been cleared following negative laboratory tests. [41]

Mr. Morley: Information is available only for Hereford and Worcester. As of 26 June there were 66 Infected Premises (IPs). Of these, 43 were tested, of which 30 returned negative results. There were 17 slaughter-on-suspicion cases. Of these 16 were tested, all returned negative results.

An Infected Premises is one where foot and mouth disease has either been diagnosed by a vet on the farm, supported by convincing clinical evidence, or where disease is found after testing. However, a negative laboratory result does not necessarily mean that the disease was not present and does not change the status of an Infected Premises.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps were taken to inform veterinary surgeons of discrepancies between clinical diagnosis of foot and mouth disease on farms and subsequent laboratory tests; on how many occasions such discrepancies occurred; and if she will make a statement. [47]

Mr. Morley: Almost all cases of foot and mouth disease during the current outbreak have been confirmed on clinical grounds. Although laboratory results are being monitored, it is important to remember that a negative laboratory test does not necessarily mean that the disease does not exist within the flock or herd. Guidance has been issued to staff to assist with clinical diagnosis, including advice on diseases or conditions which might involve symptoms similar to foot and mouth disease, particularly in sheep.

Pigswill

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risks of using pigswill prepared to the required standards; and if she will further review her Department's ban on the use of pigswill. [2097]

Mr. Morley: A veterinary assessment of the risks of using pigswill was made before the ban on swill-feeding was introduced. This assessment concluded that, owing to the recent foot and mouth disease outbreak, the disease risks from swill-feeding are very much greater than they were previously.

No further review of the ban will be made as agreement was reached at the Agriculture Council on 19 June to introduce an EU wide ban on the feeding of swill to livestock.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Luxembourg on 19 June was. [2509]

Margaret Beckett: I attended the meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg on 19 June.

The Council adopted by qualified majority (Spain and Netherlands opposing) measures to tackle the problems in the EU beef market resulting from the discovery of BSE in certain continental countries late last year. I was pleased to secure important exemptions for United Kingdom farmers from the measures cutting back suckler cow production, in recognition of the particular impact of FMD, as well as rejection of the excessively bureaucratic proposals to impose individual farmer quotas on beef special premiums and to reimpose the 90 head limit on individual claims.

The Council also adopted—by qualified majority with Spain opposing and Portugal abstaining—rules to restrict the use of close confinement stalls for sows. This brings other countries into line with conditions already applying here. It is an important and welcome step to improve pig welfare across the Community, albeit less radically than I would have preferred. The Council also resolved to improve the welfare of animals during transport, which I urged must be given effect speedily.

I updated my colleagues on the latest situation on FMD in the UK. The Council also discussed further measures on BSE, as a result of which the Commission will enact a range of further controls including an extension to the current ban on the use of animal protein in animal feed.

The Council unanimously adopted conclusions following up the Copenhagen Conference on organic food and farming, and setting the framework for the European Action Plan. It unanimously agreed proposals concerning the olive oil and hops regimes, inspection and control of animal feedingstuffs, a special aid scheme for small farmers and a common position on controlling undesirable substances in animal feed. By qualified majority, it agreed common positions on the processing, use and disposal of animal by-products and on classical swine fever (Germany and Austria opposing in both cases).

Landfill Tax (Fly-tipping)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has produced on changes in the incidence of fly-tipping following the increase in the level of the landfill tax; and if she will make a statement. [812]

Mr. Meacher: The Tidy Britain Group (TBG) has carried out three surveys to determine the effect, if any, of the landfill tax on fly-tipping. The TBG's most recent report, "Effects Of The Landfill Tax On Fly-Tipping (April 1997-March 1998)", confirmed that the type of waste most frequently fly-tipped is household waste. However, local authorities have a legal duty to collect household waste and householders are not directly affected by the landfill tax.

The Fly-Tipping Forum, under the chairmanship of the Environment Agency, has commissioned research to assess the problem of fly-tipping on farm land. However, the survey which is an essential part of the project was suspended on the outbreak of the foot-and-mouth epidemic. The Forum will consider in the autumn whether it is then practicable to carry out the survey.

The action being taken by the Government on fly-tipping, and other forms of unlawful waste disposal, was set out most recently in the Government's response to the

Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's Report on the Environment Agency (Cm 4832—paragraphs 55–60).

Air Pollution

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she is expected to make a statement on the Government's policy towards air pollution. [1674]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The Government's policy towards air pollution is set out in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published in January 2000. The Strategy sets health-based standards for the eight air pollutants of most concern, as well as the Government's and devolved Administrations' air quality policy objectives for the short to medium term. We will also be consulting shortly on a number of new or revised objectives for certain pollutants. In doing so, we will take full account of the emerging evidence on the health effects of long-term exposure to air pollution.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which areas within the Yeovil constituency have air pollution above the Government's targeted limits; and if she will make a statement. [1499]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities across the country have been carrying out detailed studies of their local air quality over the past three years. Within the Yeovil constituency, the relevant authority (South Somerset district council) is undertaking a major study of air quality in Yeovil town centre, having identified some potential air pollution problems there. No other areas within the Yeovil constituency have so far been identified as having levels of air pollution which might exceed the nationally prescribed objectives.

Within Yeovil town centre, South Somerset district council has identified a potential exceedence of the nationally prescribed objective for nitrogen dioxide in the vicinity of the A30/A37 hospital roundabout. A new monitoring station has therefore been installed in the grounds of the Yeovil district hospital, to measure levels of nitrogen dioxide and particles in the area of concern. I understand that South Somerset district council is due very shortly to publish an interim report giving the first detailed monitoring results from this station.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much illegal meat was imported into the UK and confiscated from ports and airports in the last 12 months; and if she will list the species of animal concerned. [1999]

Mr. Morley: A number of enforcement authorities are involved in the seizure of illegal imports of meat into the UK and no central records are kept of meat confiscated from ports and airports. As part of the new action across Government on illegal imports of animal products, we are developing mechanisms to centralise such records in future. Consolidated historical figures are not available but the information we have gathered to date indicates that in excess of 1,750 kg of illegal meat was confiscated from individuals during the financial year 2000–01 and that over 450 kg was seized from commercial consignments at Heathrow airport alone in the 12-month period from May 2000.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to control the trade in smuggled meat, with particular reference to smuggling from countries with foot and mouth. [1998]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that rules governing both commercial and personal imports are enforced effectively at ports and airports. We have introduced improved publicity to ensure travellers are aware of the restrictions on what may be imported. Posters have been placed at main airports and information is being provided by the travel industry and FCO posts abroad. New arrangements have been introduced to improve sharing of information within Government on known or suspected illegal imports to enable enforcement authorities to better target their activities. In addition, the European Commission have agreed to give urgent attention to ensuring that the law on personal imports is clear and robust so that consistent and effective controls can be maintained across all the Community's borders.

Civil Servants

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many civil servants were employed by *(a)* the Department of the Environment and *(b)* the Ministry of Agriculture in April 1997. [1802]

Mr. Morley: In April 1997 the Department of Environment (Central) employed 3,180 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) civil servants; this does not include staff within its Agencies. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food employed 10,314 FTE civil servants, which includes staff in its Agencies.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the White Paper on radioactive waste. [1771]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 47W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensioners (Benefit Take-up)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the number of pensioners who are entitled to, but fail to claim, each benefit or allowance; what is the total annual amount which consequently remains unclaimed; and if he will make a statement. [1379]

Mr. McCartney: Available information on take-up of benefit can be found in "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up 1998–99", a copy of which is in the Library.

Pension Service

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress to establish the new Pension Service. [2392]

Mr. Darling: The new Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will bring together the Government's drive to help people get into work as well as to provide a better service for pensions and pensioners.

The new Department will have two core operations to enable it to do this: Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service.

The Pension Service will offer a local service working in partnership with local authorities and voluntary organisations. To support the local service network, we will bring together the backroom processing in about 20 locations rather than over 400 at present, allowing frontline staff to concentrate on dealing with customers. For example, they will undertake outreach activity such as home visiting, private interviews in locations that suit pensioners and drop-in services.

As we already process much of our pensions work for the whole of the UK in Newcastle, centralising processing work is a logical next step to support the national frontline network. Staff are being consulted and kept informed as plans develop.

The proposed phase 1 locations are to be sited in Bath, Birmingham, Blackpool, Burnley, Cwmbran, Dundee, Glasgow, Leicester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Norwich, Nottingham, Plymouth, Stockton, Swansea, Walsall, Warrington, Wolverhampton, and Wrexham. Phase 2 locations will be announced in due course.

State Pension

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the total net cost, taking into account all offsetting benefit adjustments, of increasing the single person's basic state pension to *(a)* £90 per week, *(b)* £100 per week and *(c)* £110 per week, assuming the matching adjustments to pensions for couples; and if he will make a statement. [1378]

Mr. McCartney: We are providing significant extra help for all pensioners, including a £200 winter fuel payment and a minimum income guarantee of more than £92 a week for single pensioners. We have increased the basic state pension by £5 a week for single people and £8 a week for couples. In total, we are spending £4.4 billion more on pensioners in 2001–02 alone as a result of the changes that we have introduced.

The table gives the cost of the options set out in the question in 2001–02 after income related benefit savings including linked benefits.

Basic state pension	*Net cost (£ billion)*
£90 per week	6.7
£100 per week	10.7
£110 per week	14.8

Notes:
1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion.
2. Costs are given in current price terms.
3. Net costs were estimated using the Policy Simulation Model.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend entitlement to the winter heating allowance to people below retirement age who are unable to work because of disability; and if he will make a statement. [1370]

Mr. McCartney: Winter Fuel Payments are made to people aged 60 or over, so disabled people who fall into this age group are already eligible for the payments. There are no plans to extend the scheme to disabled people below age 60.

Disabled people have available disability benefits in recognition of their extra costs. The care and mobility components in Disability Living Allowance are used as broad indicators of all the extra costs of a disabled person. These could include heating, laundry or special diets.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* made in each police force area in England and Wales to date. [1254]

Mr. Denham: The available information is given in the table.

Anti-social behaviour orders applied for and made between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2001 by police force area within England and Wales

Police force area	*Number of applications to 31 March 2001*[1,2]	*Number made from*		*Total*
		1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[3]	*1 June 2000 to 31 March 2001*[2]	
Avon and Somerset	13	9	4	13
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	5	5	—	5
Cheshire	—	—	—	—
Cleveland	5	1	3	4
Cumbria	1	1	—	1
Derbyshire	11	3	8	11
Devon and Cornwall	3	1	2	3
Dorset	2	—	2	2
Durham	6	—	6	6

Anti-social behaviour orders applied for and made between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2001 by police force area within England and Wales

Police force area	Number of applications to 31 March 2001[1,2]	Number made from 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[1]	Number made from 1 June 2000 to 31 March 2001[2]	Total
Essex	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	1	—	1	1
Greater Manchester	13	10	3	13
Hampshire	2	1	—	1
Hertfordshire	5	1	4	5
Humberside	10	—	10	10
Kent	10	—	10	10
Lancashire	12	5	7	12
Leicestershire	1	1	—	1
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	12	8	—	8
Metropolitan Police Service[3]	23	9	12	21
Norfolk	10	6	4	10
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	12	8	4	12
North Yorkshire	4	4	—	4
Nottinghamshire	5	1	4	5
South Yorkshire	4	3	1	4
Staffordshire	2	—	2	2
Suffolk	3	3	—	3
Surrey	1	—	1	1
Sussex	4	3	1	4
Thames Valley	1	1	—	1
Warwickshire	1	—	1	1
West Mercia	12	5	7	12
West Midlands	18	11	7	18
West Yorkshire	9	4	5	9
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—
England	221	104	109	213
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—
North Wales	1	—	1	1
South Wales	1	—	1	1
Wales	2	—	2	2
England and Wales	223	104	111	215

[1] Based on data collected from ACPO and GLA trawls covering period 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000
[2] Data collected centrally from magistrate courts committees as from 1 June 2000 onwards
[3] Includes City of London

Anti-social behaviour orders applied for by police force area within England and Wales

Police force area	Up to May 2000	June 2000	Q3 2000	Q4 2000	Q1 2001	Total	June 2000 to Q1 2001
Avon and Somerset	9	—	2	—	2	13	4
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—		0	0
Cambridgeshire	5	—	—	—	—	5	0
Cheshire	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
Cleveland	1	—	3	—	—	4	3
Cumbria	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Derbyshire	3	1	—	6	1	11	8
Devon and Cornwall	1	—	—	—	2	3	2
Dorset	—	—	2	—	—	2	2
Durham	—	1	1	2	2	6	6
Essex	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	1	—	1	1
Greater Manchester	10	1	1	—	1	13	3
Hampshire	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Hertfordshire	1	—	—	—	4	5	4
Humberside	—	2	—	7	1	10	10
Kent	—	—	—	2	8	10	10
Lancashire	5	—	2	3	2	12	7
Leicestershire	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
Merseyside	8	—	—	—	—	8	0

Anti-social behaviour orders applied for by police force area within England and Wales

Police force area	*Up to May 2000*	*June 2000*	*Q3 2000*	*Q4 2000*	*Q1 2001*	*Total*	*June 2000 to Q1 2001*
Metropolitan Police	9	—	9	1	2	21	12
Norfolk	6	—	—	—	4	10	4
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
Northumbria	8	—	—	4	—	12	4
North Yorkshire	4	—	—	—	—	4	0
Nottinghamshire	1	—	4	—	—	5	4
South Yorkshire	3	—	—	1	—	4	1
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	2	2	2
Suffolk	3	—	—	—	—	3	0
Surrey	—	—	1	—	—	1	1
Sussex	3	—	—	1	—	4	1
Thames Valley	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Warwickshire	—	—	1	—	—	1	1
West Mercia	5	—	5	1	1	12	7
West Midlands	11	3	1	2	1	18	7
West Yorkshire	4	1	—	—	4	9	5
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
England	104	9	32	31	37	213	109
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
North Wales	—	—	—	—	—	0	0
South Wales	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
England and Wales	104	9	33	31	37	214	110

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the Government's plans to establish anti-social behaviour units in each local authority; and what the cost to public funds will be. [1245]

Mr. Denham: The report of policy action team 8, published in March 2000, recommended that a named person in each local authority district should co-ordinate action on anti-social behaviour and also encouraged the setting up of specialist teams to focus on anti-social behaviour. This second point has been reiterated in our manifesto. We think it important that each local authority district should have an effective means of tackling anti-social behaviour. The precise level of resources will vary from area to area depending on local need.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the Government's plans to increase the powers of and the resources available to HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary. [1244]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has a broad remit to inspect and report to the Secretary of State on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces in England and Wales, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. Under the Local Government Act 1999 these powers were extended to cover the inspection of best value in police authorities. The Police Act 1996 provided that the Secretary of State may direct the inspectors of constabulary to carry out other duties for the purpose of furthering police efficiency and effectiveness. Under this provision, from April 2001, the inspectorate has additionally been tasked with inspecting, over a five-year period, every police basic command unit (BCU) in England and Wales. There are no plans at present to further increase the powers of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary.

Budgetary allocation for the inspectorate in 2001–02 is just over £7.7 million. This includes £1 million for the additional costs associated with the BCU inspections.

Group Family Five Areas

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources have been allocated to each Group Family Five area; and what the level of crime is in each such area, broken down by standard category, since 1997. [1136]

Mr. Denham: Resource allocation for basic command units within police forces is a matter for each chief constable. The information is not held centrally.

Recorded crime statistics at basic command unit level are available from April 1999 onwards. They are contained in the Home Office Statistical Bulletins "Recorded Crime Statistics" published on 18 January 2000, 18 July 2000 and 16 January 2001, copies of which are available in the Library.

James Ashley

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for a public inquiry into the fatal shooting of James Ashley by police on 15 January 1998; and if he will make a statement. [263]

Mr. Denham: In the debate on the Address on 27 June, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said he hoped that with the continuing work of the Police Complaints

Authority and the considerable help of the Police Authority itself, we will be able to make sense of the matter without a further public inquiry.

It will be important to ensure that all necessary lessons are learnt from this tragic incident so that the possibility of similar events taking place in Sussex or other forces are minimised.

I will want to listen to the concerns of the Ashley family, and I will be meeting them on 4 July.

Postal Robberies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many robberies of *(a)* post offices and *(b)* Royal Mail vehicles there were in each police division in the year 2000; and if he will estimate the total sum stolen. [976]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally. Data for recorded robberies involving the use of firearms indicate that there were 315 such robberies in post offices in the year ending March 2000. No details of the sums stolen are available.

Police Numbers (North Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in North Yorkshire on *(a)* 1 May 1997, *(b)* 1 May 1998, *(c)* 1 May 1999, *(d)* 1 May 2000, *(e)* 1 May 2001, *(f)* projected figures for 1 May 2002 and *(g)* 1 May 2003. [35]

Mr. Denham: Police numbers are normally reported half-yearly, for 30 September and 31 March. Figures for North Yorkshire from 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2001, the most recent figures available, are given in the table.

	Number
31 March 1997	1,338
31 March 1998	1,367
31 March 1999	1,337
31 March 2000	1,283
31 March 2001	1,305

North Yorkshire police estimate that officer numbers will reach 1,420 by March 2002. The force has no projections for the following year.

Huntingdon Life Sciences

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the procedures for protecting the staff of Huntingdon Life Sciences. [2020]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* It would not be in the interests of those concerned to offer such an assessment.

Police Pensions

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reform the criteria for awards of medical pensions in the police. [2224]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* I will be considering a number of issues in relation to medical pensions within the police pension scheme in the coming months.

HMP Garth

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact in the reduction in the number of prison officers at HMP Garth on the rehabilitation programme for sex offenders. [2023]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Her Majesty's Prison Garth does not hold sex offenders for long periods of time and therefore there is no rehabilitation programme for sex offenders at Garth prison. The sex offender treatment programme (SOTP) does operate at Wymott prison, which is adjacent to Garth. The proposed reduction in the number of prison officers at Wymott will not have any impact on completion of SOTP courses.

Certificate of Identity

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which European Union member states refuse to accept the certificate of identity as a valid travel document; [1102]

(2) how many certificates of identity were issued between 1 May 1997 and 7 June 2001 to grantees of exceptional leave to remain. [1101]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office certificate of identity (CID) is a travel document issued to foreign nationals who are resident in the United Kingdom and cannot obtain a passport from their national authorities. The majority of people issued with CIDs have applied unsuccessfully for asylum, but subsequently been granted exceptional leave to remain for a limited period. Between 1 May 1997 and 7 June 2001, the Home Office issued 58,454 CIDs. Separate records are not kept of the number of CIDs issued to persons with current exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom as opposed to those with indefinite leave to remain.

The certificate of identity is issued on a discretionary basis, not under an international convention. European Union member states are not obliged to recognise the document. Those member states which do not do so, and generally do not issue travel visas to CID holders, include France, Germany, Greece and Spain.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce his conclusions following public consultation on possible changes to the law on sexual offences. [2217]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 99W.

Police Reform

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reform police practices, specifying which reforms will and will not require primary legislation. [1501]

Mr. Denham: The police reform programme will deliver a modern police service providing the highest standards of detective capability, public reassurance, scientific and technical support, leadership, and modern working practices to secure reductions in crime and in the fear of crime. Discussions are continuing with representative police organisations to determine the best ways of delivering these goals and identify where legislation is required.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the severity of sentencing for individuals found in possession of larger quantities of illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [1455]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Within the broad statutory limits set by Parliament, sentences in individual cases are a matter for the courts alone, taking into account all the circumstances of the offences and the offender, including all mitigating and aggravating factors. The current maximum penalties for possession of controlled drugs are seven years, five years and two years respectively for class A, B and C. The Government believe these maximum penalties are appropriate and have no plans to increase them.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish an independent inquiry into the classification of illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [1375]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have no such plans. There is already a statutory, independent body to advise the Government on the classification of illegal drugs—the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

Avon and Somerset Police

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio was between the number of police officers and notifiable offences in Avon and Somerset for each year from 1980 to 2001; and if he will make a statement. [1374]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is given in the table. Recorded crime figures for the year ending 31 March 2001 are not currently available.

Avon and Somerset

Year	*Recorded crimes per police officer*
1980	20
1981	21
1982	23
1983	23
1984	25
1985	27
1986	31
1987	33
1988	33
1989	33
1990	42
1991	50
1992	57
1993	58
1994	56
1995	51
1996	53
1997	48
1997–98[1]	49
1998–99[1,2]	50
1999–2000[1,2]	50

[1] Recorded crime data expressed on a financial year basis.
[2] Revised rules for recording crime were introduced on 1 April 1998. The ratios before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Metropolitan Police

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the numerical strength of police officers in the London Metropolitan police area in *(a)* April 2000 and *(b)* April 2001; and how many officers (i) have been recruited to the Metropolitan police and (ii) have left the service since 1 April 2001. [1778]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The Metropolitan police had 25,485 police officers on 31 March 2000 and 24,878 officers on 31 March 2001. Most of the decrease of 607 officers can be attributed to the reduction in the size of the Metropolitan police district following the boundary changes with Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey on 1 April 2000.

I am told by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that 412 officers were recruited in April and May of this year. 264 left in the same period.

Young Offenders

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted juveniles aged 15 and 16 years have been given *(a)* a custodial sentence and *(b)* a non-custodial sentence in each of the past 10 years; and what has been the reconviction rate in each category. [1682]

Beverley Hughes: Data on custodial and non-custodial sentences imposed on 15 and 16-year-olds for standard list offences between 1990 and 1999 are shown in table 1. Reconviction rates for male offenders aged 16 and under at time of sentence and subsequently reconvicted for a standard list offence within two years of discharge from a custodial sentence between 1987 and 1997 are shown in table 2.

Reconviction rates for non-custodial sentences for 15 and 16-year-olds have not routinely been collected. However from a sample of 15 and 16-year-old offenders sentenced during the first half of 1997, 76 per cent. of

those given a community penalty and 63 per cent. of those given a fine, discharge or other type of sentence were reconvicted within two years of sentence. Reconviction rates monitoring performance under public service agreement target 10 will be published as a national statistic in due course.

Table 1: number of persons aged 15 and 16 sentenced at all courts for standard list offences, England and Wales 1990–99

			Non-custodial sentence	
	Total sentenced	*Immediate custodial sentence*	*Community penalty*	*Other non-custodial sentence*
1990	24,039	1,683	9,257	13,099
1991	21,825	1,739	8,927	11,159
1992	19,372	1,591	7,921	9,860
1993	18,360	1,880	7,691	8,789
1994	22,820	2,299	9,630	10,891
1995	25,457	2,634	10,736	12,087
1996	27,224	3,056	11,673	12,495
1997	27,956	3,235	12,161	12,560
1998	29,983	3,273	13,262	13,448
1999	31,393	3,406	13,624	14,363

Table 2: percentage of young males, aged 16 or under at age of sentence, who were reconvicted for a standard list offence within two years of discharge from custody, England and Wales 1987–97

	Percentage reconvicted
1987	83
1988	83
1989	86
1990	89
1991	88
1992	89
1993	89
1994	88
1995	88
1996	85
1997	84

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases in each police authority have been investigated relating to the deliberate infecting of farms with foot and mouth disease since 21 February. [1593]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally.

Asylum Support

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the findings of his Department's review of the asylum voucher system. [1321]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 50W.

Rural Crime (Leicestershire)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce crime in rural areas, with particular reference to Leicestershire. [1425]

Mr. Denham: Tackling crime and the fear of crime is a clear priority for this Government. It applies to all areas, whether suburban, rural or inner-city, and our approach is to assist the police and the local crime and disorder partnerships to address local crime effectively.

We are providing increased funding for police forces covering rural areas to take account of the additional costs involved: £30 million is being allocated to 31 forces this year. The allocation for Leicestershire police is £433,516. In addition, the rural crime toolkit, on the Home Office's crime reduction website, provides a new resource to help local partnerships to address crime in rural areas.

The nine crime and disorder partnerships in Leicestershire are supporting a varied programme of crime reduction initiatives and projects as part of the Government's crime reduction programme. Each of the partnerships is being provided with £10,000 from the crime reduction programme this year to help them to improve their performance in tackling crime in their areas. In addition, the partnerships in Leicestershire have received money to support closed circuit television initiatives, and they have been allocated £565,000 this year to tackle drug related crime. In November last year, Leicestershire received £341,000 for a project to tackle burglary in Leicester as part of the reducing burglary initiative, and £168,000 was awarded to eight forces, including Leicestershire, to tackle distraction burglary in central and eastern England as part of the targeted policing initiative.

Asylum Seekers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the method for recording failed asylum seekers as leaving the country was changed to include dependants in the total figures; when the change in recording measures was published; and if he will make a statement. [1600]

Mr. Blunkett: Statistics concerning asylum applications have been published since 1992. Separate figures are given both for principal applicants only, and for principal applicants and dependants; and cover the period from 1984 to the present. The information is published in the annual Home Office statistical bulletins entitled "Asylum Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Statistics concerning asylum removals published before March 2001 have given figures for principal applicants only. From April 2001, the figures show the total number of failed asylum seekers removed, including dependants. This is to reflect the change in the removals target for failed asylum seekers for 2001–02 which is expressed in terms of the total figure for the first time. The change is intended to give a more informed picture of the number of people being removed from the United Kingdom as a result of failed asylum applications and to give a fairer reflection of the activity involved in enforcing their departure. The details were published in December 2000. The removals target is equivalent to some 24,000 principal applicants and 6,000 dependants, although the number of dependants removed will vary according to the balance between individuals and families as well as family size, and is difficult to predict. The 30,000 target has always been extremely ambitious and high risk; no

European country has achieved levels of this kind. We are investing substantial additional resources, and the programme to increase the numbers is continuing. I will be monitoring the position closely.

Despite these difficulties, the Government are committed to increasing the number of failed asylum seekers who are removed from the United Kingdom. The Labour manifesto said that in excess of 30,000 people who had not justified their claim would be removed in 2003–04, which is about 2,500 people a month. We have decided that that monthly target must be met by early next year, which enables us to have a commitment to reach and exceed 30,000 removals by 2003.

Corporate Killing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the findings of his consultation exercise on the reform of the laws governing corporate killing. [1804]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As I set out in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 26 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 82W, we will publish the findings of our consultation exercise on reforming the law on involuntary manslaughter as soon as we have completed consideration of the responses received. We are determined to bring forward clear and workable legislation that will hold undertakings to account for serious wrongdoing. The consultation exercise has allowed us to meet with interested parties and consider this difficult area in detail.

The Government remain committed to the introduction of an offence of corporate killing. We will honour our manifesto commitment to reform the law to make provisions against corporate manslaughter.

Police Career Management

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to adopt mid-career exit points for police, in line with the armed services. [2127]

Mr. Denham: "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", presented to Parliament in February by my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary, referred to the need for more flexible career management in the police service. We are currently discussing with the police service how to tackle this and other issues.

Marsham Street

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of maintaining the former Department of the Environment buildings at Marsham street has been in each year since 1997; and what the anticipated cost is in the forthcoming year. [1287]

Mr. Blunkett: The management and maintenance of the former Department of the Environment buildings at 2 Marsham street became the responsibility of the Secretary of State for the Home Department on 1 April 1999. The intention is to provide new accommodation on this site as part of the Home Office central London accommodation strategy. Since 1 April 1999, the cost of maintenance for each year excluding value added tax has been:

£479,000 for 1999–2000

£388,000 for 2000–01 and the provisional budget for part 2001–02 is £290,000.

The existing buildings at 2 Marsham street are not empty, as there is a permanent team on site carrying out minimum health and safety maintenance. The Home Office has allowed a number of fee-paying temporary uses of these buildings and car park areas. One such use has been a temporary winter shelter under the rough sleepers initiative.

Sentencing Reform

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on proposals for sentencing reform. [2592]

Mr. Blunkett: I will be publishing the report of a review of the sentencing framework at 9:30 a.m. on 5 July, copies of which will be available in the Vote Office and placed in the Library. The review was announced in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope), 16 May 2000, *Official Report,* column 71W. The review, which was led by John Halliday—a senior official in the Home Office who has now retired—was established to consider what principles should guide sentencing decisions and what types of disposal should be made available to the courts so as more effectively to reduce reoffending.

The report, which is a very thorough and thought-provoking document, was presented to Ministers on 1 May.

The report contains a number of interesting proposals and recommendations, which the Government will consider very carefully. The review was conducted in an open and inclusive way and, in line with what I said in the House on 27 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 663, I want to build upon that process by inviting views on the report's recommendations before reaching final conclusions ourselves. I will be asking for initial comments by 31 October 2001 and, in the meantime, the Government will be examining the proposals in more detail. I will make a further statement to Parliament when the Government have considered the responses received during the consultation period.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Insurance Scheme

Margaret Moran: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to extend the insurance scheme agreed by the House on 23 May 2000. [2465]

Mr. Robin Cook: On 23 May 2000, the House resolved that an insurance scheme should be established to cover claims against Members in respect of defamation claims. It has since become apparent that similar insurance is needed in respect of claims of negligence, the risk of which applies to all Members, and the motion on allowances arising from the SSRB report on parliamentary

pay and allowances, which I tabled on Monday, would, if agreed by the House in the debate tomorrow, Thursday 5 July, enable this.

The House will wish to be aware that a specific case has already arisen, and I have tabled a motion to enable the House to reimburse my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in respect of reasonable legal expenditure including damages arising in consequence of an action against him alleging vicarious liability for an act of negligence committed in the course of his duties as a Member of this House.

The claim arises from legal proceedings against my right hon. Friend for Blackburn (as the second defendant) and the Blackburn with Darwen borough council (as the first defendant) by a constituent alleging, in respect of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, vicarious liability on his part for an act of negligence by a member of his staff (who for unrelated reasons subsequently left his employment) committed in the course of his duties as a Member of this House.

The constituent claims damages exceeding £50,000 for, among other matters, losses on the value of his property and for personal injury, distress and inconvenience (as well as his legal costs), which he claims are attributable to the release from the constituency office of my right hon. Friend of information which he had provided to it.

The motion I tabled last night would, if agreed by the House following the debate on Thursday 5 July, provide for my right hon. Friend to be reimbursed his reasonable legal expenditure, including damages, already incurred and to be incurred in this instance.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which constituencies have received *(a)* less than 10 per cent. and *(b)* less than 15 per cent. of the national average for constituencies of grants to good causes from the national lottery. [1838]

Mr. Caborn: My Department's national lottery awards database allocates awards to constituencies based on the postcodes for the project or applicant supplied by the national lottery distributing bodies. According to the figures on this database, the following constituencies have received less than 10 per cent. of the average (mean) value of awards by constituency:

Denton and Reddish
Hayes and Harlington
Billericay
Southend, West
Hornchurch
Morley and Rothwell
Birmingham, Hall Green
Doncaster, North
Bexleyheath and Crayford
Birmingham, Northfield
Birmingham, Erdington
Normanton
Croydon, South
Romford
Castle Point.

In addition, the following constituencies have received less than 15 per cent. (but more than 10 per cent.) of the mean:

Chingford and Woodford Green
Broxtowe
Birmingham, Hodge Hill
Cannock Chase
Wentworth
Walsall, North
Wirral, West
Ruislip-Northwood
Hamilton, South
Makerfield
Reigate
Airdrie and Shotts
Reading, West
Worthing, West
Newport, East
Gedling
Haltemprice and Howden
Crawley
Redditch
Tamworth
Brent, North
Meriden
Blackpool, North and Fleetwood
South-West Bedfordshire
Cheadle.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangements are made to monitor the distribution of national Lottery funds. [1830]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's directions to the national lottery distributing bodies (issued under section 26(3) of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993) require them to institute systems of project monitoring. They are also required to publish details of their monitoring activities in their annual reports (copies of which are placed in the Library of the House). My Department collects details of all national lottery grant awards and places them on the national lottery awards database, which is available via the Department's website www.culture.gov.uk.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the disparities between constituencies of grants to good causes from the national lottery. [1831]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are keen to see all areas receive a fair share of funding. Reforms introduced under the National Lottery Act 1998, the revised policy directions issued to lottery distributors in the same year, and targeted programmes introduced by distributors, such as the Community Fund' s Priority Areas Initiative, were designed to reduced these disparities and there has been some improvement. We recognise, however, that there is

still more to be done and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 June the new £150 million initiative to target funds at some 50 areas which are both deprived and have received less lottery funding than other parts of the country.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what guidelines are set for the creation and distribution of the national lottery community first fund. [1832]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the community fund to target £100 million of its funds, and the new opportunities fund to target an additional £50 million to some 50 areas which are both deprived and have received less lottery funding than other parts of the country. The community fund and the new opportunities fund will use their knowledge and experience to develop the detailed arrangements for the scheme and will take the lead in determining the areas to be targeted. The scheme will be UK-wide and will begin in April 2002.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures have been put in place to promote applications to the national lottery community fund from the areas the fund is designed to assist. [1829]

Mr. Caborn: Measures to promote applications from the areas to be targeted under this new £150 million initiative will be developed by the community fund and the new opportunities fund in time for the start of the programme in April 2002.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the money raised from the national lottery has been used *(a)* in the NHS and *(b)* in schools; and if she will make a statement. [1634]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are committed to the principle that lottery money should add to and not substitute for existing Government expenditure. Lottery funding has been used to fund projects in the NHS and schools which are additional to their core functions. According to information received from the distributors, 1.7 per cent. of the money raised by the national lottery has been allocated to projects in the NHS and 3.0 per cent. has been allocated to projects in schools.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been raised each year from the national lottery, for each category of good cause, since the establishment of the national lottery; and if she will make a statement. [1633]

Mr. Caborn: The amounts raised for each good cause, including interest, in each financial year since the start of the lottery are shown in the following table.

£000

	Arts	*Sport*	*Heritage*	*Charities*	*Millennium projects*	*Health, education and environment projects*[1]
1994–95	58,523	58,518	58,522	58,535	59,649	—
1995–96	302,277	302,392	301,679	302,909	303,167	—
1996–97	312,294	313,946	313,816	313,979	318,078	—
1997–87	358,413	368,154	370,694	366,205	402,696	107,743
1998–99	284,923	306,710	315,022	304,414	397,145	330,442
1999–2000	262,926	273,172	287,593	275,487	349,839	302,559
2000–01	285,403	298,411	321,859	295,433	345,093	243,245

[1] Includes £200 million for the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to providing further assistance to UK tourism following the foot and mouth outbreak. [2150]

Dr. Howells: I am in close and regular contact with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on issues relating to the impact of foot and mouth disease on tourism, including the provision of assistance to affected businesses. For example, I attended the meeting of the Rural Task Force on 26 June where these issues were discussed.

Spoliation

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to introduce legislation to give effect to the recommendations of the Spoliation Committee regarding the return of looted cultural property. [67]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Spoliation Advisory Panel, under the chairmanship of retired Lord Justice of Appeal, the right hon. Sir David Hirst, announced on 18 January 2001 its first report (HC 111) on a claim to "A View of Hampton Court Palace" by Jan Griffier the Elder in Tate Britain. The report made two recommendations, both of which related to the Griffier painting, and these have been accepted and implemented. No recommendations concerning legislation were made.

Sports Grounds

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve the safety of sports grounds. [99]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I intend to keep the operation of the legislative framework for sports ground safety under review, and the culture and recreation Bill will be re-introduced as soon as this is practicable. The Government expect that the Bill will re-constitute the Football Licensing Authority as the

sports ground safety authority, which will be able to advise local authorities and others on safety issues at all sports grounds.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the areas of responsibility that have *(a)* been transferred from her Department to other departments and *(b)* been transferred to her Department from other departments since 8 June. [95]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* None of my Department's responsibilities have been transferred to other departments. My Department has, however, taken on responsibility for the following areas from the Home Office: gambling; horseracing; licensing; censorship and film classification; and, planning for the Golden Jubilee.

Community Sports Clubs

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to introduce charitable status for community sports clubs. [138]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government have no current plans to introduce legislation to extend charitable status to community sports clubs. However, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget statement the Government's intention to consult on the best way for a tax relief to help community amateur sports clubs that make a positive contribution to the local community. My officials and their Treasury and Inland Revenue colleagues are in discussions with sporting organisations including Sport England, the Central Council for Physical Recreation and the National Playing Fields Association on the detail of this relief. A consultation paper will be published later this year.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Debt Relief

9. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her assessment is of the impact of measures taken to alleviate indebtedness in the poorest countries. [687]

18. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made by her Department in reducing third-world debt. [696]

Clare Short: Twenty three countries have now qualified for exceptional relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. Over $53 billion of debt relief has been agreed for these countries, which will reduce their debts by almost two-thirds on average. The money released is directly linked to poverty reduction. The impact of this debt reduction means that, after debt relief, social expenditures in these HIPC countries are projected to rise by an average of some US$1.7 billion per year during 2001–02. We hope more countries will qualify for relief this year, but many of the remaining countries are affected by conflict or have yet to demonstrate their commitment to reform.

Aid Target

10. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the proportion of GNP given in official aid was over the course of each of the last two Parliaments. [688]

Clare Short: Under the last Conservative Administration the oda/GNP ratio fell from 0.30 per cent. in 1992 to 0.27 per cent. in 1996. In the last Parliament the ratio rose to 0.31 in 2000. We have made a commitment to reach a level of 0.33 per cent. oda/GNP by 2003–04 a level not seen in the UK since the mid 1980s.

Street Children

11. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects she is supporting relating to street children. [689]

Clare Short: Children live on the streets because of poverty. By tackling the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice, we help to realise of the rights of all children, including street children, to health, education and protection from violence.

In addition we support a number of projects that work directly with street children. We are currently supporting projects in Brazil, Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

St. Helena

12. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects to make an announcement on the feasibility study for an airfield on the island of St. Helena. [690]

Clare Short: The final report of the comparative study of air and sea access, which will identify the least cost solution to the island's future international passenger and cargo transport needs, has just been finalised. Its recommendations will be discussed with the St. Helena Government next week. We have agreed to provide funding equal to the least capital cost option—that is either the cost of replacing the RMS St. Helena or the estimated cost of an airport and related infrastructure.

Copies of the report are being placed in the Library of the House.

Zimbabwe

13. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what actions she proposes to promote good governance in Zimbabwe. [691]

Clare Short: We are working through direct contact with the Commonwealth and the European Union to promote a return to good governance and the holding of a free and fair presidential election next year. We have made it clear that increased UK development support depends on a return to the rule of law and the adoption of credible economic policies. We are also working with Zimbabwean civil society organisations that are advocating good governance.

16. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on British aid to Zimbabwe. [694]

Clare Short: Our efforts are focused on mitigating the effects of the current crisis on the poorest, whose plight continues to worsen. We are also continuing with our work to combat HIV/AIDS. We are working with non-governmental organisations to try to ensure we can protect the poorest—particularly children—from likely food shortages later in the year.

20. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received about funding of projects in Zimbabwe. [698]

Clare Short: My Department receives a large number of requests for funding in Zimbabwe, as in other countries in which we work. Most recently, we have received a number of approaches from international non-governmental organisations. They are seeking our support to protect the poor—particularly children—from likely food shortages later in the year. We are working with them to develop and implement their proposals.

26. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with other European states regarding the future of aid to Zimbabwe. [705]

Clare Short: We have on-going contracts at various levels with other European Governments to discuss development assistance in Zimbabwe. In addition, there is joint political dialogue between the EU and the Government of Zimbabwe under article 8 of the Cotonou agreement. We support the EU in seeking results on key governance issues; and agree that appropriate measures will be needed if the dialogue does not yield rapid results over the next two months.

Gujarat

14. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Indian Government about further assistance in the aftermath of the earthquake in Gujarat. [692]

Clare Short: My Department is in active discussions with the Indian Government regarding the possibility of our providing assistance to help strengthen disaster management arrangements in the country, in the wake of the Gujarat earthquake and other major disasters. To this end, an expert DFID team has recently visited India to assess the current situation and will be putting forward recommendations shortly.

Our priority has been to ensure that those who survived the earthquake were cared for until normal services were restored. In my statement to the House on Monday 29 January, I announced an overall allocation of up to £10 million to support the emergency relief efforts in Gujarat without reducing spending in other parts of India. To date nearly £9 million of the total allocation has been disbursed. We are considering allocating the balance to help strengthen natural disaster management capacity.

Good Governance

15. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to encourage improved governance in developing countries in receipt of British aid. [693]

Clare Short: Our strategy on good governance is outlined in the consultation document "Making Government Work for Poor People", which was placed in the Libraries of both Houses in June 2000. We have made commitments of £650 million for the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 to programmes where governance was a principal element. A further £1.3 billion was committed over the same period on programmes where governance was a significant element.

Trade Negotiations

17. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has given to developing countries to enable them to represent their interests at international negotiations about trade. [695]

Clare Short: Currently the WTO is hosting negotiations on trade in services and in agricultural products. For agriculture, we are funding a consultant at the South Centre to assist developing countries develop negotiating proposals. We are in the process of establishing a scheme with UNCTAD to provide assistance for developing countries for the services negotiations. We aim to add to the work that the WTO Secretariat and the EU's new ACP office do for countries with low representation at the WTO by strengthening the work that organisations like the Commonwealth Secretariat and AITIC undertake. An important element of beneficial representation at the WTO is good trade policy capacity in capitals. We are running many programmes in developing countries to build such capacity.

Ilisu Dam

19. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's involvement in decisions on granting export credit for the proposed Ilisu hydro-electric dam in Turkey. [697]

Clare Short: DFID was first consulted about this project as a part of ECGD's wider Whitehall consultation in January 1999. At the beginning of that year, DFID commented on ECGD's terms of reference for an independent review of environmental and resettlement impact reports produced by the project sponsors. Turkey is not a priority country for DFID and since mid-July 1999 DFID has had no further advisory input into any decisions on the project.

HIV/AIDS (Sub-Saharan Africa)

21. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy on combating HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. [699]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is the single most important development challenge in sub-Saharan Africa. The epidemic is undermining economic growth and fundamentally threatens social and economic development in many countries in the region. We know what needs to be done to tackle the disease, and I strongly believe that commitments by the international community must now be transformed into a worldwide effort to contain the spread of the disease.

DFID continues to give greatest priority to prevention, but we also place great emphasis on reducing the personal, social and economic impact of illness and death caused by the disease.

As national strategic plans to tackle the epidemic improve, we have begun to place our support within the framework of those plans. For example, we have recently approved significant HIV/AIDS related programmes in support of the national response in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe totalling over £60 million, and a £20 million programme is being designed to support Mozambique. A new programme for South Africa is also planned for this year. We have also committed £25 million to support the International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa, and £7.5 million to a regional initiative on HIV/AIDS with the Southern Africa Development Community.

In addition, the Government are exploring the potential of a number of options for increasing the long-term affordability and availability of treatment for HIV/AIDS and related infections which will benefit sub-Saharan Africa, while maintaining a focus on the development of long-term sustainable health systems which is needed to deliver them.

Nepal

22. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much bilateral aid was granted to Nepal in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [700]

Clare Short: The total bilateral aid given by HMG to Nepal in each of the last five years is as follows:

	£000
1996–97	15,562
1997–98	17,280
1998–99	16,627
1999–2000	15,989
2000–01	[1]17,165

[1] Provisional

Palestinian Authority

23. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about UK aid to the Palestinian Authority. [701]

Clare Short: Britain is providing assistance to the Palestinian Authority to help reduce poverty and support democratic and accountable government in the West Bank and Gaza.

Palestinians are suffering badly from the effects of the current conflict and the economic sanctions imposed by Israel.

Tibet

24. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last had discussions with the Chinese Government regarding human rights abuses in Tibet. [703]

Clare Short: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office leads for British Government on the dialogue on human rights in China and raises this regularly with the Chinese Government. In addition to those held at the multilateral and European levels, discussions on human rights are taken forward at the UK-China human rights dialogue, last held in February 2001.

During my last visit to China in October 2000, I discussed a number of issues with the Chinese Government, including human rights. My Department's main concern is to help those people in all parts of China who live in abject poverty. Since 1978, China has experienced a remarkable reduction in poverty, and continues to achieve impressive social indicators, for example low child mortality and high rates of enrolment in primary education. There has been a significant improvement in respect for the economic and social rights of the poor in China. We will continue to press the case for more progress on civil and political rights.

Civil Society Programmes (South-eastern Europe)

25. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to develop civil society programmes that will contribute to stability in south-eastern Europe. [704]

Clare Short: Strengthening of the role of civil society is one of the main objectives of our programmes in south-eastern Europe.

In Serbia we are designing a major project to assist co-operation between civil society and government in service delivery. In Croatia we have agreed a programme of support to the Government Office for NGOs, support to civil society co-operation with government and to evaluation of government grants to NGOs. In Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina we are supporting major social policy projects, which include the involvement of civil society in design and delivery of programmes. In Albania we have also assisted with the government's arrangements for consultation with civil society on its poverty reduction strategy. In Macedonia we are working with civil society agencies to develop a network of citizens advice and information services.

Refugees (Middle East)

27. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support Her Majesty's Government will give to refugees and refugee resettlement in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. [706]

Clare Short: We have increased our support to UNRWA to help with both its regular operations and its special measures to address the growing social and economic hardship in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Our contributions in 2001 will exceed £18 million.

Tanzania

28. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her recent visit to Tanzania. [707]

Clare Short: I last visited Tanzania in April 2000. I hope to do so again later in July.

Poverty Reduction

29. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will promote partnership programmes with individual developing countries committed to poverty reduction. [708]

Clare Short: Partnerships with developing countries committed to poverty reduction form the cornerstone of our efforts to eliminate poverty. DFID is working with others to help partner country governments draw up nationally owned and led poverty reduction strategies. These strategies provide a framework for international efforts to help tackle poverty and for DFID's work in the majority of our major partner countries.

Global Health Fund

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the global health fund. [684]

Clare Short: The fund is designed to make available drugs and commodities for the prevention and treatment of Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS, in the poorest countries. We believe a purchasing fund will increase reliability of supply, reduce prices and encourage research leading to the production of new treatments. It will also help leverage the development of better delivery systems so that poor people get access to available drugs.

HEALTH

TB Case, Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement concerning the risk to patients and the contraction of TB by a patient at Barnet hospital from another patient. [60]

Yvette Cooper: In line with departmental recommendations, Barnet and Chase Farm hospitals NHS trust has an infection control policy that covers the situations in which it is necessary for patients to be nursed in isolation. This includes patients who are thought likely to have the more infectious forms of tuberculosis.

Patients are placed in their own room and are asked not to leave the room unnecessarily and not to have contact with other patients. Staff entering the room wear disposable gowns and gloves to prevent the spread of infection.

A long-term patient at Barnet hospital was recently found, following a routine test, to have contracted TB. It is possible that the TB had been dormant in the patient for some time. The patient was immediately put in a side room. Once it became apparent that the patient had contracted TB, 23 patients were recalled for testing. None of them has contracted the disease. However, 10 higher risk individuals are having follow-up tests as a precautionary measure. The trust is managing this incident in liaison with the communicable disease surveillance centre.

CFS/ME

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many specialist clinics for myalgic encephalitis/chronic fatigue syndrome have *(a)* outreach/mobile units for severe housebound/bedbound sufferers and *(b)* in-patient ward facilities; and what the average size of such units and facilities is; [1107]

(2) how many NHS specialist clinics there are in the United Kingdom for sufferers from myalgic encephalitis/chronic fatigue syndrome. [1106]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not held centrally.

The national health service provides a considerable number of services which people who have chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) can access. These patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialties including general medicine, neurology and immunology. The CFS/ME working group is developing guidance to improve the quality of care for CFS/ME patients.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many myalgic encephalitis/chronic fatigue syndrome sufferers there are in *(a)* Cambridgeshire, *(b)* Lincolnshire and *(c)* Northamptonshire; [1164]

(2) how many designated myalgic encephalitis/chronic fatigue syndrome specialists there are in the *(a)* Cambridgeshire, *(b)* Lincolnshire and *(c)* Northamptonshire health authority areas. [1108]

Yvette Cooper: We do not collect information centrally on the incidence of individual diseases. It is estimated however, that up to one or two people in every thousand may have the illness, with numbers peaking in the 20–40 age group.

Information on the numbers of myalgic encephalitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME) specialists is not available as CFS/ME is not classed as a specialty.

The National Health Service provides a considerable number of services which people suffering from CFS/ME access. These patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialties including general medicine, neurology and immunology. The CFS/ME working group is developing guidance to improve the quality of care for CFS/ME patients.

Draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received regarding the omission of health visitors from the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 under section 62(9) of the Health Act 1999; [1233]

(2) if he intends to amend the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 under section 62(9) of the Health Act 1999 to include health visitors; [1235]

(3) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the omission of health visitors from the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 under section 62(9) of the Health Act 1999. [1234]

Mr. Hutton: Consultation on the draft order ended on 1 July. A wide range of organisations and individuals have commented on various aspects of the draft order. We will give careful consideration to all comments received before finally putting forward legislation for parliamentary approval.

Health visitors will continue to be regulated as part of the nursing and midwifery professions but with the capacity to recognise their special contribution to public health. The draft legislation contains several safeguards for health visiting. Health visitors will have a separate register, protection of their professional title and be guaranteed equal representation on the council with nurses and midwives, and from each United Kingdom country.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received in respect of the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001, part III, article 8; [1504]

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that the final version of the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001, part III, article 8, does not require the disclosure of the personal address details of people on the register. [1502]

Mr. Hutton: Consultation on the draft order continues ended on 1 July. A range of organisations and individuals have commented on aspects of the draft order.

The draft legislation does not require the publication of home addresses of registrants on the register.

The proposals make it clear that it will be for the new Nursing and Midwifery Council to decide what details appear on the register. The new council will have a duty to have proper regard to the interests of all registrants and prospective registrants, and will be required to consult on its plans beforehand.

GM Food

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure the labelling of processed food products includes the mention of genetically modified organisms where they are used. [593]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The Genetically Modified Novel Foods (labelling) Regulations 2000 require foods containing genetically modified (GM) material (DNA or protein) to be labelled. The European Commission is expected to issue proposals shortly to extend the current labelling rules to require all ingredients derived from genetically modified organisms whether or not they contain GM material. The United Kingdom will seek to ensure that any new rules are practical, proportionate and enforceable.

Autism

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being undertaken to investigate the effects of thiomersal in vaccines on children and links with autism. [1408]

Yvette Cooper: The Department is discussing with the Public Health Laboratory Service what suitable research in this area may be possible. The United States Centers for Disease Control have conducted two studies which have not demonstrated a causal association between autism and thiomersal (the amount of thiomersal in vaccines used in the UK childhood immunisation programme is considerably less than that used in the United States programme). A full joint statement by the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices and the US Public Health Services is available on the world wide web at http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vacsafe/concerns/thimerosal/joint_statement_00.htm.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, the Department of Health's statutory independent advisory committee, has reviewed the available evidence and has concluded that the present evidence did not support a link between thiomersal in vaccines and autism. They also concluded that there was substantial evidence that the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine—which is a live attenuated vaccine and therefore has never contained thiomersal—is not a factor, but the cause of autism remains unknown. The Department has asked the Medical Research Council to review current knowledge about autism and to suggest possible areas for further research development so that a cause may be found.

Campath

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Campath has received approval from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; what plans he has to increase its availability to NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [1417]

Yvette Cooper: Alemtuzumab (Campath, Berlex Laboratories) is not currently licensed for use in the United Kingdom and has not been considered for the institute's work programme.

Neo-natal Hearing Screening

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will provide guidance to health service providers carrying out universal neo-natal hearing screening about the need to inform other statutory authorities about the detection of deafness. [1344]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* A pilot scheme to evaluate the practicalities of introducing universal neo-natal hearing screening is currently under way in 20 health authorities in England. It includes active participation of all key stakeholders including other statutory authorities. One of the aspects that the pilot scheme will examine is how to develop and recognise the role of education and social services authorities in the delivery of services for deaf and hard of hearing babies. The pilot evaluation will also inform protocols and good practice for national implementation.

Strategic Review, Newcastle

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to approve *(a)* the hospital regeneration project at the Royal Victoria infirmary site, Newcastle and *(b)* the new northern centre for cancer treatment; and what the target date for completion of each is. [2074]

Mr. Hutton: The outline business cases for the capital schemes to complete the implementation of the Newcastle strategic review have now been approved and it is hoped that the procurement process will commence in mid July 2001.

The provisional estimates for the new facilities being operational are late 2006 at the Royal Victoria infirmary and late 2005/early 2006 at the Freeman hospital (including the new northern centre for cancer treatment). However, more precise estimates will emerge as the procurement progresses.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will issue his response to the review carried out by the UK national screening committee into the case for introducing a national neo-natal cystic fibrosis screening programme. [1751]

Yvette Cooper: On 30 April 2001, I announced that a new national programme for neo-natal cystic fibrosis screening would be introduced. This will be subject to further advice from the United Kingdom national screening committee about feasibility, time scales and costs of a national programme, which is expected in the autumn.

Routine Screening

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to extend routine screening for middle-aged male patients; and if he will make a statement; [1482]

(2) if he will list the diseases for which routine screening would be appropriate for men aged over 50 years; and if he will make a statement. [1484]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The United Kingdom national screening committee (NSC) advises Ministers, the devolved Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament on all aspects of screening policy. The NSC assesses proposed new programmes against a set of internationally recognised criteria and in forming its proposals draws on the latest research evidence. Assessing programmes in this way is intended to ensure that screening does more good than harm at a reasonable cost.

The NHS plan announced colorectal cancer screening will be introduced should the current pilot studies demonstrate its effectiveness. It also announced that a prostate cancer screening programme will be introduced if and when screening and treatment techniques have developed sufficiently. The NSC will continue to keep all research evidence for preventing disease through screening under careful review when considering the case for recommending new programmes.

NHSnet

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when all GPs will be connected to NHSnet. [1967]

Mr. Hutton: As stated in the Government's information management and technology strategy for the national health service, "Building the Information Core", all clinical and support staff in the NHS (including general practitioners) will be connected to NHSnet by the end of March 2002.

Independent Hospices

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional help he intends to make available for independent hospices. [1359]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The NHS cancer plan set out our commitment to increase national health service investment in specialist palliative care by £50 million by 2004 to end inequalities in access to care and enable the NHS to make a more realistic contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of services.

Cancer networks are currently developing detailed service delivery plans, which will identify current provision and set out action plans for further development across all services including palliative care. These will be completed by the autumn.

Hospital Waiting Times

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times for operations in each of the hospital trusts in England and Wales are; and what the equivalent figures were in May 1997. [2220]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* A table showing inpatient waiting times in national health service trusts in England has been placed in the Library. Waiting times in Wales are now a matter for the devolved Welsh Assembly.

Data for England show that the average wait has reduced from 3.04 months at June 1997 to 2.95 months at April 2001.

Older People's Champions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he has issued to older people's champions on the discharge of their responsibilities under the national service framework for older people; [2012]

(2) what response he has made to proposals he has received from Age Concern England for a pledge to be made by older people's champions; [2000]

(3) what plans he has to monitor and evaluate the role of older people's champions. [2013]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Age Concern England's "Champions Pledge" is welcomed and will help focus the thinking and development of local older people's champions.

The National Service Framework for older people provided for the appointment of older people's champions and representation across every health and social services organisation by the end of June 2001. Once details of local appointments are collected in July 2001, and before detailing their role and responsibilities further or providing guidance, we will be seeking their views and

the views of national organisations that represent older people. Age Concern England has been included in discussions around this.

The national service framework for older people provides for a range of performance measures by which achievement of milestones and standards set will be judged. Careful consideration will be given to any identified need to monitor and evaluate the role of older people's champions once these discussions have taken place.

MS

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by the NHS on research into *(a)* the causes and *(b)* the treatment of MS in each of the last five years; what plans he has to increase this amount; and if he will make a statement. [1859]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The main Government agency for research into the causes and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department of Health funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service.

The Department and MRC spend on multiple sclerosis research, which includes spend on basic work on a whole range of auto-immune disease was as follows:

£1.86 million (estimated) in 2000–01;

£1.425 million in 1999–2000;

£0.77 million in 1998–99;

£0.783 million in 1997–98;

£0.172 million in 1996–97.

The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for research into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands in funding.

The Department will be considering further research requirements in this area in support of the national service framework for long-term conditions.

Care Home Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the costs of the first three months of a care home placement will be met; and what estimate has been made of these costs. [1503]

Jacqui Smith: Where a local authority provides a person with residential accommodation, it will assess the person's ability to reimburse the cost of the placement. The difference between the amount the person can reimburse and the cost of the care home placement will be funded by the local authority, which is in turn funded as part of the personal social services standard spending assessment to provide these services.

From April 2001, a 12-week property disregard has been introduced, which removes the value of a person's property from the assessment for that period. The cost of the 12-week disregard is reflected in the PSS SSA.

Those residents who are able to meet their care home fees fully through their income and other assets will do so from their own resources.

Mental Health Reform

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which parts of the White Paper on mental health reform, published in December 2000, are undergoing further review. [2007]

Jacqui Smith: As new mental health legislation is prepared further definition will be added to all parts of the framework set out in the White Paper, "Reforming the Mental Health Act".

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans the Government have to implement the proposals contained in the White Paper on mental health reform published in December 2000; and if he will make a statement; [2006]

(2) what the Government's proposed timetable is for bringing forward legislation on mental health reform. [2008]

Jacqui Smith: We are committed to the reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 and will introduce new legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The White Paper made clear our intention to reform mental health legislation and bring it into line with the contemporary patterns of care and treatment that are being created by our investment of over £300 million in mental health services under the NHS plan.

Nursing Care (Costs)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his Department's policy to meet the full costs of nursing care for elderly people in nursing homes; and if he will make a statement. [1635]

Jacqui Smith: The Health and Social Care Act makes good the pledge set out in "The NHS Plan: The Government's Response to the Royal Commission on Long Term Care" to make the NHS responsible for purchasing nursing care in nursing homes, strengthening the incentives for the NHS to ensure effective rehabilitation after acute illness of injury. If they have been assessed as needing the care of a registered nurse, people will not have to pay for the care and supervision provided by registered nurses in nursing homes, or for specialist equipment.

Detailed draft guidance on how we plan to implement free nursing care will be issued for consultation shortly.

Guidance on NHS and councils' responsibilities for continuing care were published on 28 June.

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency will publish its annual business plan. [2502]

Ms Blears: We are pleased to announce that the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency's annual business plan has been published and copies have been placed in the Library.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what undertaking has been given to review the decision to close the Royal Hospital, Haslar. [1964]

Ms Blears: No undertaking has been given to review the decision to close the Royal Hospital, Haslar. The decision to close the Royal Hospital, Haslar was taken by the Ministry of Defence in 1998. Portsmouth Hospitals national health service trust took over management responsibility for clinical services provided at the hospital with effect from April 2001. The hospital will continue to treat patients until its services transfer to the planned new facilities at Queen Alexandra hospital, part of Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 5 July 2001

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to announce the completion of contract negotiations with the preferred bidders for the London Underground public-private partnership. [1034]

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the PPP will be signed for the London Underground. [1603]

Mr. Byers: Robert Kiley reported to me on 3 July that he had not been able to agree terms with the bidders for the modernisation of the underground consistent with the objectives of his agreement with the Government. Having carefully considered everything Mr. Kiley had to say, the Government have concluded that the best course is to proceed with plans for the modernisation of the underground, to create a 21st century tube which will be publicly run and privately built. I will today be asking London Underground to move quickly to progress negotiations, subject to the requirements to ensure safety, so that work can start as soon as possible. In doing this, and as a result of the discussions with Bob Kiley, London Underground plan to make a number of changes to deliver better public sector control, particularly in the area of safety.

Homelessness

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* families and *(b)* individuals in bed and breakfast accommodation were placed there by local housing authorities; how many (i) families and (ii) individuals are regarded as homeless; how many (1) families and (2) individuals are on housing waiting lists; and how many (x) families and (y) individuals are on transfer lists, in each London borough. [1049]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The latest available information as reported by London boroughs is presented in the table. This represents households without distinguishing between family groups and individuals. Information on local authorities' transfer lists is not collected centrally.

London boroughs' reported action under the homelessness provisions of Housing Acts

	Decisions made during the period[1] January–March 2001				
	Accepted as being homeless and in priority need	*Eligible, homeless and in priority need, but intentionally so*	*Eligible, homeless but not in priority need*	*Households accommodated by the authority on 31 March 2001 in bed and breakfast*	*Number of households on the Housing Register[2] as at 1 April 2000*
Barking and Dagenham	34	8	12	0	1,925
Barnet	244	4	144	[3]—	5,489
Bexley	103	7	197	66	3,592
Brent	281	35	68	585	12,603
Bromley	216	9	98	100	3,264
Camden	289	22	102	69	5,884
City of London	3	0	0	23	787
Croydon	514	22	337	420	6,265
Ealing	244	20	255	400	7,709
Enfield	301	3	30	267	6,001
Greenwich	277	10	86	0	5,473
Hackney	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	7,011
Hammersmith and Fulham	294	5	41	376	4,726
Haringey	299	6	[3]—	192	9,510
Harrow	189	10	86	131	2,610
Havering	16	5	51	0	1,738
Hillingdon	271	9	121	407	3,656
Hounslow	296	7	204	182	5,017
Islington	445	17	190	[3]—	11,590
Kensington and Chelsea	163	17	42	651	8,206
Kingston upon Thames	125	3	68	8	3,113
Lambeth	304	19	60	187	16,220
Lewisham	247	[3]—	[3]—	0	9,774
Merton	45	4	28	35	3,920
Newham	429	24	73	641	11,107
Redbridge	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	3,555
Richmond upon Thames	118	4	33	66	4,992
Southwark	693	28	52	250	5,543
Sutton	114	17	88	47	2,154
Tower Hamlets	293	13	16	187	6,751

London boroughs' reported action under the homelessness provisions of Housing Acts

Decisions made during the period[1] January–March 2001

	Accepted as being homeless and in priority need	*Eligible, homeless and in priority need, but intentionally so*	*Eligible, homeless but not in priority need*	*Households accommodated by the authority on 31 March 2001 in bed and breakfast*	*Number of households on the Housing Register[2] as at 1 April 2000*
Waltham Forest	250	46	69	135	7,476
Wandsworth	258	9	145	259	2,441
Westminster	304	21	178	923	8,099

[1] Decisions during the quarter are those where applicant households were found to be homeless and eligible for assistance under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1996 and associated legislation.
[2] Local authorities have different practices for compiling and managing housing register/waiting lists which mean that simple comparisons between authorities can be misleading.
[3] Information not reported
Source:
DTLR quarterly P1E housing activity and annual Housing Investment Programme returns

National and regional information on local authorities' activity under statutory homelessness provisions is published in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department. A separate Supplementary Table provides summary data for individual authorities.

Copies of the Release and Supplementary Tables are held in the Library, and the latest edition, published on 15 June, presents statistics up to the end of March 2001.

Motorway-widening Schemes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will require the preparation of an environmental impact assessment when the widening of motorways is proposed. [1332]

Mr. Jamieson: The publication of an environmental statement assessing the impact of a project for constructing or improving any highway is a statutory requirement under the provisions of Part VA of the Highways Act 1980 if the area of the project exceeds 1 hectare or is situated in whole or in part in a sensitive area.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy on the widening of motorways. [1831]

Mr. Jamieson: Our 10-Year-Plan, Transport 2010 includes provision for widening some 5 per cent. (360 miles) of the strategic road network. Such widening will be a key element in meeting our objective to reduce road congestion on the inter-urban network and in large urban areas in England below current levels by 2010 by promoting integrated transport solutions and investing in public transport and the road network.

Heathrow

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to make a decision on a fifth terminal at Heathrow airport. [1311]

Ms Keeble: A decision will be issued as soon as possible consistent with full and careful consideration of the report of the inquiry Inspector.

A5

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has for improvement to the A5 between the M69 and A47 Longshoot junction. [1426]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency has a strategy for improving the A5. I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. David Tredinnick, dated 5 July 2001:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent question about proposals for improving the A5 between the M69 and A47 Longshoot Junction.

A strategy for improvements to this section of the A5 was developed following the publication of the Inspector's Report on the Public Inquiry into the Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan. This strategy indicated the need for improvements to the road as a result of development proposals identified in the Plan and preliminary consultation, undertaken in June 1999, identified a number of possible improvement schemes.

The enclosed leaflet sets out the broad programme although there have been a number of changes since it was published in March. Work is likely to start in the Autumn on two developer-funded schemes, the provision of roundabouts at Nutts Lane and Sketchley Lane, and we hope to start work this financial year on improving signing at Hinckley Railway Bridge and on the traffic signs at Stretton House Bends. Other developer funded schemes, including Dodwells roundabout and proposals at Wolvey Road and the M69 junction, are less advanced and will be dependent in part on the developers' timescales.

More recently, work has started on the preparation of the Route Management Strategy for the trunk road corridor between the M1 and the A38 in the Midlands, including this length of the A5. This was mentioned in Gwyn Drake's letter to you of 19th January. This will look at the corridor as a whole and will recommend a range of highway improvements for inclusion in future works programmes. It will also review some of the improvements identified in the preliminary consultation, such as the pedestrian and cycle path on the north side of the A5 between the M69 and the Longshoot junction, and enhancements including "no waiting" restrictions, a 40 mph speed limit and street lighting. Public consultation is expected to start early in 2002, with the final strategy being published June.

The result will be a Route Management Plan, which will include a ten-year strategy and a three-year action plan.

I trust that this answers your question but if you wish to discuss any aspect further, the Highways Agency Route Manager for this length of A5 is David Nock. He can be contacted at our offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1BL, or by telephone on 0121 678 8362.

Housebuilding Targets

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans the Government have to revise the housebuilding targets published in the regional planning guidance for *(a)* the west midlands, *(b)* the south-east and *(c)* East Anglia; and if he will make a statement; [1279]

(2) if he will make a statement on the extent to which housebuilding targets detailed in a regional planning guidance are binding on local authorities. [1295]

Ms Keeble: Draft Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) is drawn up by the Regional Planning Body for each region and includes proposed rates of housing provision. Once the RPG has been confirmed by the Secretary of State following public examination, the presumption is that the rates of housing provision are carried through into structure plans or Unitary Development Plans. The housing provision for each region is no longer set as an inflexible long-term target for housebuilding based on a 'predict and provide' methodology but is expressed as an annual rate of provision for additional dwellings which is subject to regular monitoring and review. The level of housing provision is monitored by the regional planning body with the expectation that it will be reviewed every five years, or sooner if necessary.

RPGs for East Anglia and the south-east were issued in November 2000 and March 2001 respectively. The regional planning body in the west midlands is currently preparing new draft RPG.

Best Value

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money within central Government has been allocated for administrative costs associated with best value in local government in the forthcoming year. [1291]

Mr. Raynsford: For the financial year 2001–02, £1,751,000 has been allocated within central Government for administrative costs associated with best value.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost to central Government was of the administration of best value in local government in the last financial year. [1284]

Mr. Raynsford: In the financial year 2000–01, £1,524,000 was spent on the administration of best value by central Government.

Electoral Law

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the annual costs to business resulting from the provisions on the availability of the full and edited electoral register in the draft Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement. [1289]

Mr. Raynsford: Officials have been in frequent contact with representatives of businesses and business associations since the beginning of 1998 when changes to the availability of electoral registers were first considered by the Working Party on Electoral Procedures. A summary of the estimates made by companies which responded to the working party was published in Annexe M to the working party's final report of October 1999, copies of which are in the Library of the House and on the Home Office website.

A draft Regulatory Impact Assessment accompanied the draft Amendment (No.2) Regulations when these were placed on the internet for public comment.

Local Government

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to undertake local government restructuring *(a)* before and *(b)* after the introduction of regional assemblies in England outside London. [1296]

Mr. Raynsford: No decisions have yet been taken on what—if any—changes in local government structures might be involved in taking forward the Government's proposals in relation to elected regional assemblies.

As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W, the Government intend to publish a White Paper on Regional Governance in England. This will set out the Government's thinking on these issues.

Good Practice

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he proposes to take to ensure that good practice in local government can be developed. [2164]

Dr. Whitehead: The Secretary of State has introduced a wide-ranging programme of modernisation for local government. We are committed to supporting the capacity of local government to deliver on this programme. The development of best practice is seen as an important element of such support.

We have strengthened the Improvement and Development Agency, particularly through the creation of the Performance Support Unit, and we continue to support the Local Government Improvement Programme. We have enhanced the Audit Commission's role in audit and inspection, particularly through the Best Value Inspection Service. The IDeA and the BVIS have key roles in sharing best practice.

The DTLR offers help to local authorities directly through (among others) its Modernisation Team, a group of senior staff with local authority experience who work in every region of the country to support councils as they introduce modernisation.

The Department is involved in many other initiatives. Examples include the introduction of Local Public Service Agreements. Local PSAs provide councils with the opportunity to discuss with Government Departments new ideas for improving services and try them out. Ideas that work will naturally be of interest to other councils.

In addition, we are making available £350 million funding over three years, to enable local authorities achieve our target of 100 per cent. electronic service capability by 2005. This year we have made £25 million available to support innovative projects which will make a generic contribution to local authority service delivery. This work will be supported by a further £325 million in 2002–04.

Local authorities were able to compete for grant under Rounds 2 and 3 of the Invest to Save Budget. This is a Treasury/Cabinet Office initiative, designed to develop projects which bring together two or more public services in an innovative and more efficient fashion. In Round 3, 46 out of 100 successful projects were led by local authorities, involving some £22.4 million funding from a total ISB Round 3 pot of £60 million. Both e-government and IS projects will provide a valuable source of best practice for local government.

Through the beacon council scheme, councils can improve by learning from those who already provide excellent services. 39 councils, given beacon status in the second round of the scheme, are currently offering opportunities to develop services across 11 themes. Earlier this week—4 July 2001—we published an application brochure inviting further applications in the third round of the scheme. Evaluation studies are showing that the beacon scheme is making a positive contribution to the development of good practice.

The Department has embarked on a major programme to develop best practice in partnership working with public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

Jointly with the Local Government Association, we commissioned a Review of Local Government Procurement under Sir Ian Byatt. We have now received this report. It is an important contribution to the debate on the modernisation of local government and the provision of high quality services to local people. This report will stimulate the development of best practice in procurement.

Rockingham Speedway, Northamptonshire

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will hold a public inquiry into the process and procedures by which a series of planning consents has been granted for the construction of the Rockingham Speedway, Northamptonshire. [1783]

Dr. Whitehead: A public inquiry will be held this September into the appeal by Rockingham Speedway against some of the conditions imposed by East Northamptonshire council in its permission of October last year. In addition, the council has resolved to take enforcement action to ensure compliance with other conditions. However the Department is not aware of any grounds to suggest the council's consideration of this case requires investigation.

Fire Contingency Arrangements

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contingency arrangements he has made in the event of strike action by fire fighters on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement. [2129]

Dr. Whitehead: At the request of the Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority, I have agreed with my right hon. Friend the armed forces Minister that armed forces personnel should provide emergency fire cover during any periods of strike action by firefighters on Merseyside.

Local Authority Boundaries

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the terms of reference are for the boundary commission's current review of local government boundaries in Merseyside; and if he will make a statement. [2104]

Dr. Whitehead: All the Local Government Commission's periodic electoral reviews, including those of the Metropolitan borough councils in Merseyside starting in September, are undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements, including those of securing electoral equality (the number of electors represented by each councillor elected to the authority to be, as far as possible, the same in every ward) and effective and convenient local government, and to reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

Housing (London)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people were accepted as homeless in each of the London boroughs in each of the last five years; how many of these were accommodated in bed and breakfast establishments; and at what cost. [1737]

Ms Keeble: Information reported to the Department by London boroughs on the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, in each of the past five years, is as follows:

Homeless households in priority need accepted by London boroughs

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Barking and Dagenham	241	65	257	230	234
Barnet	909	872	1,027	1,103	(3) 868
Bexley	173	285	319	275	359
Brent	1,394	1,164	(3) 721	1,040	1,146
Bromley	657	610	728	839	881
Camden	1,362	1,422	1,555	1,338	1,021
City of London	22	44	53	64	17
Croydon	1,513	956	814	1,219	1,886

Homeless households in priority need accepted by London boroughs

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Ealing	1,202	1,068	1,016	989	1,026
Enfield	836	743	754	793	1,007
Greenwich	1,053	1,270	1,403	1,242	1,227
Hackney	(2) 454	676	705	963	(3) 594
Hammersmith and Fulham	618	598	709	895	918
Haringey	[1]—	1,157	975	(3) 1,101	1,436
Harrow	499	690	720	670	701
Havering	(3) 267	283	(1) 98	(3) 326	(3) 160
Hillingdon	888	932	914	686	1,003
Hounslow	1,082	858	(3) 609	1,003	945
Islington	1,113	949	(3) 897	1,298	1,556
Kensington and Chelsea	614	594	(3) 411	533	658
Kingston upon Thames	323	437	(3) 271	306	421
Lambeth	1,042	779	1,039	1,124	1,112
Lewisham	(3) 601	(3) 574	1,085	1,248	892
Merton	336	186	205	242	168
Newham	224	[1]—	1,383	1,411	1,596
Redbridge	302	322	302	450	(3) 325
Richmond upon Thames	479	584	633	432	343
Southwark	(3) 873	890	(3) 841	1,614	1,702
Sutton	417	274	299	513	429
Tower Hamlets	(2) 369	971	1,070	1,130	1,282
Waltham Forest	771	880	(3) 779	856	981
Wandsworth	639	440	[1]—	(2) 391	886
Westminster	1,259	(3) 839	1,266	1,152	1,074

[1] Blank entries indicate that no returns were submitted by the authority

Note:

Numbers in brackets indicate the number of quarters for which returns were received

Source:

DETR P1(E) housing activity returns (quarterly)

Information reported by London boroughs on the numbers of households resident in bed and breakfast accommodation on 31 March in each year is as follows:

Homeless households accommodated by London boroughs as at 31 March

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0	[1]—	0
Barnet	103	88	116	[1]—	[1]—
Bexley	1	10	19	56	66
Brent	273	369	290	410	585
Bromley	17	30	118	134	100
Camden	100	114	44	56	69
City of London	15	22	33	64	23
Croydon	[1]—	122	157	286	420
Ealing	19	33	68	201	400
Enfield	159	208	206	253	267
Greenwich	0	0	0	0	0
Hackney	[1]—	40	[1]—	366	[1]—
Hammersmith and Fulham	99	159	263	317	376
Haringey	[1]—	142	151	216	192
Harrow	58	92	183	122	131
Havering	0	0	0	[1]—	0
Hillingdon	107	120	295	279	407
Hounslow	11	50	[1]—	149	182
Islington	145	65	67	71	0
Kensington and Chelsea	239	250	466	559	651
Kingston upon Thames	9	2	1	26	8
Lambeth	2	0	14	56	187
Lewisham	[1]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	0
Merton	24	9	10	56	35
Newham	[1]—	[1]—	270	346	641
Redbridge	88	145	165	184	[1]—
Richmond upon Thames	39	62	203	224	66
Southwark	0	0	42	180	250
Sutton	24	23	64	123	47

Homeless households accommodated by London boroughs as at 31 March

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Tower Hamlets	[1]—	124	253	190	187
Waltham Forest	0	0	[1]—	32	135
Wandsworth	74	124	[1]—	[1]—	259
Westminster	851	[1]—	1,058	1,135	923

[1] Indicates information not reported

Note:
Figures include households being accommodated pending completion of inquiries by the local authority

Source:
DETR P1(E) housing activity returns (quarterly)

National and regional information on local authorities' activity under statutory homelessness provisions is provided in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department. Table 7 presents reported data on households accepted as homeless by each London borough, and a separate Supplementary Table provides summary data, including numbers resident in B&B, for all authorities in England. Copies of these are held in the Library, and the latest edition published on 15 June presents statistics up to the end of March 2001.

Information reported to the Department by London boroughs about their expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation is as follows:

Local authorities' gross current expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation

£000

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0	0	18
Barnet	1,679	1,448	1,907	5,700	9,406
Bexley	92	98	111	424	427
Brent	2,095	2,392	3,609	3,848	5,183
Bromley	125	132	144	1,066	1,858
Camden	1,403	1,329	2,825	5,297	5,780
City of London	0	0	0	0	775
Croydon	654	609	846	2,097	3,158
Ealing	409	297	243	527	1,322
Enfield	1,641	1,790	3,663	6,776	11,062
Greenwich	0	0	0	0	0
Hackney	691	3,467	488	2,046	3,447
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,080	1,779	1,431	2,947	5,090
Haringey	4,475	4,332	5,790	15,356	16,518
Harrow	314	700	976	1,964	2,196
Havering	0	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	883	808	1,109	2,326	4,766
Hounslow	410	402	726	2,140	6,822
Islington	3,789	3,087	2,945	2,942	4,544
Kensington and Chelsea	2,287	3,222	3,240	4,937	7,215
Kingston upon Thames	171	130	155	52	485
Lambeth	1,623	664	1,391	2,092	2,057
Lewisham	4	0	0	0	0
Merton	340	368	162	271	688
Newham	1,061	824	1,401	4,773	5,388
Redbridge	486	1,182	2,029	3,354	3,486
Richmond upon Thames	217	314	460	4,346	11,184
Southwark	179	127	0	352	4,981
Sutton	193	221	163	434	1,525
Tower Hamlets	1,775	2,155	1,584	2,128	5,104
Waltham Forest	0	2	8	2	237
Wandsworth	890	698	1,626	3,440	3,289
Westminster	4,795	5,024	6,798	13,595	16,321

Source:
DTLR RO6 Revenue Outturn forms

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the average weekly level of *(a)* council rents in London and *(b)* rent charges for bed and breakfast establishments used by the London boroughs in each of the last five years. [1736]

Ms Keeble: The average weekly unrebated rents for local authority tenants in London as at April in each year, including the latest survey results for April 2001, are as follows.

Average local authority unrebated rents as at April

(£ per week)

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Barking and Dagenham	39.71	42.10	44.43	49.68	52.24	54.54
Barnet	52.11	52.60	52.59	55.35	56.92	58.52
Bexley	53.02	58.52	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Brent	69.81	69.05	70.37	72.59	72.81	73.80
Bromley	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Camden	58.71	59.69	60.76	59.77	62.92	63.97
City of London	55.34	55.82	56.83	58.58	58.70	60.80
Croydon	62.10	62.78	62.78	64.20	67.95	65.83
Ealing	59.17	58.72	59.11	60.85	63.26	64.43
Enfield	51.98	52.79	53.50	55.55	57.93	62.75
Greenwich	50.50	51.14	53.95	56.25	54.65	58.99
Hackney	54.79	55.25	56.11	56.62	58.47	61.77
Hammersmith and Fulham	53.77	54.26	56.18	57.98	59.13	61.34
Haringey	57.54	56.02	58.96	58.94	60.48	61.89
Harrow	64.68	65.17	67.21	66.77	68.65	70.97
Havering	44.59	44.95	45.18	46.83	48.26	49.68
Hillingdon	63.24	64.20	65.28	66.71	68.80	70.59
Hounslow	49.81	50.81	52.01	52.89	55.85	57.93
Islington	56.16	57.16	58.36	60.00	62.32	64.38
Kensington and Chelsea	68.72	68.72	68.16	68.17	68.15	70.23
Kingston upon Thames	61.15	61.64	63.43	63.99	66.33	68.50
Lambeth	49.56	54.01	55.24	57.72	59.88	62.00
Lewisham	46.73	48.90	49.82	52.15	55.00	57.35
Merton	52.56	53.05	54.06	54.83	56.02	58.60
Newham	43.72	44.21	44.92	49.40	54.35	56.35
Redbridge	65.89	66.36	67.56	67.65	69.14	70.20
Richmond upon Thames	52.92	54.54	56.09	61.13	62.41	[1]—
Southwark	50.07	50.56	49.70	54.74	56.56	58.04
Sutton	50.97	53.08	54.63	54.15	56.88	60.44
Tower Hamlets	45.01	49.21	50.52	58.71	62.86	66.39
Waltham Forest	46.37	49.36	52.17	59.54	62.65	64.15
Wandsworth	59.68	60.17	60.79	65.61	66.95	69.78
Westminster	64.62	66.65	68.62	73.96	76.15	78.19

[1] Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of all borough stock

Note:

Average rents chargeable for the property, excluding any service charges

Source:

DETR Housing Subsidy Claim Forms and March Survey data

Information on average rents charged by bed and breakfast establishments is not collected centrally.

Housing (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of bringing up to acceptable standard, the private sector housing stock in *(a)* Pendle, *(b)* Burnley and *(c)* East Lancashire as a whole. [1989]

Ms Keeble: We do not make estimates of costs to carry out repairs and improvements to private sector housing stock for individual districts or areas within regions. It is the responsibility of local housing authorities to assess any problems of private sector housing within their districts. Local authorities supply the Department with their estimates of the numbers of private sector unfit dwellings in their areas, they do not provide cost estimates although this will change in 2001. The latest local authority estimates for numbers of unfit dwellings are:

	Number
Pendle	5,600
Burnley	7,344
Remaining East Lancashire authorities	36,334

Housing (Warsop)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what timescale is foreseen on the use of a special purchase vehicle on private leased housing in Warsop and Warsop Vale. [2223]

Ms Keeble: The East Midlands Development Agency has been in discussion with the Meden Valley Partnership about this project and it is anticipated that decisions will be made later this year on the scale of funding that might be made available.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers are available to him when a local authority fails to enforce the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against owners who are in contravention of their obligations. [1930]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State has powers to issue listed building enforcement notices and conservation area enforcement notices. He can also take court action against those who carry out works to listed buildings or in conservation areas without the necessary consent, or in

breach of a condition attached to a consent. The Secretary of State may also prosecute owners who deliberately damage listed buildings. It is the Secretary of State's policy to take enforcement action or to prosecute only in exceptional cases.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his response to his consultation on the control of noise from civil aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [1969]

Mr. Jamieson: We will announce our conclusions later this year, after full and careful consideration of the arguments put forward by respondents.

Green Belts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the status of green belts within planning guidance, with particular reference to those within key transport corridors. [1655]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) note 2: Green Belts, issued in 1995, sets out the presumption against inappropriate development in green belts. That guidance was amended in March this year by Annexe E of PPG13: Transport which advised that, in certain limited circumstances, park and ride development in green belts was no longer inappropriate.

A30/A303

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which stretches of the *(a)* A30 and *(b)* A303 in Somerset have accident rates above the national average for A roads; and if he will make a statement. [1369]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The average rate of accidents on non-built-up A roads of the three years 1997–99, published in "Road Accidents Great Britain: 1999 The Casualty Report", was 26 per 100 million vehicle kilometres (mvkm). Only one stretch of the A303 in Somerset had an accident rate above this national average; the stretch of road between the Eagle Tavern and the A358 had an average accident rate of 27.35 per 100 mvkm in 1997–99.

The A30 in Somerset is a local road so information on accident rates is not held centrally. Further information the hon. Member requires may be held by Somerset county council.

Mobile Homes and Parks

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation to regulate *(a)* the sale and *(b)* the running of mobile homes and parks; and if he will make a statement. [2482]

Ms Keeble: Changes to the statutory provisions on the sale of mobile homes and other proposals affecting residents of mobile homes and their site owners were included in the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party, published last year. We consulted on, and are considering, the working party's recommendations.

DEFENCE

Submarines

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which fleet submarines are operational. [965]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Triumph, HMS Tireless, HMS Superb and HMS Trafalgar are currently on operational duties.

Fertility Treatment

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding the availability of fertility treatment for service personnel and their families. [2327]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence receives a small number of letters each year from service personnel or their wives on this issue.

Pilot Strength

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the benefits of recruiting RNZAF combat pilots made redundant as a result of the New Zealand Defence Review to fill gaps in RAF combat pilot strength. [972]

Mr. Ingram: The RAF, like several NATO air forces, currently has a shortfall of experienced fast jet pilots. The opportunity to recruit former Royal New Zealand Air Force pilots (who become surplus to requirements as a result of the New Zealand Government's decision to reconfigure their armed forces to undertake peacekeeping duties) is therefore of interest to the RAF. Details of the personnel directly affected by the restructuring have yet to be released by the New Zealand Defence Staff. The RAF are closely monitoring the evolving situation and senior British officers have been in contact with their opposite numbers in Wellington to highlight employment opportunities in the RAF.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sea Harriers are held in attrition reserve. [960]

Mr. Ingram: These are currently 19 Sea Harrier FA2 aircraft in the sustainment fleet, available to sustain an operational fleet of 28 Sea Harrier FA2s. The sustainment fleet includes those aircraft formerly considered as the attribution reserve fleet.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sea Harrier airframes have been used for spare parts in order to ensure other aircraft are operational. [959]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Sea Harrier conversions are currently under way; and how many more Sea Harriers will be converted to FA2 standard; [966]

(2) how many Sea Harrier FRS1s have been converted to FA2 standard. [961]

Mr. Ingram: All 33 Sea Harrier FRS1 aircraft operated by the Royal Navy at the time of the conversion programme were upgraded to FA2 standard. The programme was completed in 1999. No further upgrades to FA2 standard are planned. A further 18 new-build Sea Harrier FA2 aircraft were purchased from new.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sea Harrier engines have been upgraded to 1161 standard. [969]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Warships

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each operational warship of the Royal Navy, together with its scheme of complement total, and the number of trained men on board each vessel. [962]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 90 HM ships and submarines in the operational fleet. This includes all vessels on operational duties or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training. The precise manning level of ships available for operations is an indicator of the operational readiness of each individual ship and I am withholding the information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The total number of trained personnel on board these vessels as at 25 June 2001, is 9,012 against a scheme of complement total of 9,510.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all Royal Navy warships put to sea with their full weapon outload; and if he will make a statement. [964]

Mr. Ingram: All Royal Navy ships are equipped with weapon outloads appropriate to their operational tasking.

Fleet Air Arm

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Fleet Air Arm's inventory is of each type of Lynx helicopter; and how many are operationally available. [963]

Mr. Ingram: As at Monday 25 June 2001, the Royal Navy had a total of 38 Mk3 and 36 Mk8 Lynx helicopters. Of these, 25 Mk3 and 18 Mk8 aircraft were operationally available. These figures provide a snapshot on a specific date. Numbers can change as aircraft move in and out of maintenance.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if type 23 frigates were procured to replace type 22 frigates; and if he will make a statement. [958]

Mr. Ingram: The type 23 class frigate was conceived in the late 1970s as a light anti-submarine frigate whose primary role was to meet the then Soviet nuclear submarine threat in the North Atlantic. This new class was intended to replace the Leander class frigate, which was developed in the 1950s and the type 21 class frigate, developed in the 1960s, as the backbone of the Royal Navy's surface ship anti-submarine force. The type 23 class frigate was not procured as a replacement for the type 22 frigate.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of each of the Royal Navy's type 23 frigates. [967]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of HMS Norfolk, the first of the type 23 class frigates, was £135.449 million. The following 16 vessels have cost, or are estimated to cost where final payments are not yet due, between £60 million and £96 million depending on when the vessel was ordered and the scope of shipbuilder supplied equipment.

Merlin Helicopter

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Merlin helicopter will be cleared for night-time active sonar dipping operations; and if he will make a statement. [957]

Mr. Ingram: The Merlin helicopter is expected to receive appropriate clearance to conduct night-time active sonar dipping operations before the end of 2001.

Link 16

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of studies indicating significant operational advantages in fitting Link 16 to the Tornado GR4 and Harrier GR7 fleets; [968]

(2) for what reason he has decided not to install Link 16 on the Tornado GR4 and Harrier GR7 fleets. [970]

Mr. Ingram: The operational advantages offered by systems such as Link 16 are well recognised. The capability is already fitted in some aircraft types and it will be fitted more widely in our aircraft and ships. As with any defence equipment capability, decisions have to be made about priorities. Link 16 is not currently planned to be fitted to Tornado GR4 or Harrier GR7 aircraft as we have higher operational priorities.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason he has decided not to install Link 16 on naval platforms. [971]

Mr. Ingram: No such decision has been taken. On current plans, we will install Link 16 in several in-service naval and air platforms as follows:

In-service platform	*ISD with Link 16*
Type 42 destroyer (Batch 2 and 3)	2004
CVS (Invincible class)	2004
Sea King AEW	2002
Nimrod (R)	2003
Sea Harrier FA2	2004

Major new naval and air platforms, such as Eurofighter and the Type 45 destroyer, will be provided with situational awareness through secure tactical data links, in many cases by installing Link 16.

Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the prime contractors and their partner companies who have responded to the invitation to negotiate on the future strategic tanker aircraft project; what locations they have specified for their main operating base; and if any of the bids include any role for Dera or Quinetiq at Boscombe Down airfield. [867]

Dr. Moonie: We received bids on 3 July from two consortia: Air Tanker, consisting of Cobham, Thales, Brown & Root, EADS and Rolls Royce, and a consortium consisting of BAE Systems, Boeing, Serco and Spectrum Capital. Evaluation of the bids, which are complex and commercially sensitive, has only just begun. I am withholding further information under Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I shall, however, write to the hon. Member as soon as our analysis of the bids permits.

Northumberland National Park

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future use of Otterburn Training Area in the Northumberland National Park. [868]

Dr. Moonie: Otterburn Training Area is one of the Ministry of Defence's principal training facilities. In common with all training areas, military training was suspended at Otterburn in recent months due to foot and mouth restrictions, but resumed on 29 June.

As the hon. Member may be aware the MOD has plans to develop the Otterburn training area and our proposals have been subject to two lengthy sessions of a non-statutory public inquiry. The inquiry Inspector's report is with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and we await the decision.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Single European Currency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment the Government have made of the potential increase in *(a)* organised crime and *(b)* financial crime in the UK and elsewhere of UK entry into the single European currency, with particular reference to the planned maximum denomination of euro notes; and if he will make a statement; [1259]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the increase in *(a)* organised crime and *(b)* financial crime in the United Kingdom resulting from the introduction of the single European currency in other EU member states, with particular reference to the planned maximum denomination of euro notes; what measures the Government are taking as a result; and if he will make a statement. [1242]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Law enforcement and other competent authorities in the United Kingdom are already working with their counterparts abroad in preventing and combating crime in relation to the single European currency. Threat assessments have been carried out, at both the national level by the United Kingdom's National Criminal Intelligence Service and the European level by Europol, to determine the potential impact of organised and financial crime involving the Euro, including counterfeiting and money laundering. These analyses and the experience being gained would be fully taken into account if the Government were to recommend United Kingdom entry into the single currency and Parliament and the people in a referendum were to agree.

Work Permits

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W, on work permits, if he will place a copy of the affidavit received from a Trinidad and Tobago Football Association medical officer in the Libraries of both Houses. [2086]

Angela Eagle: No. The affidavit was provided for the purpose of considering applications for work permits and it is not the practice of Work Permits (United Kingdom) to disclose documents submitted in support of applications.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W, on work permits, what inquiries were made to validate the information contained in the affidavit provided by a Trinidad and Tobago Football Association medical official. [2087]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* There was no information to suggest that the evidence provided in the sworn affidavit was incorrect and in the absence of such information the Department did not think it necessary to make any inquiries to validate this information.

Telephone Tapping Warrants

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of telephone tapping warrants issued in each reporting period since 1980; and if he will make a statement. [1456]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The numbers of interception warrants issued in 1980–84 are set out in the White Paper "The Interception of Communications in the United Kingdom" dated February 1985 (Cmnd 9438), prior to the introduction of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 now replaced by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

Numbers of warrants issued annually since 1985 have been published in the reports of the Interception Commissioners, copies of which are placed in the Library. The annual report for 2000 is not yet available.

Asylum Vouchers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will reform the no-change policy in relation to asylum vouchers; by what date he intends to publish the findings of the review of asylum vouchers; and if he will make a statement; [1511]

(2) if he will place in the Library a summary of the submissions made in response to the Government's review of asylum vouchers, indicating which individuals and organisations favoured abolition of vouchers; and if he will make a statement. [1638]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 50W. We are looking at the no-change rule as part of the review of the operation of the asylum voucher scheme. The Government have undertaken to place in the Library a list of those organisations which have contributed to the review and copies of their representations, once the review is complete.

Young Offenders (Community Orders)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community orders relating to young offenders have been *(a)* breached and *(b)* revoked since 1 April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [2360]

Beverley Hughes: 40,853 community orders were imposed between April 2000 and March 2001. Of these, 11,760 were breached, the order revoked and the offender resentenced.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to require Youth Offending Teams to collect data for breaches and revocations of the different types of community order made against young offenders. [2359]

Beverley Hughes: The Youth Justice Board is currently in the process of revising its data collection methods. It will shortly be requiring Youth Offending Teams to record breaches for certain types of community orders made against young offenders.

Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on private companies providing remunerated work-based prison regimes within the prison estate; and if he will make a statement [2120]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service is keen to work with outside contractors to provide increased and better quality employment opportunities for prisoners, where local circumstances permit. However, the primary aim of regimes for prisoners is to address their offending behaviour and improve their employability so as to reduce the risk that they will re-offend on release. It is important that regimes provide a mix of offending behaviour, drugs treatment and educational programmes and resettlement activities as well as work and vocational training.

The private sector was originally introduced into prison management because of the possible benefits of cost and speed of delivery but also the prospect of improvements in the quality of prison conditions. Where a prison is under private sector management, the contract requires employment and other purposeful activity to be provided and specifies the level of provision.

Coroners Courts

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans for the reform of coroners courts. [1729]

Beverley Hughes: We are keen to ensure that coroners can provide a modern, effective, service. A fundamental review of the coroner arrangements was accordingly announced in January, with terms of reference published in March. An announcement about the names of the chair and review members is expected to be made shortly.

The review will address the coroner system both in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, and will consider recommendations for changes to death certification procedures and the arrangements needed for the investigation of suspicious and unnatural deaths. I expect the review to report towards the end of next year.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 19 April regarding a constituent, ref. G2793286, PO4790/01. [1096]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* My noble Friend Lord Rooker replied to my hon. Friend on 26 June. I am very sorry for the delay in replying.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter addressed to his predecessor on 2 April by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Shazia Azhar Alvi. [802]

Mr. Blunkett: My officials wrote to my right hon. Friend on 20 June about this case and I will reply to him shortly.

Immigration and Asylum

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the quality of statistics available to him on immigration and asylum. [2093]

Angela Eagle: Statistics on immigration and asylum are based on administrative sources and their quality is benefiting from the improvements and developments that have been made to the administrative systems over the past year. Further improvements in quality and scope are expected. The data produced monthly shortly after the end of the reference period are subject to quality improvement and revision prior to publication in biennial and annual statistical publications to take account of the delayed reporting of data and data cleansing work.

Immigration and asylum statistics are published in a Command Paper and a number of regular statistical bulletins covering general immigration, asylum, and citizenship. All these publications form part of the National Statistics and as such are produced to professional standards set out in a Code of Practice. The formal assessment of data quality is incorporated in the cycle of reviews under the National Statistics Work Programme.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Coram Foundation

39. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on her policy relating to the Coram family, with special reference to plans to display its works of art and other memorabilia. [912]

The Solicitor-General: I must emphasise at the outset that I am required to act in this matter as protector of charity. Indeed, it would be improper for me to take into account any consideration other than what is in the best interests of charity.

The Thomas Coram Foundation is a child care charity—its objects are broadly the support and maintenance of poor children. My predecessor intervened, as he was required to do, to ensure that any plans for the Hogarth paintings and other heritage assets which belong to the foundation are consistent with charity law. Essentially, the assets must be applied for the purpose of benefiting the charitable objects of the foundation, that is to say for child care purposes.

I sympathise with the position of the Governors and Coram and am anxious to assist them to find a solution which is in the best interests of the charity.

So the Attorney-General will be discussing this, among other issues, with the Charity Commissioners and will meet the Governors of Coram to discuss it with them.

Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act

40. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Solicitor-General on how many occasions the Attorney-General has been asked to consider prosecutions under section 5 of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998; and on how many occasions he has not consented to such prosecutions. [913]

The Solicitor-General: As the hon. Gentleman knows, section 5 of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998 relates to legislation governing the possible indictment in the UK of individuals who are conspiring to commit offences abroad.

So far the Attorney-General has given his consent to the prosecution of two individuals involved in a conspiracy to facilitate the entry of illegal immigrants into the United States of America and the United Kingdom. There were eight defendants involved in the conspiracy and all were successfully prosecuted.

There have been no other applications for the Attorney-General's consent under this provision.

Human Rights Act

41. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998 on the Crown Prosecution Service. [914]

The Solicitor-General: The Human Rights Act 1998 has undoubtedly affected all aspects of the work undertaken by the Crown Prosecution Service. This was anticipated from a very early stage and a high priority was given to ensuring that the CPS was well prepared for the implementation of the Act on 2 October 2000.

An intensive training programme for prosecutors and selected caseworkers was undertaken before 2 October 2000. Follow-up training is still being undertaken. The quality and intensity of the training has meant that cases giving rise to human rights issues have been dealt with in a professional and effective manner. CPS areas have reported that prosecutors are using convention arguments with greater confidence than ever before.

The Human Rights Act has meant that the courts are considering many new arguments. A number of cases raising human rights points have already been decided by the appeal courts. Fast tracking of cases has enabled cases that have an impact on the criminal justice system as a whole to be heard quickly by the appeal courts. This has assisted in ensuring that blockages in the criminal justice system have not developed.

Crown Prosecution Service

42. **Mr. Dhanda:** To ask the Solicitor-General what policies she has for tackling racism and promoting equality in the Crown Prosecution Service. [916]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is committed to ensuring that it does not discriminate as an employer or as a prosecutor.

The CPS has undertaken a series of initiatives to address discrimination and change the culture of the organisation. An Equality and Diversity Unit has been established to ensure that the CPS equality statement is implemented. A training programme in equality and diversity, with emphasis on racial equality, is under way and by March 2002 all staff will be trained.

A new range of initiatives undertaken by the CPS internally include a "dignity at work" campaign, aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is valued. The CPS has developed positive action training for minority ethnic staff in areas where they are under-represented. The CPS is also seeking to engage with local minority ethnic communities and leaflets in 12 languages explaining the work of the CPS have been distributed. New guidance has also been provided to prosecutors on their responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The CPS is also examining the findings of the Denman report into race discrimination in the CPS. The CPS hopes to co-ordinate a response to the Denman report together with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) report into the CPS Croydon branch.

43. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on progress of the inquiry by Ms Denman into racism in the Crown Prosecution Service. [917]

The Solicitor-General: Sylvia Denman has recently completed her inquiry and her report has been delivered to the Crown Prosecution Service. It is hoped to co-ordinate publication of the report together with the findings of the Commission for Racial Equality in relation to their investigation of the CPS Croydon branch. This would enable the Crown Prosecution Service to take a coherent and comprehensive approach to its race equality work.

Postal Voting

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Solicitor-General what discussions she has had with the CPS on prosecution policy in respect of forging signatures on applications to vote by post at the last general election. [915]

The Solicitor-General: I have spoken to the Chief Executive of the CPS to discuss current prosecution policy.

The police are responsible for investigating any complaints of forged postal applications to vote. As this is a specialised area of law, CPS headquarters handle all cases involving breaches of election law referred to the CPS by the police. All cases are reviewed in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors, to assess the sufficiency of evidence and where appropriate the public interest in bringing a prosecution.

CPS experience shows that allegations of this kind are received from a number of sources over a period of months. It is still too early to say whether the increase in postal voting has led to an increase in criminal complaints. In addition, the CPS liaises with the Electoral Commission as the Commission is required to publish a report on the conduct and administration of the recent general election.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the agenda for the meeting of the EU-Israel Association Committee in May to review the operation of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. [824]

Peter Hain: A copy of the agenda, agreed by the EU and Israel, was deposited in the House of Commons Library on 2 July 2001.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Israeli authorities have responded to the EU post-verification requests for certificates of origin for goods alleged to be from illegal settlements. [825]

Peter Hain: The Israeli Customs Authorities have responded to a number of the post-verification requests for certificates of origin for goods exported by Israel under the preferences conferred by the EU-Israel Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement. Under the terms of the Agreement, Israel has 10 months to reply to each request. All the responses should be received within the coming weeks. The EU will consider next steps in the light of the responses received.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the EU will stop the import of suspected settlement products under preference in the absence of the necessary proofs of origin within the internationally recognised borders of Israel, as provided for in the post-verification exercise. [826]

Peter Hain: The UK supports the Commission's efforts to establish whether any infringements of the EU-Israel Association Agreement have taken place. EU member states continue to receive responses from the Israeli authorities to their post-verification requests, and all of these responses need to be analysed. The EC will consider next steps and will then discuss the issue with Israel at the EU-Israel Customs Co-operation Committee on 23 July 2001.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what safeguards the EU secured from the Israeli authorities that co-operation on *(a)* scientific and technological, *(b)* economic, *(c)* trade and *(d)* audio-visual and cultural matters, as discussed at the meeting of the EU-Israel Association Committee on 21 May, would give equal access to Arab, Druse and Jewish citizens of Israel and would not include any institutions operating in illegal settlements outside the international borders of Israel. [828]

Peter Hain: The EU-Israel Association Agreement provides for co-operation between the EU and Israel in a number of areas, and also allows Israel to participate in a number of EU programmes. The EU operates a non-discrimination policy in deciding which institutions can access these co-operation programmes.

The EU has repeatedly condemned settlement activity in the occupied territories (including east Jerusalem). It is illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. Therefore, institutions from the Israeli settlements will not be eligible to participate in any EU co-operation or programme.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the EU proposes to monitor that co-operation between the EU and Israel under the EU-Israel Trade Association Agreement conforms with equal opportunities in benefiting Jewish, Druse and Arab citizens of Israel. [829]

Peter Hain: We take human rights issues, including equal opportunity for all, extremely seriously. Respect for human rights and democratic principles is regularly raised during dialogue at all levels, most recently at the EU-Israel Association Committee on 21 May 2001. EU Heads of Mission in Tel Aviv also regularly raise human rights concerns with the Israeli Government.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the decisions taken by the meeting of the EU-Israel Association Committee on 21 May. [827]

Peter Hain: A report of the outcome of the meeting can be made public only with the agreement of the EU member states and of Israel.

Western Sahara

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is regarding recognition of Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [1437]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government do not recognise Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara. The UK fully support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General, his Personal Envoy, James Baker, and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in finding a just and lasting solution to this issue.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is towards the right of self-determination of the population of Western Sahara through a United Nations-sponsored referendum; and if he will make a statement. [1436]

Mr. Bradshaw: We supported United Nations Security Council resolution 1359 which was passed unanimously on 29 June 2001 and which extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 November 2001. This reiterated full support for the on-going efforts of MINURSO to implement the Settlement Plan and agreements adopted by the parties to hold a free, fair and impartial referendum for the self-determination of the people of the Western Sahara.

Nice Treaty

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to renegotiate the Nice treaty to deal with the objections of the Irish people. [1558]

Peter Hain: I refer the right hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) of 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 167W.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the implementation of the Nice treaty on EU enlargement of the Irish referendum result rejecting Irish ratification. [1822]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) of 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 167W.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the report to the European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Affairs on the treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union, report number A5–0168/2001 Final, dated 4 May. [1764]

Peter Hain: We welcome all contributions to the debate on the future of Europe.

However, final decisions will be taken by member states at the inter-governmental conference in 2004.

British Dependent Territories

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made to ensure that all British Dependent Territories citizens have been offered British citizenship and the right of abode. [1304]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Overseas Territories Bill, which will grant British Citizenship and the right of abode in the United Kingdom to British Dependent Territories citizens in qualifying territories, was given a first reading in the House of Lords on 21 June. The Second Reading is scheduled for 10 July. The Bill was published on 22 June. Copies, with Explanatory Notes, are available from the Libraries of both Houses.

Africa

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to give greater priority to Africa within his Department's policy. [1821]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Prime Minister has made clear that Africa is a major foreign policy priority. The Minister for Africa, Baroness Amos, will be working to build on the solid base established over the past few years. Our aim is to promote a stable, democratic and well-governed African continent, which is increasingly free from conflict, disease and poverty and which will be able to play a full role in the global economy. We shall be working with the many African leaders whose goals are similar.

Conflict Prevention

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department proposes to make conflict prevention and peacekeeping more effective. [1833]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is engaged on a number of fronts to make international conflict prevention and peacekeeping more effective. We are working to push conflict prevention up the international agenda with GB, UN and EU partners; to help make international organisations better at peacekeeping and conflict prevention; to assist other countries with their peacekeeping efforts; and to improve our own contribution.

We support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to move the UN:

"from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention",

and welcome his recent report on conflict prevention, which pursues this aim. We are working closely with EU and UN partners to follow up implementation of the report on UN Peace Operations drawn up by the Panel chaired by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi in 2000. In particular, we are pressing for improved early warning mechanisms within the UN system, better analysis of where problems might arise and more effective rapid deployment mechanisms. We are also working with UN Security Council partners to improve the decision-making processes leading to the deployment of UN peacekeeping operations.

The Government have established two cross-departmental conflict prevention pooled funds to help maximise our contribution to conflict prevention and peacekeeping work. The pools—one for sub-Saharan Africa and one for the rest of the world—are jointly managed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence. Their purpose is to produce a joint strategy to facilitate collective decision making on where

and how to focus our conflict prevention efforts, enabling Government to identify ways in which these Departments, by working more closely together, can make more a effective contribution.

We are also putting mechanisms in place to improve the effectiveness of our national contributions to peacekeeping. These involve a rapid deployment capability for civilian police and on-call arrangements for military personnel.

ABM Treaty

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the United States Government's intention to abrogate the anti-ballistic missile treaty; and if the future of the ABM treaty was discussed with the United States Administration delegation at the Gothenburg summit in June. [1823]

Mr. Bradshaw: The future of the anti-ballistic missile treaty is first and foremost a matter for the US and Russia as parties to the treaty. We welcome US and Russian consultations on strategic issues, and were encouraged by the outcome of the summit between Presidents Bush and Putin and by both sides' commitment to further constructive discussions on the issues.

The future of the ABMT was not discussed at the EU-US summit in Gothenburg.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work has been done by his Department to assess the global reaction to a unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty by the US. [2297]

Mr. Bradshaw: The future of the anti-ballistic missile treaty is first and foremost a matter for the US and Russia as parties to the treaty. Presidents Bush and Putin agreed at their recent summit that the two sides should continue their consultations on missile defence and the ABMT. It is therefore premature to make such an assessment.

US National Missile Defence

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Russian Government concerning the proposed US National Missile Defence system. [2295]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not yet discussed missile defence with his Russian counterpart. Missile defence is of course the subject of regular exchanges with Russia at all levels.

Export Controls

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goods, controlled by the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, were approved for export to Iraq in 2000. [3073]

Mr. Bradshaw: Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry approved on 21 July 2000 a licence to export spare parts for use in Iraq's electricity sector under the UN Oil for Food programme. The spare parts included a roller bearing, which is controlled by the Wassenaar Arrangement in line with existing Security Council resolutions. The export of the goods to Iraq was approved by the UN Sanctions Committee. The announcement of this export is in line with the Government's commitment to increasing transparency in the field of export controls.

Death Certificates

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the procedure is for issuing a death certificate for a British citizen who dies abroad. [2484]

Mr. Bradshaw: Deaths of British nationals overseas may be recorded in the consular register of deaths held by the British mission in the country where the death occurred (with the exception of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Overseas Territories; deaths which have occurred in Pakistan prior to 19 February 1972 cannot be registered). For a death to be registered the Registration Officer must be satisfied as to the national status of the deceased and the following original documentation presented in support of the application: the civil death certificate issued by the local authorities; evidence of the deceased's claim to British nationality, eg full UK birth certificate or British passport or certificate of naturalisation or registration.

A consular fee is levied for this service.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the applicant KB under Dhaka reference 59569 will be called for interview. [2487]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not our practice to disclose details of individual entry clearance cases in a public forum. The Joint Entry Clearance Unit will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North about this case in the next few days.

Norwegian Whaling

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and how the Government have opposed Norwegian whaling *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside the International Whaling Commission; how the Government have sought to get the Norwegian Government to curtail whaling activities; and whether Norway is permitted to survey minke whale populations in United Kingdom waters. [2078]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The UK Government take every appropriate opportunity, both within the International Whaling Commission and in other relevant forums, to express their opposition to Norwegian whaling and to persuade Norway to cease its whaling activities. After careful consideration the Government have refused Norway's recent application to survey minke whale populations in UK waters as we are not convinced that it is in the best interests of whale conservation.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

World Trade Organisation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those Least Developed Countries which are members of the World Trade Organisation; and what progress has been made with the establishment of a fast-track accession process to the WTO. [2289]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Thirty Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are already WTO members. These are Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia. Another nine LDCs are currently negotiating to join the WTO (Bhutan, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Laos, Nepal, Samoa, Sudan, Vanuatu, and Yemen) and are at different stages of the process.

At the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries in May 2001, the EU (in a joint statement with US, Canada and Japan), reinforced its support for the expedition of the WTO accession processes for the nine LDCs currently negotiating to join. The statement underlined our interest in streamlining the LDC accession process; seeking reasonable market access commitments; making full use of WTO Provisions for LDCs and strengthening technical assistance and capacity building. I have today placed a copy of the joint EU/ Canada/Japan/US statement in the Library of the House.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in her Department's commitment to increase its support for WTO capacity building projects. [2288]

Clare Short: Our recent White Paper on International Development (Making Globalisation Work for the Poor) commits the Government to doubling their support for trade related capacity building to £30 million over the next three years. A number of initiatives have been taken forward since the publication of the White Paper in December. These include:

A £7.5 million bilateral commitment to the Africa Trade and Poverty Programme, to begin this autumn in six countries while a further six countries are identified this summer;

A further £1.1 million to provide ongoing support to the Commonwealth Secretariat's Trade and Investment Access facility;

A £700,000 bilateral commitment to support trade capacity development in Ghana;

A £600,000 commitment to support a development capacity building project focused on trade related intellectual property rights with UNCTAD and the NGO ICTSD (International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development);

A further £370,000 to provide ongoing support to the Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme (with the WTO, ITC and UNCTAD) which supports a number of East and West African countries on trade policy formulation and implementation;

A £300,000 commitment with ICTSD to support African countries participation in trade negotiations with a special focus on trade and sustainable development;

A £350,000 ($500,000) commitment to support the pilot phase of the enhanced Integrated Framework for least developed countries. We are also working closely with the World bank and other partners to guide this initiative.

UN Aids Conference

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the UN Aids Conference in New York. [2290]

Clare Short: The Declaration of Commitment adopted by 189 delegations at the 26th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly sets out a global consensus on future actions necessary to tackle the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The Declaration commits member states to a series of national targets and strategies to achieve them in the areas of leadership; prevention; care, support and treatment; HIV/AIDS and human rights; reducing vulnerability; children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS; alleviating social and economic impact; research and development; HIV/AIDS in conflict and disaster affected regions; resources and follow-up. The Declaration does not clearly identify those individuals and groups at highest risk of infection because of blocking action by a group of states. Uganda and Thailand have demonstrated that an open and honest approach to tackling the epidemic can lead to a reduction in the rate of transmission of the disease. Other countries must follow their example.

The Declaration confirms what we know needs to be done to begin to contain the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is now time to urgently transform commitments into action at country-level to tackle the epidemic.

Internet Access

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department's study on the cost of internet access in developing countries will be completed. [2287]

Clare Short: The consultants have submitted a draft report which is being discussed by officials of my Department in consultation with officials of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Natural Resources Institute

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what representations she has made to the University of Greenwich concerning reduction in staff at the Natural Resources Institute; and what assessment she has made of its effect on development and food production; [1689]

(2) what representations she has made to the Natural Resources Institute concerning redundancies of specialists there; [1691]

(3) what assessment she has made of the effect on agriculture and natural resource management in developing countries following the planned reduction in staff at the Natural Resources Institute. [1690]

Clare Short: It is for the University and the Institute to judge what staff they need. I understand that planned changes at NRI are designed to relate the numbers and type of staff more closely to the present day demand for research and consultancy and hence to equip NRI to contribute more effectively to development in the field of renewable natural resources.

Poverty Reduction

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategy papers in reducing poverty. [2292]

Clare Short: Only five countries—Uganda, Burkino Faso, Tanzania, Mauritania and Bolivia have developed full poverty reduction strategy papers. More than 20 low income countries, have produced interim PRSPs and a further 15 could be presented by the end of 2001. PRSPs contain goals and targets for poverty reduction over 3–10 years. One positive early indication is the strong degree of local ownership that has emerged in the course of developing many of the PRSPs.

Technical Assistance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the enhanced integrated framework pilot project to improve the efficiency of trade-related technical assistance to least developed countries; and what plans she has to develop a more extensive initiative. [2293]

Clare Short: The implementation of the enhanced Integrated Framework (IF) commenced as a Pilot Scheme on 3 May 2001 with the adoption of the Pilot Phase Work Programme by the WTO Steering Committee. The three countries selected for the pilot process are Cambodia, Madagascar and Mauritania. The operation of the scheme will be reviewed prior to the fourth WTO ministerial meeting in November 2001, with a view to extension to other countries.

Montserrat

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in providing post-16 education for children in Montserrat. [1306]

Clare Short: The Government of Montserrat manage a programme of post secondary education, through the University of West Indies Distance Learning Centre. The Government of Montserrat are considering how to meet the tuition needs of A-level students in the short term. In the longer term, the Government of Montserrat are planning a new Community College and considering possible funding.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations have been made to the Montserrat Government concerning the withdrawal of benefits from elderly people living with their relatives. [1316]

Clare Short: In February 2000, the Government of Montserrat introduced a means tested social assistance scheme to replace the near-universal food welfare scheme which was made available following the onset of volcanic activity.

The introduction of the scheme has been closely monitored and levels of assistance are kept under review by the Social Welfare Board which includes representatives of the Government of Montserrat and civil society.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessments have been made of volcanic activity and dome buildings in the Soufrière Hills volcano in Montserrat. [1315]

Clare Short: The Montserrat Volcano Observatory's assessment is available weekly through local media and published on their website www.mvomrat.com.

The formal scientific and hazard assessment was last updated in January 2001. It concluded that the volcano had entered into a second period of prolonged dome growth, likely to last for at least the next few years. The risk to the populated areas of the island is considered low, though a shift in the direction of dome growth, towards the north or west, would make the areas bordering the exclusion zones a high risk. A copy of the full scientific assessment has been placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to encourage tourism in Montserrat. [1314]

Clare Short: The Government of Montserrat are supporting a number of tourism initiatives, including the development of nature trails, assistance to the Montserrat Tourist Board and the development of volcano-linked tourism.

UN Development Targets

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made towards the UN international development targets for 2015; and if she will make a statement. [1748]

Clare Short: An analysis of progress towards the International Development Targets is shown in DFID's "Departmental Report 2001", pages 11 and 12, a copy of which is in the House Library.

Progress is being made against all targets although current trends are not enough to achieve all of them in every region of the world. The income poverty target looks as if it will be met, thanks notably to progress in the large countries of Asia, but some countries are moving less fast. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, has stagnated for most of the past decade though some African Governments have made significant progress in reducing poverty. Intense efforts will be needed if Sub-Saharan Africa is to reach the targets.

Much has been achieved, but much remains to be done—1.2 billion people still exist in extreme poverty, 113 million children are currently out of school and over half a million women still die in pregnancy and childbirth each year.

Increased international effort is needed, building on what has already been achieved and on the overwhelming consensus reached at the 2000 Millennium summit last September. This summit reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to achieving the goals as a first step towards eradicating global poverty.

The challenge over the next few years will be to turn this commitment into solid and sustained action. National Governments must take the lead. Industrialised countries must work for a stronger commitment in global institutions and agreements to the systematic reduction of poverty. Development assistance needs to increase and be deployed more effectively on building national capacity to meet the IDTs. Globalisation must be managed if its effects are to benefit the poorest people in the poorest countries. DFID's approach to this is set out in our White Paper published last December, a copy of which is also in the House Library.

DFID is widely seen as playing a leading role in the drive towards the international development targets. The long-term fall in UK development assistance has been reversed and this Government are committed to increasing the oda/GNP ratio from its year 2000 level of 0.31 per cent. to 0.34 per cent. by 2003–04. Our manifesto committed the Government to further substantial increases during this Parliament.

Overseas Development (Investment)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of *(a)* the total investment in all forms of overseas development by her Department, for each country dealt with by her Department, in the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 and *(b)* expenditure per head of population for each country. [1393]

Clare Short: Details of all DFID's expenditure on overseas development is contained in "Statistics on International Development".

Development Council

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the outcome was of the Development Council held on 31 May; and if she will make a statement. [1942]

Clare Short: At its meeting on the 31 May, the Development Council:

called for increased poverty focus in EC aid; clear indicators of performance; more effective collaboration with other donors; and coherence between development objectives and other EC policies. It also agreed a mechanism for monitoring performance against such indicators;

called for the EU to improve co-ordination with other organisations on conflict issues without adding to bureaucracy; agreed that development adds the vital longer-term perspective to analysis of conflict and highlighted the importance of building national capacity to prevent and resolve conflict;

agreed conclusions on Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development; Election Monitoring; EC-UN Partnership; and Follow-up to the EC Development Policy;

adopted a Joint Declaration with the Commission on the Global Health Fund.

We will be reporting separately on the outcome of the Council to the Chairs of the House of Lords European Union Committee, the Clerks of the International Development Committee and the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee.

St. Helena

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Government of St. Helena concerning improvements in transport services to and from the island; what further discussions she has had regarding a proposed airport for St. Helena; and if she will make a statement. [1785]

Clare Short: The report of the "Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access" for St. Helena, which addresses the future international passenger and cargo transport needs of the island, has just been finalised. Copies are available in the House of Commons' Library. The study's findings are currently under discussion with the St. Helena Government. We have made it clear that we will support funding for either the cost of replacing the RMS St. Helena or the estimated capital cost of an airport and related infrastructure, depending on which is most cost-effective.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the proposals of the St. Helena Leisure Corporation for the future of that island. [1684]

Clare Short: The St. Helena Leisure Company has held preliminary discussions with the St. Helena Government and my Department about its proposals to provide leisure facilities on the island. At the request of the St. Helena Government, we have made available to the Company a copy of the recent report of the 'Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access' for St. Helena. We understand that the Company wishes to take account of the study's findings in further formulating its proposals to the St. Helena Government.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the results of the comparative study of air and sea access to the island of St. Helena will be published. [1685]

Clare Short: The report of the 'Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access' has just been finalised. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fixed Term Work Directive

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implementation of the EU directive on fixed term work. [1966]

Alan Johnson: The fixed term directive is due to be implemented by 10 July 2001, but provides that member states may take up to an extra year to implement if they encounter special difficulties. The public consultation on the implementation of this directive in the UK closed on 31 May and the responses have shown that there are particular difficulties with the implementation of the directive in this country. In particular, the relative lack of existing legal provisions on fixed term contracts in the UK has made it difficult to establish how they are used. We shall therefore be taking extra time to implement the fixed term directive and have notified the European Commission accordingly. Before deciding to take extra time to implement the Directive, we consulted with

employer and employee representative bodies, including the CBI and TUC. I am aware that several other member states have indicated they will also be taking extra time to implement the directive.

Productivity

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the United Kingdom's productivity rate compared with that of the United States; and if she will make a statement. [2159]

Ms Hewitt: The Government monitor the productivity gap with the US and other leading industrial countries as part of our Public Service Agreement commitments. The most recent assessment can be found in "Productivity in the UK: Enterprise and the Productivity Challenge", which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I published on 18 June 2001. This document sets out the next steps the Government will take to narrow the productivity gap.

Small Businesses (Merseyside)

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to increase the productivity of small businesses in the Merseyside sub-region. [2015]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* We have established the Small Business Service on Merseyside to help small businesses enhance their competitiveness and profitability. They work with a range of partners, including the Government Office (especially as the managing agent for the European Objective One Programme, which has a significant resource dedicated to developing business) and the North West Development Agency, to champion entrepreneurship and business improvement and to minimise the burden of regulation.

Manufacturing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policies for supporting UK manufacturing industries. [1728]

Mr. Wilson: The platform of economic stability the Government have established, together with our policies to foster enterprise and help firms to innovate and grow, are the best way to secure the long-term success of UK manufacturing industries.

Export Controls

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish responses to the consultation on draft legislation on export controls published on 29 March (Cm 5091); and if she will make a statement. [3099]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department has received 52 responses to the consultation on draft legislation on export controls published on 29 March. I am today placing copies of the responses in the Libraries of both Houses and in the Library of the Department. I have also arranged for copies of the responses to be made available by the Department's Export Control Organisation on request.

Universal Bank

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government will make transitional finance available for rural sub-post offices before 2003; and if she will make it her policy that the universal bank will be post office based. [30]

Mr. Alexander: Decisions on the provision of transitional financial assistance for rural sub-post offices will be taken in the context of advice from the Postal Services Commission which we expect to receive in the autumn in line with the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit report. Earlier this year, a new Government fund, with a funding allocation for the current financial year, was announced to help with the costs of relocating and refurbishing rural post offices. Universal banking services is a Post Office based approach which will ensure that those benefit and pension recipients who wish to continue to collect their benefits in cash, in full, across a post office counter, will be able to do so.

Public Services

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with trade unions in respect of proposals to introduce greater private sector management into the public services. [1757]

Ms Hewitt: I have regular meetings with trade unions at which we discuss a wide range of topics.

Adhesive Label Manufacturing

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the reclassification of backing paper as packaging material on the competitiveness of the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry. [1236]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not assessed the impact of this obligation on the competitiveness of the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry. Nevertheless, the regulations should not place UK business at a competitive disadvantage in the domestic market given that imported packaging is equally obligated. Similarly, packaging which is exported from the UK is not obligated under the UK packaging regulations.

The Department works closely with representatives of the UK's paper and printing related industries in order to help improve their long term prospects. To this end, we are currently exploring ways to take forward recommendations from recent competitiveness studies for paper related industries, in partnership with the Confederation of Paper Industries and the British Printing Industries Federation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the change in the annual cost to the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry of the reclassification of backing paper as packaging material; and if she will make a statement. [1237]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not independently estimated the change in the annual cost to the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry.

However, the Environment Agency have estimated that the cost in 2001 to the UK adhesive label manufacturing industry as a whole will be in the order of £430,000.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners in Merseyside have *(a)* received final compensation payments, *(b)* received interim compensation payments and *(c)* undertaken a medical assessment and are awaiting payment for (i) vibration white finger and (ii) respiratory diseases. [2029]

Mr. Wilson: IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered, in Merseyside' 778 claims in relation to Vibration White Finger, VWF. Of these, 428 have attended appointments to undergo the Medical Assessment Process, MAP. To date, IRISC have made 197 interim payments and 128 claims have been settled in full and final settlement.

With regard to respiratory diseases, IRISC have registered 1,383 claims in Merseyside'. Of these, 605 claimants have undertaken a screening spirometry test and 132 claimants have undergone the full MAP. To date, IRISC have made 279 interim payments and 82 offers in full and final settlement.

' Merseyside is defined by postcodes with prefixes CH 41–49, 60–63, L 3, 9, 10–13, 16–26, 29–31, 34–38, 62–63, PR 8,9, WA 10–12 and WN4–5.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average duration is between medical assessment and final compensation payment for former coal miners seeking compensation for *(a)* Vibration White Finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases. [2010]

Mr. Wilson: With regard to Vibration White Finger, VWF, under the Handling Agreement, where there are no outstanding issues, the employment has been agreed and IRISC, the Department's claims handlers are in receipt of all the necessary documents, an offer of compensation in respect of general damages can be made in 56 days. The issues regarding special damages have not been finalised and therefore these payments can not be made as yet.

In respect of compensation for respiratory diseases, following spirometry, the first stage of the medical assessment, expedited offers are made within seven days where the results meet the relevant criteria. Payment is made within 10 days of acceptance of offers, subject to agreement of employment history.

In relation to settling claims where claimants have undergone the full Medical Assessment Process, where there are no outstanding issues, the employment has been agreed and IRISC are in receipt of all the necessary documents, an offer of compensation in respect of general damages can be made in 28 days. Meanwhile, IRISC are making interim payments wherever applicable.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress made in processing miners' compensation claims. [2030]

Mr. Wilson: To date, the Department has received over 272,000 claims in respect of respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger, VWF. Of these, more than 132,000 have been assessed. The Department has made over 91,246 individual payments amounting to £451 million.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Electoral Law

Mr. Waterson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, when the Commission intends to publish its plans for spending on public awareness campaigns under section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [1445]

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission acquired responsibility for promoting public awareness of electoral and democratic systems under section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 on 1 July 2001. I understand from the Chairman of the Commission that information about the Commission's spending plans under section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 will be included as part of its overall Five Year Plan. This will be published following consideration by the Speaker's Committee at its next meeting, whose date is currently under discussion. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, (1) what reports the Commission *(a)* has submitted and *(b)* intends to submit to the Secretary of State under section 6 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000; if he will place the reports in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [1443]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Commission's plans to conduct a review of the administration of the general election of 7 June under section 5 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000; and when the Commission estimates that the review will be completed. [1444]

Mr. Beith: I understand from the Chairman of the Electoral Commission that the Commission intends to publish a report on the administration of the 2001 general election later this month. The report will also deal with wider issues relating to the election. A further report, addressing issues of election expenditure, is planned for spring 2002. These reports will set out the Commission's preliminary views on the need for a review programme for modernising the electoral process.

The Commission has not, to date, submitted any reports to the Secretary of State under section 6 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is expected to do so following the completion of its review programme.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what circumstances the Minimum Income Guarantee is payable when the claimant is abroad. [2485]

Mr. McCartney: Generally, Minimum Income Guarantee remains in payment for a limited period while the claimant is abroad provided certain conditions are fulfilled. The conditions are set out in the Income Support (General) Regulations 1997 (SI 1987/1967), regulation 4.

Benefits Information Guide

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the 2001–02 edition of the Benefits Information Guide has been published; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [2263]

Malcolm Wicks: A copy of the 2001–02 edition of the Benefits Information Guide has been placed in the Library.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if pensioners who respond to the Government's take-up campaign for the Minimum Income Guarantee will be contacted to advise them of their potential entitlement to the Pension Credit once details of that scheme have been worked out. [1265]

Mr. McCartney: We will develop a comprehensive programme to ensure all those who may be entitled to the Pension Credit are aware of this.

Pensions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the proportion of a stakeholder pension fund accumulated over 20 years which would be lost by a 1 per cent. charge. [1132]

Mr. McCartney: The proportion of a stakeholder fund taken by a 1 per cent. charge over 20 years would be 11.4 per cent.

Note:

This figure is based on standard assumptions used by the Personal Investment Authority.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many pensioners are subject to a reduction in their state retirement pension because they have been in *(a)* an NHS hospital and *(b)* a similar institution and treated as being an NHS patient, for over 52 weeks; [2303]

(2) how many pensioners in hospital for 52 weeks or more and subject to the hospital downrating system receive less than 20 per cent. of the basic pension rate; [2305]

(3) how many people experienced a reduction in *(a)* their state retirement pension and *(b)* one or more means-tested benefits due to being in hospital for (i) six weeks and (ii) 52 weeks in the last year for which figures are available. [2304]

Mr. McCartney: The rule that pensions and other benefits should be reduced when the beneficiary is in hospital has been in force since the National Insurance Scheme was introduced. There is no reduction during the first six weeks in hospital. Thereafter the amount of Retirement Pension is reduced by 20 per cent. of the basic pension rate for those with a dependant and by 39 per cent. for all other cases. (40 per cent. prior to 9 April 2001). The amount of Retirement Pension reduces to 20 per cent. after 52 weeks. No one receives less than 20 per cent. of the basic State Pension.

The available statistical information on retirement pensioners with hospital reductions is shown in the table.

Retirement pensioners by category with hospital reductions

Thousand

	September 2000
All hospital reductions	31.5
Reduced by 20 per cent.	6.1
Reduced by 40 per cent.	14.9
Reduced to 20 per cent.	10.5

Notes:
1. The figures are rounded to the nearest hundred
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding

Source:
5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at September 2000

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government will publish the revised reports from the Pension Provision Group on pension provision for self-employed people and the impact on pensions of changes in the labour market. [2270]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Provision Group are currently reviewing both reports in the light of the Government's Pension Credit proposals. It is anticipated that both reports will be ready for publication later in the year.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 33W, on the pension credit, if he will estimate how many of the responses to the formal consultation process did not welcome the proposals. [1559]

Mr. McCartney: The responses contained helpful views, many welcoming our proposals. We will be announcing our response to the Pension Credit consultation in due course.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average amount of state pension and benefits lost by pensioners subject to hospital downrating rules was in the last year for which figures are available. [2307]

Mr. McCartney: It is not possible to provide estimates for the average reduction in income-related benefits.

The average reduction in basic state pension as a result of hospital downrating in 2000–01

£ per week

Category	*Average reduction*
Benefit reduced to pocket money rate	56.28
Benefit reduced by 20 per cent.	13.53
Benefit reduced by 40 per cent.	27.11

Note:
Data are from the September 2000 administrative sample

Asylum Seekers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the issuing of national insurance numbers to asylum seekers who have been given permission to work; and what the average time for issuing of NI numbers has been from the date of application in the last 12 months. [1125]

Malcolm Wicks: Asylum seekers who have been granted permission to work should apply for a National Insurance number if they are working or claiming a

benefit. A person applying for a National Insurance number will be invited to attend an evidence of identity interview at their local Benefits Agency office and complete the relevant documentation for the allocation of a National Insurance number to be considered.

Information about the overall length of time taken for an application for a National Insurance number to be processed is not held.

Council Tax (Pensioners)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioner households paid *(a)* more than 5 per cent., *(b)* more than 10 per cent., and *(c)* more than 15 per cent. of their gross income in council tax in 1999–2000. [2257]

Mr. McCartney: 41 per cent. of pensioner households in Great Britain paid more than 5 per cent. of their gross income in Council Tax in 1999–2000, 8 per cent. of pensioner households paid more than 10 per cent., and 2 per cent. paid more than 15 per cent.

Notes:

1. These figures are from the Family Resources Survey (Great Britain).
2. For the purposes of this analysis, Council Tax is taken to be net of Council Tax discount.
3. A pensioner household is one that contains at least one person over State Pension age.
4. The estimates are based on sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using grossing factors that control for region, Council Tax band, tenure and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
5. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

Incapacity Benefit

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for Incapacity Benefit from residents of *(a)* Aylesbury and *(b)* Luton were made, how many applicants were required to take a medical examination, and how many of those medical examinations were undertaken at (i) Luton, (ii) Aylesbury, (iii) Euston and (iv) other in each year since 1997. [823]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the tables.

Incapacity Benefit claims received in the Aylesbury and Luton Benefits Agency office areas

	Aylesbury	*Luton*
January to December 1997	2,128	4,147
January to December 1998	1,734	3,697
January to December 1999	1,710	3,978
January to December 2000	1,561	3,723
January to May 2001	709	1,388

Note:
New claims data are from a 100 per cent. count. A new claim may not result in an award of benefit, for example where a claim is withdrawn.

Number of Incapacity Benefit claimants who ere assessed at medical examination centres (MECs)

	Aylesbury	*Luton*	*Euston*
Aylesbury			
October to December 1998	186	8	1
January to December 1999	710	27	8
January to December 2000	597	21	0
January to May 2001	307	14	1

Number of Incapacity Benefit claimants who ere assessed at medical examination centres (MECs)

	Aylesbury	*Luton*	*Euston*
Luton			
October to December 1998	5	519	0
January to December 1999	27	2,002	1
January to December 2000	20	1,432	0
January to May 2001	8	683	0

Notes:

1. Initial entitlement to Incapacity Benefit requires the claimant to provide medical evidence of their incapacity (normally a general practitioner's certificate). Subsequently, incapacity is assessed under the Personal Capability Assessment but not all claimants are required to attend a medical examination.
2. Figures are from data supplied by Medical Services and include first and subsequent referrals. Information for individual MECs is not available prior to October 1998.
3. Figures relate to Incapacity Benefit claimants living in the area covered by Aylesbury and Luton Benefits Agency offices respectively.
4. Medical Services have no record of any customers in these areas being referred to other MECs.

Departmental Title Change Costs

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the Department's new name is estimated to cost in total, broken down into costs associated with *(a)* stationery, *(b)* signs, *(c)* moving fixtures and fittings, *(d)* redesigning the website and *(e)* other costs. [372]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 77W.

State Second Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the second stage of the State Second Pension is expected to be introduced. [2266]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to page 40, paragraph 8 of the Green Paper "A New Contract for Welfare: Partnership in Pensions" (Cm 4179) in December 1998.

Winter Fuel Payments

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate *(a)* the cost of extending Winter Fuel Payments to households with a disabled person and to householders with children aged under five years and *(b)* the amount allocated within existing benefits for disabled people towards heating costs. [1118]

Mr. McCartney: Applying current entitlement rules and extending Winter Fuel Payments to households with a disabled person aged under 60 in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and all households with a child under five, would increase the annual cost of Winter Fuel Payment provision by an estimated £780 million.

There is no specific amount for heating costs in the benefits available to disabled people under 60 years of age, but Disability Living Allowance (DLA) provides a contribution towards the extra costs associated with severe disability. The care and mobility needs entitlement criteria for the benefit are used as broad indicators of all the extra

costs, including the heating costs, of a disabled person. The disability premiums in income-related benefits are paid in recognition that the poorest disabled people need extra help.

Note:

Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million. They are based on data taken from the 1999–2000 Family Resources Survey and 5 per cent. scans of administrative data from the DLA computer system and Child Benefit computer system. Quoted costs allow for forecast changes to 2001–02 in the DLA caseload and in the number of children under the age of five.

Benefit Rules

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the annual cost of abolishing the rules regarding the reduction of state pensions, other contributory benefits and income-related benefits for *(a)* claimants and *(b)* pensioners. [2306]

Mr. McCartney: It is not possible to supply costs for abolition of hospital downrating for income-related benefits.

Estimate of the cost of the abolition of hospital downrating for 2001–02

£ million

Benefit	*Cost for abolition for 6–52 weeks downrating*	*Cost of abolition of over 52 weeks downrating*	*Total cost of abolition*
Retirement Pension	30	30	60
Incapacity Benefit	10	10	20
Severe Disablement Allowance	[1]—	20	20
Total cost	40	60	100
Cost for pensioners	30	30	60

[1] Means that the costs are greater than 0 but less than £5 million

Notes:

1. Costs are given in £ million, rounded to the nearest £10 million
2. It is not possible to give costs for means tested benefits
3. Costs are based on 2000 administrative data
4. Costs are given in current price terms

Non-residential Care

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will exempt people on Income Support from charges for non-residential personal care; and if he will estimate the cost of doing so in each of the next five years. [261]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

On 3 January 2001 we published a consultation paper and draft guidance on fairer charging policies for non-residential social services. The draft guidance proposed that charges should not reduce service users' incomes below "basic levels" of Income Support, as defined in the draft guidance.

The Department's consultation paper noted that, while some users would pay lesser charges or cease to pay charges as a result of the draft guidance, better off users might reasonably be expected to pay higher charges. The experience of the local council operating the good practice example of charging policy described in the consultation paper suggests that there is scope for councils to maintain charge income in this way.

We are currently considering consultation responses and plan to issue final guidance later this summer.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment the Government have made of psychological trauma caused by foot and mouth disease to rural communities; and what provision they have made to counter this problem; [2191]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the psychological effect of foot and mouth disease on farm children; and what provisions have been implemented to ensure that adverse effects on their schooling are resolved. [2179]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Department is working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in support of the Rural Stress Action Plan (RSAP) which offers support to help alleviate stress in rural areas. Through the RSAP, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has already made available £500,000 to support farmers as part of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's action plan for farming. The second RSAP is focused on the need to respond to the problems facing rural people as a consequence of the foot and mouth disease outbreaks which commenced in February 2001. The Department has also provided the rural stress information service and MIND with funding through the section 64 General Scheme under the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 for projects developing support networks and access to information, care and support for people in rural areas.

In addition, local primary care services will be able to provide appropriate support to children and families suffering any adverse psychological problems resulting from measures taken on farms to eradicate foot and mouth disease. The Department for Education and Skills has also issued information on the implications of foot and mouth for schools, in order to help minimise the impact on pupils' schooling. This includes guidance on making arrangements for attendance recording, educational trips games fixtures and national tests. The Department for Education and Skills also worked closely with the GCSE/A-level awarding bodies to allow special considerations to apply where students' participation in exams or completing coursework was affected.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the consequences for agriculture of the foot and mouth outbreak in Essex; and if she will make a statement. [1070]

Mr. Morley: Foot and mouth disease is having a considerable impact on farming and a range of industries throughout the UK. The duration of the outbreak and associated restrictions remains uncertain. At present it is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the overall effect.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the figures of

those farms and holdings that lost stock due to the contiguous cull under foot and mouth provisions will be published. [1671]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* To 28 June, 2,617 premises in Great Britain have had a total of 926,912 animals slaughtered as a result of the contiguous cull.

Figures for the number of animals slaughtered on contiguous premises, broken down by county and species, are published and updated daily on the DEFRA foot and mouth disease website www.defra.gov.uk. Work is in hand to add the number of affected premises per county to this report.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals were slaughtered in each week as a result of foot and mouth disease. [1652]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The table lists the number of animals slaughtered each week as a result of foot and mouth disease since the commencement of the outbreak.

Week ending	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Pigs*	*Goats/etc.*	*Total*
25 February 2001	799	370	1,741	0	2,910
4 March 2001	6,262	38,156	189	9	44,616
11 March 2001	16,578	60,621	1,304	12	78,515
18 March 2001	32,979	104,596	11,086	43	148,704
25 March 2001	46,852	197,468	28,405	236	272,961
1 April 2001	78,307	364,484	20,864	145	463,800
8 April 2001	85,751	489,509	20,744	777	596,781
15 April 2001	88,435	473,844	25,389	243	587,911
22 April 2001	59,742	357,839	6,418	141	424,140
29 April 2001	24,075	198,866	7,529	89	230,559
6 May 2001	17,582	90,619	419	389	109,009
13 May 2001	10,445	47,652	2,313	15	60,425
20 May 2001	8,651	54,440	78	3	63,172
27 May 2001	15,693	80,256	276	12	96,237
3 June 2001	13,046	50,813	98	7	63,964
10 June 2001	12,533	47,371	56	43	60,003
17 June 2001	10,972	56,072	957	55	68,056
24 June 2001	7,833	42,023	0	1	49,857
Total	536,535	2,754,999	127,866	2,220	3,421,620

Source:
DEFRA Disease Control System Database—latest figures subject to revision, as more data become available

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will conduct a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. [1863]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* There will be an inquiry, when the disease is finally over. We have always said we are keen to learn the lessons from this outbreak. The precise nature and scope of the inquiry will, as such, be a matter for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what instructions have been issued to veterinary surgeons in respect of wild animals brought to them for treatment during the course of the current foot and mouth outbreak. [1827]

Mr. Morley: No instructions have been issued at a national level to veterinary surgeons in respect of wild animals brought to them for treatment during the course of the current foot and mouth outbreak.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the deer population is harbouring foot and mouth; and if she will make a statement. [1493]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* All cloven-hoofed animals, including deer, are susceptible to foot and mouth disease. Wild deer tend to show mild or unapparent disease, resembling the disease in sheep, although some species (eg roe deer and muntjak deer in the UK) may be severely affected.

Deer can be carriers of the foot and mouth virus, and could transmit foot and mouth disease to susceptible livestock during the clinical stages of the disease. However, the Department's current veterinary risk assessment indicates that the risk of wild deer playing any significant part in the spread of foot and mouth disease is very low. There are therefore no plans at this stage to control wild deer populations, although as more information becomes available about the epidemiology of the disease in areas where there are wild deer, the risk assessment will be updated.

As of 2 July more than 60 samples have been submitted to the Institute of Animal Health for testing from various parts of England and Scotland. All have tested negative for evidence of the foot and mouth virus, antigens or antibodies.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what circumstances she has contingency plans to authorise a programme of vaccination against foot and mouth. [1492]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The Government would be prepared to authorise a programme of vaccination based on the advice of the Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Veterinary Officer. At an earlier stage of the outbreak, their advice was to vaccinate cattle in Cumbria and Devon provided the campaign had the substantial support of farmers, consumers, veterinarians, and the food trade. That level of support was simply not

there and, as the number of new cases fell, the signs were that it would not be achieved. Vaccination remains an option, however, and is kept under continuous review.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the implementation of animal welfare standards during the culling of livestock during the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [2195]

Mr. Morley: All animals culled during the current foot and mouth disease outbreak were required to be killed in accordance with the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (WASK). These regulations are enforced outside slaughterhouses by veterinary officers of the State Veterinary Service. To the best of our knowledge the vast majority of animals were dealt with humanely and in compliance with WASK. The few cases brought to our attention where it was alleged that animals had not been dealt with humanely have been investigated and appropriate action taken.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent to which the current foot and mouth virus type is spread by *(a)* air and *(b)* movements of people and vehicles. [347]

Mr. Morley: Analyses have been completed for the first 1,706 infected farms, and epidemiological investigations are continuing on the most recent cases to determine the source of infection and method of spread. Seven farms are considered to have been infected as a result of windborne spread over several kilometres. This low number is thought to be because only 10 pig herds have become infected during the epidemic.

Short distance aerosol spread cannot be distinguished from other causes of local spread within 3 km of infected premises, which accounts for 81 per cent. of cases. In these cases there are often a number of possible means of spread such as using common facilities, contaminated roadways and movement of people and farm vehicles. In addition, however, 83 cases have been specifically associated with lorry movements or movements of people.

The breakdown is as follows (as at 21 June 2001):

GB	*Number*
Windborne (not local)	7
Dairy tanker	5
Truck	18
Other inanimate object	9
Local[1]	1,381
Person	60
Infected animals	84
Under investigation	142
Total	1,706

[1] Source of infection within 3 km; exact source unclear

Further epidemiological information will shortly be available on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many laboratory tests for foot and mouth disease were negative after 24 hours, but were subsequently found to be positive. [38]

Mr. Morley: It is correct that a laboratory test which is negative or inconclusive at 48 hours may give a positive result at 96 hours. This is because some samples may contain a very small amount of virus and it can take a second passage of 48 hours in inoculated cell cultures for the virus to be amplified to a level where it will give a clear result. Each cell passage takes 48 hours—ie 96 hours in total.

Of a total of 1,551 tissue samples which have tested positive for foot and mouth disease virus, 1,310 were confirmed in less than 24 hours and 241 were found to be positive after 24 hours. It is not possible to provide similar data for blood samples submitted together with tissue samples because when tissue samples were found positive the testing of the blood samples ceased.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms in Worcestershire are still on form D restrictions around farms now known not to have foot and mouth disease as a result of laboratory tests. [44]

Mr. Morley: Information is only available for Hereford and Worcester. As at 2 July, 119 farms are under form D restrictions, contiguous to 66 infected premises. Of those 66, 43 were tested, of which 30 returned negative laboratory results. These 30 cases remain designated as infected premises.

An infected premises is one where foot and mouth disease has either been diagnosed by a vet on the farm, supported by convincing clinical evidence, or where disease is found after testing. However, a negative laboratory result does not necessarily mean that the disease was not present and does not change the status of an infected premises confirmed on clinical diagnosis.

Information on the number of farms under form D restrictions within the protection zone around infected premises where negative laboratory results have been found is available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of premises infected with foot and mouth disease as a result of allowing animals to enter the West Midlands via Penrith, Longtown, Welshpool and Ross markets. [40]

Mr. Morley: The relatively widespread distribution of infected premises has been due to the movement of infected sheep through markets and the subsequent mixing and further sales through dealers and markets before 23 February. Without this widespread dissemination the number of infected premises would have been considerably smaller.

No firm estimates have been made of the number of infected premises that would have occurred if certain markets had not been held during mid-February. However, from analysis of the first 112 infected farms in the area, the

breakdown of source of infection in the Hereford epidemiological group, comprising Herefordshire, the Severn Valley and the Forest of Dean is as follows:

	Hereford
Infected animals	7
Local[1]	82
Other inanimate object	2
Person	8
Under investigation	13
Total	112

[1] Source of infection within 3 km; exact source unclear

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many rural tourism businesses have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted relief from business rates in connection with the impact of foot and mouth disease. [133]

Alun Michael: The data provided by the local authorities which administer the rate relief scheme do not distinguish between different classes of business, so the question cannot be answered in precisely the terms of the question. The background is that local authorities have powers to grant rate relief to businesses suffering financial hardship. Normally, the Government meet 75 per cent. of the cost of this and authorities the remaining 25 per cent., but in order to alleviate the problems of foot and mouth disease, central Government agreed to pay 95 per cent. of the cost: to 151 rural authorities; for the three months April—June; and for the properties with a rateable value (RV) of £12,000 or less.

The Local Government Association has provided us with the results of the most recent survey, which showed that 46 worst affected local authorities, have received 4,832 applications for rate relief. 41 authorities have so far approved 1,589 cases; in many cases local authorities are still considering applications. Many are also deferring ratepayers' payments. In conjunction with colleagues in other Government Departments, I shall be monitoring the take-up of this scheme.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress she has made in publishing the location of each foot and mouth disease pyre and burial site in the UK; [793]

(2) how many pyre sites there are in each county in the UK; from how many ash has been removed; and how many have been completely restored. [792]

Mr. Morley: Information on pyre and burial sites is in the process of being collated, cross-checked and validated. In the meantime, arrangements are being made for the safe removal and disposal of ash from those sites where it has not been possible to bury it on site. Information on the number of pyre sites restored is not available.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep, on how many farms, in each county of England have been slaughtered because they were contiguous to infected premises but where the infected premises later tested negative. [796]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows the numbers of cattle and sheep slaughtered on premises which are contiguous to infected premises in counties in England and where the infected premises have had negative sample results.

County	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Premises with cattle and/or sheep*
Avon	1,291	829	12
Cheshire	386	370	6
Cleveland	202	206	1
Cornwall	35	0	1
Cumbria	3,405	19,738	52
Derbyshire	46	151	3
Devonshire	9,551	44,176	122
Durham	2,278	7,364	26
Gloucestershire	5,512	21,401	123
Hereford and Worcester	4,415	31,338	114
Kent	59	701	3
Lancashire	811	3,210	27
Leicestershire	38	345	2
North Yorkshire	1,962	3,621	25
Northumberland	3,336	33,545	40
Shropshire	939	3,059	18
Staffordshire	976	2,253	20
Wiltshire	0	823	3
England	35,242	173,130	598

A negative test-result does not necessarily mean that disease was not present and does not change the status of an infected premises.

Homeopathic Remedies (Foot and Mouth)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she intends to commission to establish the effectiveness of homeopathic remedies, including borax, in relation to the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [1424]

Mr. Morley: Products that are presented for the treatment or prevention of disease in animals, or which have that function must be authorised under the terms of the Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994 before they can be legally sold or supplied in the United Kingdom. This ensures that such products are properly assessed and are demonstrated as being safe, of consistent good quality and effective when used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The manufacturer of any such products may apply for such authorisation. No such application has been made for Borax. The onus for providing evidence that supports the need for research into the effectiveness of homeopathic remedies, including Borax, against foot and mouth disease lies with the manufacturer.

Foot and Mouth (Cheese Production)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations were received by her Department and by its predecessor Department about the impact of foot and mouth restrictions on the use of unpasteurised milk for specialist cheese production; what the scientific basis was for restricting this use of unpasteurised milk; and what response she has made. [1176]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food received a number of representations on the manufacture and

handling of unpasteurised cheese. My noble Friend the then Minister of State, Baroness Hayman, responded to those representations as the Minister responsible for animal health.

Foot and mouth disease virus can be excreted in milk before animals show clinical signs of the disease. Unpasteurised milk is therefore a potent source of infection, and any milk produced in an Infected Area is required to be heat treated.

Carcase Disposal (Northumberland)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to compensate individual households and communities adversely affected by the Druridge Bay burning site and the Widdrington carcase disposal site in Northumberland. [1175]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* There is no statutory provision for compensation for any inconvenience caused to residents by the disposal of animal carcases.

Departmental Restructuring

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many civil servants were employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in April 2001; and how many will be employed by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs once departmental restructuring is completed. [1468]

Mr. Morley: In April 2001 the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food employed 11,118 civil servants, including staff in its agencies. It is anticipated that there will be 12,190 employed in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but this figure will be subject to change once the departmental restructuring is completed.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role nuclear power will play in the UK's climate change strategy; and if she will make a statement. [837]

Mr. Meacher: Nuclear power plays a role in helping the UK to meet our climate change targets. The Government believe that existing nuclear power stations should continue to contribute to the electricity supply and to the reduction of emissions, as long as they can do so to the high safety and environmental standards that are currently observed.

Nuclear output is however expected to decline from around 2005 onwards, as the older stations begin to close. Electricity generation is therefore likely to become more carbon-intensive unless other low or zero carbon energy sources can be developed. There are currently no proposals for new nuclear power stations in the UK, largely due to nuclear's inability to compete on cost grounds with other types of generation. Issues related to waste disposal and public acceptability would also need to be resolved before industry put forward any proposals for approval. The Government will shortly be publishing a consultation document on radioactive waste policy. Internationally, the industry is addressing disposal issues through its research and development programmes into current and future technology, recognising that they need to be addressed effectively if nuclear power is to remain an option in the future.

The Government announced on 25 June that the performance and innovation unit is undertaking a review of the longer term, strategic issues, including those of climate change, surrounding energy policy within the context of ensuring secure, diverse and sustainable energy supplies at competitive prices.

Livestock Blood Tests

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if livestock owners whose animals are being blood-tested by her Department's vets and officials will be allowed to keep a part of samples taken. [346]

Mr. Morley: No. Samples of blood taken for testing are potentially contaminated with foot and mouth disease virus, which is a specified pathogen controlled under the Specified Animal Pathogens Order 1998 (SAPO). No one may possess a specified animal pathogen or material which contains a specified pathogen unless they are licensed to do so under SAPO and have the necessary facilities to ensure the safe containment of the pathogen concerned in relation to the risk it poses.

Farmers (Internet)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of livestock farmers in England who have access to the internet. [1490]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The latest information available was collected in April and May 2000 as part of a research study into "MAFF's Role in E-Business". At that time the level of internet use among livestock farmers in the survey was estimated to be between 40 and 45 per cent. Further details of the survey results are available at http://www.defra.gov.uk/ebus/maffrole/annexa.htm.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many applications there have been for home energy efficiency scheme grants since its inception; and how many were successful. [1801]

Mr. Meacher: The new home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) for England was launched on 1 June 2000.

Applications for grant are mainly made over the telephone. In the period 1 June 2000 to 30 June 2001, 388,410 householders applied, of whom, 313,623 or 80 per cent. were successful.

The separate schemes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the respective Parliament or Assemblies.

Fuel Poverty

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to meet her counterparts in the devolved administrations to discuss the adoption of a common definition of fuel poverty. [1812]

Mr. Meacher: We intend to consider this, and the other issues raised during consultation on the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, within the Inter-Ministerial Group on Fuel Poverty whose members include representatives from the devolved Administrations.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the final fuel poverty strategy required by the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 will be published. [1811]

Mr. Meacher: Our aim is to publish the final version of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy in the autumn.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many qualified veterinary surgeons were employed by the state veterinary service in each year since 1979. [1983]

Mr. Morley: The number of veterinary surgeons employed by the state veterinary service at 1 January each year since 1979, is given in the table. The hon. Member may wish to know that since this date the state veterinary service has changed several times. The Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL), which previously formed part of the state veterinary service, became the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) in April 1990. The CVL figures are incorporated in this return for the years 1 January 1980 to 1 January 1990. From 1990 the figures do not include the CVL. The Veterinary Investigation Service became part of the VLA on 1 October 1995 and is not included in these figures from that date. In 2000, there were 99 veterinarians employed by VLA. Much of the information presented here previously appeared on 27 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns 323–24W.

Of the 286 full-time equivalent veterinarians employed by the state veterinary service, 220 are employed as field veterinary officers. The work of these officers is supplemented by about 100 Temporary Veterinary Inspectors (TVIs) from the private sector in normal times.

Year	*Number of vets*
1979	597.5
1980	580.5
1981	563.5
1982	557.0
1983	549.0
1984	539.5
1985	527.5
1986	506.5
1987	464.5
1988	444.5
1989	422.0
1990	430.5
1991	408.0
1992	414.5
1993	420.0
1994	408.3
1995	394.5
1996	301.2
1997	289.5
1998	302.0
1999	283.0
2000	284.0
2001	286.0

Marsh Report

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to implement the recommendations of the Marsh report into the veterinary profession's right to dispense prescription-only medicines. [1984]

Mr. Morley: The then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown), appointed a group under the chairmanship of Professor Sir John Marsh CBE to carry out an independent review of dispensing by veterinary surgeons as part of the Government's Action Plan for Farming. Its terms of reference were to review the procedures by which prescription only medicines (POMs) for veterinary use are classified and sold in the United Kingdom and the impact current practices may be having on availability and prices, and to make recommendations to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by 31 March 2001.

The chairman presented the Group's report to the then Minister on 16 March 2001 and it was published on 11 May. The Government's draft response to the report is under consideration and, in due course, will be circulated for comment to interested organisations and individuals before consideration is given to the implementation of any of the recommendations contained in the report.

HEALTH

Personal Social Services

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure consistency of charges among local authorities for non-residential personal social services. [262]

Jacqui Smith: We published draft guidance on fairer charging policies for non-residential social services on 3 January 2001. Following consultation, we plan to issue final guidance later this summer.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential care homes in *(a)* the county of Essex and *(b)* the boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea were (i) publicly-owned and (ii) privately-owned in each year from 1995 to 2000 inclusive. [1066]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of local authority staffed and independent residential care homes in Essex, Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea local authorities, 1995 to 2000

Number

	Essex[1]		Thurrock		Southend-on-Sea	
As at 31 March	*LA homes*[2]	*Independent homes*[3]	*LA Homes*[2]	*Independent homes*[3]	*LA homes*[2]	*Independent homes*[3]
1995	67	464	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1996	66	500	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1997	68	629	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1998	61	583	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1999	47	411	5	28	7	122
2000	45	378	3	28	6	120

[1] Information is presented for the former county of Essex (ie prior to re-organisation) for 1995 to 1998
[2] Local authority staffed homes
[3] Consists of voluntary, private, dual registered and small homes
[4] Not available as areas did not exist until 1 April 1998
Source:
RA form A, RAC

NHS Staff Numbers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors left service in the NHS in the last *(a)* two and *(b)* four years. [1610]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not collected on the number of hospital doctors who leave the National Health Service. The number of unrestricted principals or equivalents (who most people will have as their general practitioner) who left the NHS for any reason between 1996–97 and 1999–2000 is in the table. Doctors who 'left' include resignations, retirements and short-term career breaks. Some of these doctors will 'rejoin' the NHS at a later date.

Unrestricted principals and equivalents who left the NHS in England 1996–97 to 1999–2000

(headcount)

	Leavers
1996–97	1,058
1997–98	1,040
1998–99	1,030
1999–2000	1,098

Notes:
1. Unrestricted principals and equivalents includes general medical service unrestricted principals, personal medical service contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs
2. Leaver data refer to those UPEs leaving between 1 October and 30 September
3. Leavers are defined as those UPEs who were employed in a particular census but were not registered in the following census. We do not know why these doctors left.
Source:
General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Care Home Beds

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care home beds there *(a)* are and *(b)* were in May 1997 in England. [1608]

Jacqui Smith: The numbers of residential care and nursing care home beds at 31 March 2000 and 31 March 1997 are shown in the table.

Number of residential and nursing care home beds in England, 1997 and 2000—as at 31 March

	Residential care	*Nursing care*
1997	338,140	196,269
2000	345,578	193,330

Source:
Department of Health Annual Statistical returns

Nursing Home Fees

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons his Department did not meet the deadline of December 1999 set out in circulars on 11 August 1999 (Health Service Circular 1999/180 and Local Authority Circular (99) 30) to give final advice on the lawful way to charge nursing home fees; and what factors underlay the delays in issuing this advice prior to March 2001. [1836]

Jacqui Smith: Health Service Circular 1999/180: Local Authority Circular (99)30 said that the Department would:

"aim to issue any new guidance later this year [1999]".

New continuing care guidance for the National Health Service and social services (HSC2001/015: LAC (2001)18) was issued on 28 June. It replaced nine pieces of guidance on continuing care, stretching back to 1992.

Autism

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent change in the incidence of autism. [2248]

Jacqui Smith: The number of children identified as having autism is increasing. Although the full explanation for this increase is not clear, it is at least in part due to improvement in diagnosis by the clinical professions, including child mental health specialists and community paediatricians.

The Department has recently asked the Medical Research Council to conduct a detailed review of the current state of knowledge about autism and to suggest possible areas for further research. The aim is to obtain a clear and comprehensive picture of what is currently known about the incidence, prevalence and causes of autism and how strong the evidence is which underpins that knowledge.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce tests for children at an early age to detect autism. [2249]

Jacqui Smith: We have recently announced the establishment of a working party to develop new guidance on how the needs of young disabled children aged 0–2 and their families can be met. This guidance, which will

be issued jointly by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health will cover issues such as early diagnosis, intervention and support.

A group chaired by Professor Ann Le Couteur, the National Initiative on Autism, is looking at diagnosis and early interventions in autism. This is being funded by the National Autistic Society. We will consider what, if any, further action needs to be taken in the light of the group's report.

A number of diagnostic tools have been developed in recent years. These include the diagnostic interview for social and communication disorders whose further development is being led by the National Autistic Society.

Registered Blind People

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered blind people there are in the United Kingdom; and how many have assistance animals. [1725]

Jacqui Smith: The Department receives returns from all local authorities in England on the numbers of blind and partially sighted people registered with local authority social services departments. The latest figures for the year ending 31 March 2000 show 157,820 registered blind people in England.

There are 4,763 blind and partially sighted people in the United Kingdom who are guide dog owners. Each year 700 people receive training for new or replacement guide dogs. It is not known how many of these people are registered blind.

Data for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Assemblies.

"Golden Hello" Payments

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the golden hello payments to general practitioners joining the NHS to come into effect; and if he will make a statement. [1986]

Mr. Hutton: All doctors taking up a first post as a principal, assistant or salaried general medical services general practitioner or as a personal medical services performer on or after 1 April 2001 are or will be eligible for payments under the "golden hello" scheme. The detailed implementation of the scheme is subject to consultation with the profession, which is in progress.

We aim to conclude consultation in time to enable payments to be made to all eligible doctors in September.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cash releasing efficiency savings procedure within the NHS. [1951]

Mr. Hutton: As set out in the NHS Plan we have introduced a new approach to setting efficiency targets for the National Health Service. In the past efficiency targets were imposed on the NHS without an analysis of what is realistic.

The new approach to efficiency targets does not permit a trade off between cost and quality. The cost of providing care in trusts providing a high quality service is the benchmark for the whole of the NHS with all trusts expected to reach this level within five years.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS dentists in Yeovil constituency are accepting new adult NHS patients; and if he will make a statement; [1376]

(2) what assessment he has made of the steps taken by Somerset health authority to deal with the shortage of NHS dentistry in the Yeovil constituency; and if he will make a statement. [1377]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Somerset health authority has prepared a dental access plan to ensure that all residents who wish to can access a National Health Service dentist within a reasonable time and distance by September 2001. The plan has been subject to external assessment and the health authority has been assessed as low risk in terms of its ability to meet its access targets.

No dentists in the Yeovil constituency are currently accepting new adult NHS patients. Local availability of NHS dentistry changes frequently. Dentists can open and close lists at short notice. The hon. Member's constituents can access emergency NHS treatment through the Yeovil Dental Access Centre or the emergency dental service.

Health Care

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the plans of his Department to utilise the private sector to deliver health care. [1636]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* We believe unequivocally in the principle that the National Health Service should provide care to all, free at the point of use, regardless of ability to pay.

The areas where we will seek to use private sector expertise and finance, to help deliver care more quickly, may include: first, using spare capacity in private sector hospitals to perform operations on NHS patients; secondly, getting private sector management to run some of the new stand-alone surgery centres our manifesto commits us to building; thirdly, extending the private finance initiative and public private partnerships beyond the hospital sector into primary care, social services and the provision of imaging and laboratory equipment; and fourthly, using private sector management expertise such as information technology systems.

East Somerset NHS Trust

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in East Somerset NHS Trust have been waiting more than *(a)* three, *(b)* six, *(c)* nine, *(d)* 12, *(e)* 18, *(f)* 24, *(g)* 30 and *(h)* 36 months for an *(i)* in-patient operation and (ii) out-patient appointment; and if he will make a statement. [1384]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Information on hospital waiting times is published quarterly by the Department of Health in "Hospital

Waiting List Statistics: England" and "Waiting Times for First Outpatient Appointments in England: Detailed Statistics". This information is also available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes.

The numbers of patients waiting for in-patient or day case treatment at East Somerset National Health Service Trust on 31 March 2001 were as follows:

Patients waiting for admission by number of months waiting

Months	*Number*
0–2	1,089
3–5	538
6–11	314
12–17	2
18+	0
Total	1,943

These figures show a drop of 6 per cent. in the total numbers waiting for treatment compared with 31 March 2000.

The number of general practitioner written referral requests seen as a first out-patients in Quarter 4 (1 January–31 March 2001) were:

Of those GP referral requests seen, the number who waited (in weeks)

Weeks	*Number*
0-less than 4	2,251
4-less than 13	2,267
13-less than 26	758
26+	208
Total	5,484

Information on the total number of patients waiting for a first out-patient appointment on a given date is not collected but the numbers of people waiting over 13 weeks and 26 weeks are. At East Somerset NHS Trust 369 patients had been waiting over 13 weeks and 97 had been waiting over 26 weeks at 31 March 2001. This represents a drop of 51.6 per cent. and 62.3 per cent. respectively compared with the numbers waiting at 31 March 2000.

Nursing Home Residents (Attendance Allowance)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if residents of nursing homes receiving Attendance Allowance will receive that allowance at the same rate after the introduction of the Government's planned contributions to nursing care. [2028]

Jacqui Smith: The rate of benefit currently paid to nursing home residents in receipt of Attendance Allowance or disability living allowance will not be affected by our plans to introduce free nursing care.

Heath Visitors

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which return-to-nursing course covers health visitors. [2486]

Mr. Hutton: The English National Board Return to Practice—Part 11 is a specific return to practice course for health visitors. Work force development confederations are responsible for the commissioning of return to practice courses and will be able to provide further information on where courses are available. A list of the work force development confederations is available in the Library.

NHS Complaints Procedure

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the report on the NHS complaints procedure produced by York Health Economics Consortium; for what reasons it is a confidential report; and what the expected time scale and action plan is for implementing changes to the complaints procedure. [1985]

Ms Blears: We will be publishing the report of the evaluation of the National Health Service complaints procedure in the near future. The report is not confidential. We intend to consult widely on the options for change, following publication of the evaluation report, with a view to implementing a reformed procedure before April 2003.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sixth Form Education

3. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which learning and skills councils have developed policies on the future of sixth form education. [871]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Responsibility for policy on the future of sixth form education lies with the Government, not with individual local offices of the Learning and Skills Council.

AS-Level

15. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about the future of the AS-level. [884]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: It is too soon to make any statement about the future of the AS-level. The Secretary of State has asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to review the delivery of advanced level qualifications in general. An interim report is due by the middle of July.

Disruptive Pupils

16. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support she will give to schools to help them deal with disruptive pupils. [885]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today to the hon. Member of Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

Pupil behaviour is a major issue that will be included in a forthcoming White paper. We are also keeping the exclusions process under regular review.

School Discipline

17. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on discipline in schools. [887]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave today to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

Pupil behaviour is a major issue that will be included in a forthcoming White Paper. We are also keeping the exclusions process under regular review.

30. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has arranged with Ofsted to discuss standards of discipline in schools. [901]

Mr. Timms: We meet Ofsted regularly. Standards of discipline and behaviour in schools are important aspects of school standards, and an important part of continuing discussions with Ofsted.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to introduce proposals designed to improve discipline in schools. [872]

Mr. Timms: We strongly support heads in maintaining order in schools, including using exclusion where necessary. We are providing over 1,000 learning support units and 4,000 learning mentors to support teachers in maintaining order. We will be consulting on a wider use of parenting orders to ensure that parents take responsibility for their children's behaviour at school.

Key Stage 3

18. **Mr. Miliband:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what priority she will give to raising standards at Key Stage 3. [888]

Mr. Timms: Our new Key Stage 3 strategy aims to help schools raise standards in secondary education, building on the successful literacy and numeracy primary strategies and the work from our pilot that started in 205 schools in autumn 2000. From this September, we will be phasing in the strategy with the English and mathematics strands, to be followed by science, teaching and learning in the foundation subjects (TLF) and ICT.

Lifelong Learning

19. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her plans are for expanding resources for lifelong education. [889]

Margaret Hodge: Total expenditure by my Department on lifelong learning will increase from £11.6 billion in 2000–01 to £14.7 billion in 2003–04, an increase of 18 per cent. in real terms. We are also seeking to expand the investment made by individuals and employers in lifelong learning through Individual Learning Accounts and other measures. This is against a background of a forecast increase in total Government expenditure on education in the UK from 4.8 per cent. to 5.3 per cent. of GDP over the same period.

IT Skills (Older People)

20. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to promote IT skills for older people to increase their work and leisure potential. [890]

John Healey: The Department leads on a range of measures to promote IT skills for everyone including older people, such as UK online centres, learndirect, and Wired-up Communities. This is part of our activity to encourage lifelong learning for all, to help close the digital divide, to increase peoples' employability, and to use new technologies to enrich peoples' lives.

Higher Education

21. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her plans to widen participation in higher education. [891]

Margaret Hodge: Widening participation is a key goal for this Government. We want half of all young people to have the opportunity to benefit from higher education by the end of the decade. In this spending review the Higher Education Funding Council for England have allocated £550 million to widen participation over the next three years. In addition the Excellence Challenge will put £90 million into schools and further education colleges. We shall continue to consider what further steps we need to take to tackle the barriers that inhibit the widening of participation in higher education.

School Administration

22. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans to have with the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers to discuss the level of administration in schools. [892]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I continue to meet regularly with heads' and teachers' representatives to discuss a wide range of subjects. On 2 July, we met representatives of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers and other teacher and headteacher associations to take stock of progress on the independent study of teacher workload.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had with the Secondary Heads Association to discuss the level of administration in schools. [874]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I continue to meet regularly with heads' and teachers' representatives to discuss a wide range of subjects. On 2 July, we met representatives of the Secondary Heads Association and other teacher associations to take stock of progress on the independent study of teacher workload.

Workplace Communications

23. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for the improvement of workplace communications through the development of the union learning fund. [893]

John Healey: We have been greatly encouraged by the response to the union learning fund, including projects supporting basic skills, English as a second language and the development of IT learning centres. Union learning representatives, who communicate with employees, employers and training providers to promote learning in the workplace, have made an important contribution to improving workplace communications. The Government are currently consulting on giving statutory backing to union learning representatives to give them formal recognition and to build up their numbers through the union learning fund.

Teacher Morale

24. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action is being taken to improve teacher morale. [894]

Mr. Timms: A broad range of action being taken will help to improve teacher morale. These include improvements in the pay, status and working conditions of teachers, backed by real-terms increases in funding for schools and measures giving greater autonomy to successful schools and greater support for schools in more challenging circumstances.

25. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she last met representatives of the National Union of Teachers to discuss teacher morale. [896]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend met representatives of the National Union of Teachers, together with representatives of all the main teacher unions, on 2 May and discussed issues related to teacher morale and the setting up of an independent study into teachers' workloads.

Teachers (Working Conditions)

26. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has to encourage more suitable individuals into teaching, with special reference to improving working conditions. [897]

Mr. Timms: A range of measures is in place to encourage suitable people into teaching. Improved funding for schools and increased starting salaries have helped to bring about an extra 12,600 teachers in maintained schools in England between January 1998 and January 2001. But greater expectations and extra resources in the system have created more teaching posts and vacancies still exist. Training bursaries worth £6,000 have been introduced to attract more graduates into teaching, with new style golden hellos of £4,000 for those who go on to teach in shortage subjects. London weighting allowances have been lifted by 30 per cent and recruitment and retention allowances of up to £5,085 are now available to schools. We will also attract experienced teachers back to the profession and welcome back bonuses of between £2,000 and £4,000 are planned. These measures are set against a backdrop of increasing funding for schools, which has risen by £540 per pupil since 1997, and more resources for increasing the numbers of teaching assistants and improving working conditions generally. Grants have been made available to schools, through local education authorities to ensure that all school staff have better working conditions and ready access to the equipment they need to work effectively. The Government have invested more than £5 billion in school buildings since 1997, and £7,8 billion in England over the next three years is the biggest schools capital spending programme in decades.

School Finance

27. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if it is her policy to introduce a new system of financing schools in 2002–03. [898]

Mr. Timms: The Government are currently undertaking a review of local government funding. As part of that wider review we are working with local government and schools partners on the proposals in the September 2000 Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance" for a new LEA and school funding system. The Government have not yet decided on the timing or the final shape of any changes to the local government grant distribution system.

Teacher Recruitment

28. **Liz Blackman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to recruit more teachers. [899]

Mr. Timms: Our recruitment and retention measures have already secured more teachers than for over a decade and the number of trainee teachers has risen for the first time in eight years. We have pledged at least 10,000 extra teachers by 2006.

To achieve this, we have announced a teacher retention and recruitment fund to support schools in areas where there are difficulties; an extension to English of the £4,000 golden hellos for newly-qualified teachers of shortage subjects; an expansion of the Graduate Teacher Programme; and new courses for those returning to teaching. We are also proposing a welcome back bonus for people returning to teaching this year and a scheme to help pay off, over time, the student loans of new teachers in shortage subjects who commit themselves to a career in the maintained sector.

Further and Higher Education Funding

29. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will review the arrangements in England and Wales for payment of tuition fees and student loans in further and higher education. [900]

Margaret Hodge: The student support arrangements for higher education in England and Wales are kept constantly under review. As announced in the recent "Opportunity for All" White Paper, we are currently reviewing the financial support available for learners in further education and we will make an announcement on this soon.

Pupil Funding (Worcestershire)

31. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will set a timetable to bring funding per pupil in Worcestershire closer to the English average; and if she will make a statement. [903]

Mr. Timms: The Government are currently undertaking a review of local government funding. As part of that wider review we are working with local government and schools partners on the proposals for a new LEA and school funding system. We want that system to ensure funding better matches the separate responsibilities of local authorities and schools and reflects fairly, on the basis of up to date evidence, the needs of authorities in different parts of the country. The Government have not yet decided on the timing or the final shape of any changes to local government grant distribution system.

Local Education Authority Funding Formula

32. **Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessments she has made of the ability of the local education authority funding formula to reflect need and costs. [904]

Mr. Timms: The Government are currently undertaking a review of local government funding. As part of that wider review we are working with local government and schools partners on the proposals for a new LEA and school funding system. We aim to create a simpler, more transparent and fairer formula for distributing education funding to authorities that better reflects the separate responsibilities of LEAs and schools and the needs of their pupils.

School Admissions

33. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her proposals to change policy on school admissions. [905]

Mr. Timms: We are considering whether changes to the school admissions framework should be proposed, but no decisions have been made yet.

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice she gives to parents of children who have applied to go to a particular school, failed to gain a place, failed at an appeal and are due to attend a school they did not choose. [895]

Mr. Timms: Recent research into secondary school admissions shows that 96 per cent. of parents are offered a place at a school for which they have expressed a preference and that 85 per cent. are offered a place at their favourite school. But we cannot guarantee that every parent will secure a place for their child in their favourite school. Where they do not, they have a right of appeal. During 1999–2000, the latest year for which figures are available, 34 per cent. of all appeals were decided in parents' favour. Parents can ask for their child to stay on a waiting list for their favourite school, although the school is not obliged to keep one.

Numeracy and Literacy Targets

34. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what targets for numeracy and literacy the Government will set for the next school year. [906]

Mr. Timms: We remain committed to the 2002 targets we set in 1997 of 80 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieving the expected standard in literacy and 75 per cent. in numeracy at Key Stage 2. The literacy and numeracy strategies are clearly raising standards in primary schools. Since 1998 there has been a 10 per cent. point improvement in the English results from 65 per cent. to 75 per cent., and in mathematics a 13 per cent. point improvement from 59 per cent. to 72 per cent.

Adult Basic Skills

35. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the levels of basic skills among adults. [907]

John Healey: The latest wide-scale assessment of the level of basic skills among adults was carried out in 1996 as part of the international Adult Literacy Survey. This found that around 20 per cent. of adults in Great Britain performed at the lowest of five levels of literacy skill. Lord Moser drew upon this in his report, "A Fresh Start", to estimate that up to seven million adults have difficulties with literacy and perhaps more with numeracy.

The Government launched their strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills on 1 March this year. As part of our strategy we intend to collect better information on the scale of basic skills need, including through pathfinder projects already established in the nine English regions and through a national survey.

Tuition Fees

36. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received on the effect the introduction of tuition fees has had on applications for, and recruitment to, higher education courses from areas with high levels of social deprivation. [908]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend receives many representations about a wide range of higher education issues, including the effects of the introduction of student contributions to tuition fees. There is no evidence to date that their introduction has had any demonstrable effect on applications by, and recruitment of, students from the three lowest socio-economic groups.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacancies for teachers in Leicestershire are anticipated for the start of the school year in September. [879]

Mr. Timms: We do not collect data on anticipated vacancies in schools. Information on the number of teacher vacancies is collected once a year in January as part of the annual census of teachers and vacancies. In January 2001, Leicestershire LEA recorded 30 teacher vacancies.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time teaching vacancies there are in (i) secondary, (ii) primary and (iii) special schools in Surrey; and if she will make a statement. [2415]

Mr. Timms: In 2001 the numbers of vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained schools, reported by Surrey local authority, were as follows:

	Number of vacancies
Secondary	62
Primary	25
Special	17

Information on part-time vacancies is not collected centrally.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to improve teacher recruitment and retention; and if she will make a statement. [880]

Mr. Timms: The number of teachers in maintained schools in England has risen by more than 11,000 since 1997. We have pledged a further increase of at least 10,000 by 2006. Various incentives are in place, and applications for postgraduate teacher training are rising. We have also proposed a welcome back bonus for returners to teaching this year and writing off, over time, the student loans of new teachers of shortage subjects in maintained schools.

Early Years Places

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason Somerset has a lower proportion of three-year-olds in free early years places than the average figure for England; and if she will make a statement. [1385]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Our commitment is to provide every three-year-old, whose parents want one, with a free nursery education place by September 2004. Local education authorities have chosen to make different levels of provision in the past. They have also been influenced by the fact that allocations of places, funded directly by the Government through the nursery education grant, were made on the basis of social disadvantage.

The Government are making available over £2 million to provide Somerset with 1,704 early education places for its three-year-olds. We are the first Government to make such funding specifically available.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish a table showing the percentage of three-year-olds with free nursery places in each education authority in England in each of the years 1998–99 to 2003–04 (planned); and if she will make a statement on her plans for increasing provision of free places for three-year-olds. [1632]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* We are committed to providing all three-year-olds, whose parents want one, with a free nursery education place by September 2004. Estimates of the percentage of three-year-olds already provided with a place in each area are not available to the Department, although local authorities may choose to make their own estimates based on local data.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to reduce the differentials in levels of funding support provided through SSAs. [1866]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The Government are currently undertaking a review of local government funding. As part of that wider review we have set up two working groups, with local government and schools partners, to develop proposals for a new LEA and school funding system. We aim to create a simpler and more transparent formula for distributing education funding to authorities that reflects fairly, on the basis of up to date evidence, the needs of authorities in different parts of the country.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what analysis her Department has made of the impact of education maintenance allowances on staying-on rates post-16; [1956]

(2) if she will make a statement on the education maintenance allowance pilots. [1958]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The education maintenance allowance pilots now cover around 30 per cent. of the country and have reached over 80,000 young people. An extensive three-year evaluation programme is under way, with both quantitative and qualitative research, including interviews with 20,000 young people. We published the first evaluation reports in March.

Results from the first year of the pilot have shown an increased participation among the target group of 5 percentage points. Early anecdotal evidence suggests that the young people who receive an EMA appreciate the independence this affords them and they benefit from the experience of managing their own money.

Exam Marking

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people were employed in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000 to mark A-level papers; and how many people have been employed this year to mark (i) AS-levels and (ii) A-levels. [1961]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The number of examiners recruited by the awarding bodies at advanced level over the period in question was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1999	7,000
2000	7,000
2001	14,000

2001 is a special year, as it is the last year for the old style A-levels and the first year for the new AS examinations. This transitional situation is reflected in an increase in the number of examiners recruited, the total comprising 7,000 for A-levels and 7,000 for AS-levels.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to enable schools to fund more programmes to tackle drug abuse. [2088]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Funding to support drug, alcohol and tobacco education will rise from £14.5 million in 2001–02 to £15.5 million in 2002–03 and £17.5 million in 2003–04. This funding will improve the quality and coverage of drug education programmes in schools, provide funding for every school to have access to an LEA drug adviser and will fund drug education training for teachers and Connexions advisers. In addition to this specific funding, schools will receive £15 million in 2001–02 to support personal, social and health education and citizenship, which they can choose to spend on programmes to tackle drug misuse.

Teachers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason newly qualified teachers *(a)* who trained and qualified in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and *(b)* from countries within the European Economic Area are allowed to teach in maintained schools in England without having to sit the national numeracy test. [2141]

Mr. Timms: The requirements for achieving Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not include passing a national numeracy test. That is a matter for the devolved Administrations of those countries to decide.

Teachers who are nationals of other countries within the European Economic Area (EEA) are entitled to be awarded QTS in this country on the basis of teaching qualification status recognised elsewhere in the EEA. Similarly, those teachers would not have to pass a numeracy test to teach in this country.

School Sport

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will make a statement on the amount of time dedicated to sport in schools each week; [2142]

(2) what plans she has to increase the amount of time given to sport in schools. [2143]

Mr. Timms: The National Curriculum for Physical Education has an aspiration that all pupils should receive two hours of physical activity a week. Officials are considering with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport how we could assist schools in delivering a two-hour entitlement to all children, as set out by the Prime Minister on 11 January this year. This commitment was included in our Green Paper, "Building on Success". We are also consulting with Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, PE associations and teachers. The QCA have published examples of best practice on their website, from schools that are already providing two hours or more PE and school sport. School sports co-ordinators, of which there will be 1,000 by 2004, are already working with families of schools linked to specialist sports colleges to help schools meet this entitlement.

Bownham Park School, Stroud

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions Ministers from her Department have had with the adjudicator in connection with the timing of the announcement about closing Bownham Park School, Stroud; and if she will make a statement. [2226]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Ministers from this Department have had no discussions with the adjudicator in connection with the timing of the announcement about closing Bownham Park School. Ministers were informed on 6 June that the Office of the Schools Adjudicator would be announcing its decision on 8 June. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator is independent of the Department and Ministers have no role to play in what decision the adjudicator makes on a particular proposal.

Community Languages

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 36W, on community languages, if she will list those specialist language colleges which offer *(a)* Urdu, *(b)* Bengali, *(c)* Gujarati, *(d)* Hindi and *(e)* Chinese. [2356]

Mr. Timms: I understand that of the 99 specialist language colleges in operation as of September 2000, 46 offer one or more of the languages in question to an accredited level: Urdu (17), Bengali (10), Gujarati (7), Hindi (1) and Chinese (31). The names of the 46 schools are given in the following table.

	School	*LEA*	*Urdu*	*Bengali*	*Gujarati*	*Hindi*	*Chinese*
1	Arden school	Solihull	—	—	—	—	Yes
2	Ashcombe school	Surrey	—	—	—	—	Yes
3	Bishop Heber county high school	Cheshire	—	—	—	—	Yes
4	Bournemouth school	Bournemouth	—	—	—	—	Yes
5	Bullers Wood school	London borough of Bromley	—	—	—	—	Yes
6	Chatham grammar school for boys	Medway	—	—	—	—	Yes
7	Clevedon community school	North Somerset	—	—	—	—	Yes
8	Cranford community high school	London borough of Hounslow	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Dallam school	Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—
10	Dartford grammar school	Kent	—	Yes	Yes	—	—
11	Elizabeth Garrett Anderson school	London borough of Islington	—	Yes	—	—	—
12	Gosforth high school	Newcastle upon Tyne	Yes	—	—	—	—
13	Haydon school	Hillingdon	—	—	Yes	—	Yes
14	Hele's school	City of Plymouth	—	—	—	—	Yes
15	Hockerill Anglo-European school	Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	Yes
16	Hummersknott school	Darlington	Yes	—	—	—	—
17	Ian Ramsey CE school	Stockton on Tees	Yes	—	—	—	—
18	Judgemeadow community college	City of Leicester	—	—	Yes	—	—
19	Katharine Lady Berkeleys school	Gloucester	—	—	—	—	Yes
20	King Edward VII school	Sheffield	Yes	—	—	—	—
21	Kingsthorpe community school	Northamptonshire	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	Yes
22	Levenshulme high school	Manchester	Yes	Yes	—	—	Yes
23	Little Lever school	Bolton	Yes	—	—	—	Yes
24	Lord Grey school	Milton Keynes	Yes	—	—	—	Yes
25	Lymm high school	Warrington	—	—	—	—	Yes
26	Millais school	West Sussex	—	—	—	—	Yes
27	Monkseaton community high school	North Tyneside	—	Yes	—	—	Yes

	School	LEA	Urdu	Bengali	Gujarati	Hindi	Chinese
28	Montgomery high school	Blackpool	—	—	—	—	Yes
29	Moseley school	Birmingham	Yes	Yes	—	—	—
30	Northgate high school	Suffolk	—	Yes	—	—	—
31	Oulder Hill community school	Rochdale	Yes	—	—	—	—
32	Prince Henrys grammar school	Leeds	—	—	—	—	Yes
33	Queen Mary's high school	Walsall	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	—
34	Royal grammar school	Buckinghamshire	—	—	—	—	Yes
35	Shireland language school	Sandwell	Yes	—	—	—	Yes
36	Sir Thomas Rich's school	Gloucestershire	—	—	Yes	—	—
37	St. Edward's college	Liverpool	—	—	—	—	Yes
38	Tavistock college	Devon	—	—	—	—	Yes
39	The Harwich school	Essex	—	—	—	—	Yes
40	The Holy Family school	Bradford	Yes	—	—	—	—
41	The John Bentley school	Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	Yes
42	The Sir John Cass's Foundation and Red Coat CE school	Tower Hamlet	Yes	Yes	—	—	Yes
43	Tile Hill Wood school	Coventry	Yes	—	—	—	—
44	William Ellis school	London borough of Camden	—	Yes	—	—	Yes
45	Wolverhampton Girls' high school	Wolverhampton	—	—	Yes	—	Yes
46	Woodbridge high school	Redbridge	Yes	—	—	—	Yes
	Total		17	10	7	1	31

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Regional Cultural Consortiums

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the cost to public funds to date of the regional cultural consortiums; and if she will make a statement. [69]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The cost to date of the Regional Cultural Consortiums is as follows:

Expenditure

	£
1999–2000[1]	15,200
2000–01	210,796
2001–02	[2]3,437

[1] The Regional Cultural Consortiums were established in October 1999

[2] Expenditure calculated to 22 June 2001

The Consortiums also receive support from my Department's staff based within the Government offices in the regions. The Regional Development Agencies and the various regional agencies have all been encouraged to help with funding and other means of support.

The Consortiums use their resources to support their strategic role in the regions and promote joint working with other regional partners in order to ensure that cultural and sporting interests make a significant contribution to economic development, regeneration and social inclusion in each region.

Radio Licences

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list all applications for local radio licences which are under consideration by the Radio Authority, indicating when each was lodged. [72]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The following is a list of all applications for local radio licences which are currently under consideration by the Radio Authority:

Local Analogue licences

South and West Yorkshire regional—lodged: 6 February 2001

Sixteen applications:

The Arrow (Chrysalis Radio (Yorkshire) Ltd.)

Century Yorkshire Ltd.

Deja vu Radio (Oldies Radio (Yorkshire) Ltd.)

Flair FM (White Rose Radio Ltd.)

Flix Radio (Yorkshire) Ltd.

Forever 106 (Forever Broadcasting (Yorkshire) Ltd.)

Jazz FM Yorkshire Ltd.

Nova 106 (Yorkshire Radio Enterprises Ltd.)

106.2 The Rose (White Rose Regional Radio Ltd.)

Route FM (Yorkshire Sound Ltd.)

Saga Radio Ltd.

Sunrise Radio (Yorkshire) (Bradford City Radio Ltd.)

Variety FM (Radio Variety Ltd.)

Y107 (Yorkshire Regional Radio Ltd.)

Y-Radio (SMG Regional Radio Ltd.)

Yorkshire FM Radio Ltd.

Omagh and Enniskillen—lodged: 13 March 2001

Four applications:

Fast FM Ltd.

Southwest Radio (Southwest FM Ltd.)

Radio West FM (Radio West Ltd.)

Westside 101 (Lisara Ltd.)

Rugby—lodged: 10 April 2001

Four applications:

Fosseway Radio (Jet FM Ltd.)

The Lion (Lion Radio Ltd.)

Rugby FM (Rugby Broadcasting Company Ltd.)

Rugby 1 (Rugby on Air Co. Ltd.)

North London (current operator: London Greek Radio)—lodged: 8 May 2001

Two applications:

Fusion FM Ltd. (Di' Fusion)

London Greek Radio Ltd.

Thamesmead (current operator: Millennium FM)—lodged: 8 May 2001

Three applications:

Millennium FM Ltd.

Starmela.co.uk Ltd.

Unity FM Ltd.

Stockport (current operator: Imagine FM)—lodged: 12 June 2001

Three applications:

Imagine FM Ltd.

Stock FM Ltd.

RAKA Asian Radio Ltd.

Local Digital Multiplex licences

Ayr—lodged: 24 April 2001

Two applications:

Score Digital Ltd.

Switchdigital (Scotland) Ltd.

Bournemouth—lodged: 15 May 2001

One application:

Now Digital Ltd.

Dundee and Perth—lodged: 19 June 2001

Two applications:

Score Digital Ltd.

Switchdigital (Scotland) Ltd.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to end the current restrictions on religious broadcasters wishing to apply for new radio licences. [78]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The White Paper "A New Future for Communications" announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local terrestrial digital licence. The White Paper also invited views on whether the restrictions on ownership of other terrestrial licences by religious bodies should be relaxed, and we are currently considering the responses. The Government will publish details of their proposals in a draft Bill as announced in the Queen's speech.

New Opportunities Fund

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will state the income to date of the New Opportunities Fund together with cash disbursements made to projects. [113]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* At 31 May 2001, the New Opportunities Fund had received £814.9 million in income and committed £794.7 million to projects. £189.1 million had been made as cash disbursements to projects. A further £79.6 million in grants was awarded at the June Board meeting, and details of these will be announced in the near future.

BBC Board of Governors

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure political neutrality in appointments to the BBC Board of Governors. [114]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Department for Culture, Media and Sport appointments follow the rules of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, which state that appointments should be governed by selection on merit and that political activity is not a consideration for appointment.

The Golden Jubilee

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans she has for Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee to be celebrated in the regions; [128]

(2) if she will make a statement on preparations for the celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [127]

Tessa Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 22 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 7–9W.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are for the use of Lottery funds in relation to Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. [126]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Voluntary organisations and local groups in the community will be able to apply through the cross-distributor Awards for All scheme for grants of between £500 and £5,000 for Jubilee-related projects. Projects must meet existing criteria and involve one or more of the Lottery good causes of the arts, sport, heritage, charities, health, education or the environment. Larger applications associated with the Jubilee will be considered by Lottery distributors if the project meets the criteria and timetable of an existing programme or scheme.

BBC Chairman

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the timetable for the appointment of the new Chairman of the BBC. [104]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* My Department has advertised the post for a new Chairman of the BBC, and the deadline for submission of applications is 9 July. The appointments process will follow the rules of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the position will be filled once those processes have been completed and a suitable candidate has been identified.

Arts Boards/Arts Council

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the number of employees *(a)* currently and *(b)* in May 1997 of each of the Regional Arts Boards and of the Arts Council of England. [75]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The number of full-time equivalent employees of each of the Regional Arts Boards and the Arts Council of England in May 1997 and June 2001 is set out as follows.

	Full-time equivalent employees	
	May 1997	*June 2001*
Arts Council of England	240.5	205
Regional Arts Board		
East England Arts	48	35.5
East Midlands Arts	36	42
London Arts	44	69
North West Arts	46	53
Northern Arts	36	38
Southern Arts	33	39
South East Arts	29	40.6
South West Arts	33	39.5
West Midlands Arts	42	45
Yorkshire Arts	40	45.1

Culture Online

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the future of Culture Online. [98]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Culture Online is a manifesto commitment and we remain committed to press ahead with the programme by the target date of 2002. We are in the final stages of the preparation of our business case for Culture Online and are currently considering the most appropriate way to establish the new organisation.

Regional Arts Boards

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is her Department's policy towards the regional arts boards. [116]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Arts Council is due to report to me very shortly on its plans for reorganising the arts funding system in England and I am looking forward to discussing the proposals with it and other interested parties in more detail once I have received them.

News Scheduling

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the scheduling of news bulletins on *(a)* independent television channels and *(b)* the BBC. [136]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Under the current arrangements, the scheduling of television news bulletins on independent television channels and the BBC is the responsibility of the Independent Television Commission and the BBC Governors, respectively. We set out in the Communications White Paper—A New Future for Communications (CM 5010)—our intention to include within the proposed new regulatory structure an obligation on public service broadcasters, including the BBC, to safeguard the provision of news and current affairs in peak time.

Underwater Archaeological Sites

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to enhance the protection of underwater archaeological sites. [100]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government are actively seeking a legislative mechanism to allow the transfer of responsibility for underwater archaeology to English Heritage at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime my Department will continue to support initiatives, such as the Nautical Archaeological Society's excellent training scheme, to raise awareness of the importance of our underwater cultural heritage and promote best practice in its protection, investigation and the public's enjoyment of it.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what legal discussions she has had regarding trade names and trade marks used by the New Millennium Experience Company. [77]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I have had no legal discussions regarding trade names or trade marks used by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC).

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Football Association regarding the future development of Wembley Stadium. [2153]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have had any discussions with the Football Association since coming to the Department.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future plans for Wembley Stadium. [2152]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 37W.

Sponsorship (Tobacco Companies)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what discussions she has had with sponsors of Formula One regarding the proposed ban on tobacco advertising; and if she will make a statement; [141]

(2) what discussions she has had with representatives of *(a)* Formula One and *(b)* other sports regarding the proposed ban on sponsorship by tobacco companies. [142]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* I have not yet had discussions with either sponsors or representatives of Formula One or representatives of other sports regarding the proposed ban on tobacco advertising.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what advice she has received about the proposed funding of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester. [1341]

(2) what estimate she has made of the adequacy of funding arrangements for the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester; [1340]

(3) what representations she has received from Manchester 2002 Ltd. and Manchester city council about the funding of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester. [1342]

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the 2002 Commonwealth Games. [2198]

Tessa Jowell: Pursuant to the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 78–79W, the figure for Manchester city council's contribution to the further funding for the 2002 Commonwealth Games is a further £45 million and not £35 million as given in the answer.

TREASURY

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals contribute to *(a)* defined benefit occupational pension schemes, *(b)* defined contribution occupational pension schemes, *(c)* group personal pension schemes, *(d)* additional voluntary contributions and *(e)* free-standing additional voluntary contributions. [1141]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

The latest information available is in the table.

million

Type of pension provision	*Number of active members*
Defined benefit schemes	8.8
Defined contribution schemes	1.1
'Hybrid' schemes[1]	0.3
Group Personal Pensions	1.4
Additional Voluntary Contributions	0.9
Free Standing Additional Voluntary Contributions	1.4

[1] Mixed defined benefit/defined contribution

Notes:

1. All figures are rounded to nearest 0.1 million
2. Active members are those currently accruing pension rights
3. The information on occupational pension schemes is drawn from the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes (1995). The number of members will include those whose scheme does not currently require member contributions. It is estimated that the number of members contributing are 8.2 million for defined benefit and 0.8 million for defined contribution schemes.
4. The information on Group Personal Pensions is drawn from the New Earnings Survey (2000).
5. The information for Additional Voluntary Contributions covers private sector schemes only.
6. The information on Free Standing Additional Voluntary Contributions is drawn from Inland Revenue Statistics (2000). Individuals can have more than one Free Standing Additional Voluntary Contribution scheme.

Employment Rates

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of people of working age *(a)* with disabilities, *(b)* aged over 50 years, *(c)* of ethnic minority background and *(d)* who are single parents, have been in employment for each of the last 10 years in (i) the UK, (ii) England, (iii) Somerset and (iv) Yeovil constituency; and if he will make a statement. [1389]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. David Laws, dated 4 July 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question about various groups of people employed for last 10 years in UK, England, Somerset and Yeovil. I am replying in his absence. (1389)

Estimates of the number of people in employment in the various groups that you requested are available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). It has not been possible to supply estimates for the Yeovil constituency in any of the tables as the sample size for this area would be too small to provide a reliable estimate.

Table 1 below shows the proportions of disabled people of working age in employment, from spring 1998 to spring 2000, estimates are not available prior to this. Table 2 shows the proportion of people between 51 and working age in employment from spring 1991 to spring 2000, however the regional breakdown is only available for the latest quarter. The proportion of the ethnic minority population of working age in employment is shown in Table 3 below. The sample size is too small to provide reliable estimates for the regional breakdown. Table 4 shows the proportion of lone parents of working age in employment. This table shows data for spring 1990 and then spring 1992 to spring 2000 as data for 1991 are not available on a consistent basis. Estimates for Somerset are not available from 1991 to 1999 and the sample size is too small to provide a reliable estimate for spring 2000.

Table 1: Proportions of disabled people of working age[1] in employment; spring 1998 to spring 2000; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	UK	*England*	*Somerset*
Spring 1998	43.1	45.2	60.3
Spring 1999	45.8	47.8	60.2
Spring 2000	46.4	48.6	53.2

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2: Proportion of people aged 51–59/64 years in employment; spring 1991 to spring 2000; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	UK	*England*	*Somerset*
Spring 1991	63.4	64.7	[1]—
Spring 1992	61.9	62.8	[1]—
Spring 1993	60.4	61.6	[1]—
Spring 1994	61.2	62.2	[1]—
Spring 1995	61.6	62.8	[1]—
Spring 1996	62.2	63.4	[1]—
Spring 1997	62.7	64.0	[1]—
Spring 1998	63.8	65.3	[1]—
Spring 1999	64.8	66.1	[1]—
Spring 2000	65.6	67.0	68.8

[1] Data not available

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 3: Proportion of the ethnic minority population of working age[1] in employment; spring 1991 to spring 2000; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	UK	England	Somerset
Spring 1991	[2]—	57.3	[2]—
Spring 1992	54.8	54.8	[3]—
Spring 1993	52.7	52.6	[3]—
Spring 1994	51.4	51.6	[3]—
Spring 1995	52.5	52.6	[3]—
Spring 1996	53.5	53.5	[3]—
Spring 1997	56.5	56.6	[3]—
Spring 1998	56.4	56.4	[3]—
Spring 1999	56.2	56.4	[2]—
Spring 2000	57.5	57.5	[3]—

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[2] Data not available

[3] Sample size too small for reliable estimate

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 4: Proportion of lone parents of working age[1] in employment with dependent children; spring 1990 to spring 2000; not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	UK	England	Somerset
Spring 1990	44.6	45.1	[2]—
Spring 1992	43.0	43.5	[2]—
Spring 1993	42.8	43.4	[2]—
Spring 1994	44.0	44.3	[2]—
Spring 1995	44.0	44.4	[2]—
Spring 1996	43.7	43.8	[2]—
Spring 1997	44.7	45.4	[2]—
Spring 1998	46.1	46.6	[2]—
Spring 1999	46.9	47.1	[2]—
Spring 2000	49.7	50.5	[3]—

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[2] Data not available

[3] Sample size too small for reliable estimate

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the *(a)* male and *(b)* male and female working age population have been in (i) full-time employment and (ii) part-time or full-time employment in each year since 1975; and if he will make a statement. [1388]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. David Laws, dated 4 July 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the proportion of males and males and females in full and part-time employment since 1975 (1388). I am replying in his absence.

Estimates of the proportion of the working age population in employment are available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The table below shows non-seasonally adjusted LFS estimates of the proportion of the working age population in employment and full-time employment from spring 1984 to spring 2000. Estimates for 1979 to 1983 are not available on a consistent basis and prior to this there is no LFS data available.

Proportions of the working age[1] population in employment and in full-time employment; United Kingdom; spring 1984 to spring 2000—not seasonally adjusted

Percentage[2]

	All persons (male and female)		Males	
Spring	In full or part-time employment[3]	In full-time[4] employment	In full or part-time employment[3]	In full-time[4] employment
1984	68.3	55.0	77.4	74.7
1985	69.2	55.5	77.9	75.0
1986	69.4	55.5	77.4	74.2
1987	70.1	55.6	77.7	74.1
1988	72.4	57.6	80.1	76.3
1989	74.2	59.1	81.8	78.1
1990	74.7	59.4	82.1	78.1
1991	73.0	57.8	79.6	75.5
1992	71.1	55.4	76.3	71.8
1993	70.2	54.4	74.8	70.1
1994	70.6	54.3	75.3	70.2
1995	71.1	54.9	76.4	70.8
1996	71.6	54.7	76.4	70.6
1997	72.6	55.4	77.5	71.3
1998	73.1	55.9	78.1	71.9
1999	73.6	56.2	78.4	72.1
2000	74.3	56.7	79.1	72.7

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[2] Percentages include those who did not state whether working full/part-time

[3] Includes unpaid family workers from spring 1992

[4] The classification as full-time is based on respondents' self-assessment

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Census 2001

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken to ensure that the volunteers who helped distribute the Census 2001 forms have been adequately remunerated. [1738]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Miss Anne McIntosh, dated July 2001:

The Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question asking what measures have been taken to ensure that the volunteers who distributed the 2001 Census forms have been adequately remunerated. I am replying in his absence. (1738)

Most of the 70,000 Census field staff were paid for the work carried out by them under the terms of their contractual agreements with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in full and on time. However, there have been problems with making final payments which have lead to delays in settling claims for payments and other outstanding expenses.

In the light of these difficulties ONS has written to Census District Managers explaining the situation, and individually to the field staff concerned, to apologise for the delay and to ensure that they are aware they can contact ONS directly. Arrangements to complete these payments as a matter of urgency are now in hand. ONS has made interim final payments to those affected and has introduced special pay runs to minimise any further delays in making payments. Extra staff have been drafted in to the payroll operation to make sure the remainder of the claims are processed as quickly as possible. All staff will be paid the amounts due to them.

Euro

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the impact of the euro exchange rate has been on UK competitiveness since the launch of the euro. [2206]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* UK exports of goods to the European Union are now over 15 per cent. higher than at the time of the euro's introduction. The UK also has a modest current account surplus with the rest of the EU.

Surveillance and Security Services

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of total UK expenditure on domestic and foreign surveillance and security services for each year since 1985, expressed in real terms using 2000–01 prices; what public service agreements exist to ensure value for money for such expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [1371]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The level of expenditure by the three intelligence agencies, GCHQ, the Security Service and the Secret Intelligence Service, was first disclosed in 1994. As a consequence of the decision taken at the time not to disclose information for the years prior to 1992–93, I do not have that information. The available information is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*2000–01 constant prices*
1992–93	860	1,048
1993–94	940	1,116
1994–95	856	1,002
1995–96	782	890
1996–97	742	818
1997–98	704	755
1998–99	686	715
1999–2000	769	783
2000–01	803	803
2001–02	[1]876	857

[1] (Resource)

Each of the three agencies has a Public Service Agreement, the contents of which are available to the Intelligence and Security Committee.

Telecom/Computer Sectors

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the rate of growth of telecoms and computer sectors was in the five years to December 2000; and what his forecast is for the next two years. [1643]

Ruth Kelly: Output of computers and computing equipment grew at an average rate of 14 per cent. a year in the five years to December 2000 while manufacture of transmission and telecommunications equipment grew at an average of 26 per cent. a year. The Treasury does not produce output forecasts for specific industries. Forecasts for manufacturing as a whole can be found on page 174, table B6 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2001 (HC 279).

Industrial Provident Societies

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new industrial provident societies have been registered in each of the last five years; and in what areas. [2338]

Ruth Kelly: The table provides details of all industrial and provident societies; including credit unions, which have been registered each year since 1996.

	Registered in:		
Calendar years/entities	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*Total*
1996			
I&Ps	183	16	199
Credit unions	35	1	36
1997			
I&Ps	175	11	186
Credit unions	39	12	51
1998			
I&Ps	175	13	188
Credit unions	40	7	47
1999			
I&Ps	187	14	201
Credit unions	43	7	50
2000			
I&Ps	147	13	160
Credit unions	34	5	39
2001[1]			
I&Ps	70	4	74
Credit unions	10	0	10
Total			
I&Ps	937	71	1,008
Credit unions	201	32	233

[1] To date

Source:

Registry of Friendly Societies—2001

Local Regeneration Projects

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what policies he has to encourage banks to become partners in local regeneration projects. [1776]

Ruth Kelly: The Government, through their National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, have brought together many different organisations in response to the problems of deprived neighbourhoods. As part of this strategy, banks are involved in the New Deal for Communities pathfinder projects as well as other initiatives to reduce financial exclusion.

European Central Bank

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the scope available to Ministers to intervene in the decisions of the European central bank in circumstances where they deem that the ECB Board has taken a decision which has a negative impact on EU member state economies. [1762]

Ruth Kelly: According to Article 108 of the treaty, when exercising the powers and carrying out the tasks and duties conferred upon them by the treaty and the statute of the European system of central banks, neither the European central bank, nor any member of its decision-making body, shall seek or take instructions from community institutions and bodies, from any Government of a member state or from any other body.

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce legislation to reform the Office for National Statistics. [18]

Ruth Kelly: The launch of National Statistics in June 2000 marked the largest overhaul of official statistics in the United Kingdom for over 30 years, putting in place new arrangements to deliver statistics that command the trust and confidence of the public.

The Office for National Statistics, led by the National Statistician, is central to the Government's drive to improve the nation's statistical service. All of its public access databases and publications are within the ambit of the new arrangements, as set out in the "Framework for National Statistics".

Within the new arrangements, the Statistics Commission—independent of both Ministers and the producers of National Statistics—monitors and advises on the quality and integrity of National Statistics. The Framework Document also tasked the Statistics Commission to review the need for statistics legislation after two years (from 2000) and report back to Ministers, and keep the legislative framework under review thereafter.

Pension Rights (Part-time Workers)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Government have made of the impact of the House of Lords ruling on the pension rights of part-time workers on public sector pension schemes. [2268]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Following the House of Lords ruling in February 2001, many part-timers, who made timely claims in the Employment Tribunals, may be eligible for back-dated access to public service pension schemes, once their cases have completed the legal process. In addition, there are many part-timers still in employment covered by public service schemes who may be eligible for back-dated access to their scheme.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Duchy of Lancaster

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the disbursement from the surplus of the Duchy of Lancaster to Her Majesty the Queen in each of the last 25 years. [2075]

Mr. Leslie: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has provided the following information.

Payments made by the Duchy to the Privy Purse over the past 25 years are as follows:

Year	*£*
1976	415,000
1977	445,000
1978	485,000
1979	626,500
1980	815,000
1981	983,000
1982	1,075,000
1983	1,225,000
1984	1,350,000
1985	1,475,000
1986	1,700,000
1987	1,950,000
1988	2,270,000
1989	3,190,000
1990	3,000,000
1991	3,100,000
1992	3,750,000
1993	3,918,253
1994	3,900,000
1995	[1]2,100,000
1996	5,345,000
1997	5,752,000
1998	5,703,000
1999	5,968,000
2000	5,907,711

[1] Change of accounting period

Poverty Alleviation

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has for co-ordinating Government and EU programmes in areas of high social and economic deprivation to maximise the impact such programmes have on building up social capital, economic activity, environmental improvement and public safety; and if he will make a statement. [2122]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

'A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy Action Plan' was launched by the Prime Minister in January 2001. It sets out the Government's vision to narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of England, so that within 10–20 years no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. Our aim is to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality schools, decent housing, and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

This approach will focus main Government programmes explicitly on deprived areas and will require all sectors to work in partnership. The strategy is being spearheaded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, a cross-cutting unit based in DTLR and staffed by officials from across Whitehall and the public sector, with secondees from the private and voluntary sectors.

In respect of European Programmes, we are looking to the Regional Development Agencies. They have the main responsibility for regional economic development, and are key members of partnerships which deliver both domestic and European Funds to the programme areas. We are keeping the RDA role under review as the European programmes develop.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Auld Report

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will place in the Library copies of the evidence submitted to Lord Justice Auld's review of the criminal courts. [2215]

Mr. Wills: Lord Justice Auld has not yet completed his review of the criminal courts. The Government will make arrangements for the evidence to be made available to the public once the report has been published.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if Lord Justice Auld has completed his review of the criminal courts; and what arrangements the Government have made for the publication of his report. [2216]

Mr. Wills: Lord Justice Auld will complete his review of the criminal courts shortly. The Government will make arrangements for publication once his report is received.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor expects to receive Lord Justice Auld's report on criminal courts. [2214]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor expects to receive Lord Justice Auld's report shortly.

Sentencing Policy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the sentencing policy of individual judges whose sentencing he has reason to believe does not reflect the severity of the cases heard. [1352]

Mr. Wills: It would be improper for the Lord Chancellor to intervene in, or comment on, the sentence imposed in an individual case since to do so would undermine the independence of the judiciary. Within the statutory limits laid down by Parliament, the appropriate sentence in each individual case is entirely a matter for the discretion of the trial judge, who has heard the evidence, listened to the arguments and given in open court his reasons for the sentence imposed.

Judges

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will re-examine his Department's advice to judges on how to avoid any display of partisanship which might be considered party political. [1351]

Mr. Wills: The current guidance given to judges on appointment advises them against engagement, in any capacity which might undermine, or be reasonably thought to undermine, their judicial independence or impartiality. A statement about the position of the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary was made by the Senior Law Lord in another place on 22 June 2000, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 419–20, setting out the general principles on the participation of the Lords of Appeal in the business of the House of Lords. There are no plans to review the guidance.

Office for the Supervision of Solicitors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the performance of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors. [911]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government continue closely to monitor the situation of the OSS. Progress has been made in clearing the backlog of cases received by OSS prior to 1 January 2000. There is also evidence that in complaints received after that date, the OSS is beginning to achieve the quality and turnaround time targets that were agreed with the Government in December 2000.

Mediation UK

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what support the Lord Chancellor's Department has given to Mediation UK in each of the last five years. [2135]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In both 2000–01 and 2001–02 the Legal Services Commission has granted £15,000 to Mediation UK as part of a joint funding exercise to provide core funding that also includes the Home Office and the Department of Health.

Human Rights

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will initiate a study into the likely consequential effects of establishing a human rights commission on the existing arrangements for upholding laws relating to *(a)* equal opportunities, *(b)* sex discrimination, *(c)* racial discrimination, *(d)* disability rights and *(e)* child protection; [1721]

(2) what assessment he has made of the case for establishing a human rights commission to promote the Human Rights Act 1998 and investigate violations of human rights in the United Kingdom. [1720]

Mr. Wills: The Government have not ruled out the possibility of a Human Rights Commission. We already have several commissions, however, for example the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission, and there may be a case for a single, over-arching human rights commission, with a divisional structure, to cover all these areas. The Government would welcome representations on that possibility. During the last Parliament, the Joint Committee on Human Rights issued a consultation document, seeking views on what form a human rights commission might take. We will consider very carefully any recommendations the reconstituted Joint Committee makes following this consultation.

Bailiff Law

Barbara Follett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made with the reform of bailiff law. [918]

Mr. Wills: The area of bailiff law is complex and requires careful consideration as part of a comprehensive enforcement system. The Government's forthcoming Green Paper on enforcement will include proposals for a single piece of bailiff law. The Government continue

to believe that the broadened enforcement review, announced on 6 March this year, which includes structures for, and the regulation of, civil enforcement agents generally, not just within the High Court and county courts, affords an opportunity for real progress in our enforcement system.

Libra Computer Project

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the current state of the Libra computer project, including the total cost, specifying what sums expended are irrecoverable. [1970]

Mr. Wills: Work on the Libra project continues. The first stage of the project, to roll out the infrastructure and provide office automation to all courts, is proceeding on schedule.

The second part is the development and implementation of a software application. This is part complete: there is a demonstration version dealing with criminal cases which has been well received by users improving how they operate; and developing the rest of the software is expected to delay full implementation until toward the end of next year, representing an overall delay to this part of the project of 15 to 18 months.

The total value of the Libra contract is estimated to be £319 million over the life of the contract at current prices and workloads. Payments made to date amount to £10 million (ex VAT) of which £7.8 million (ex VAT) are for office automation services delivered to the courts to an acceptable standard, and for which the question of recovery does not arise.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 9 July 2001

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Commonwealth Games 2002

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Government's financial support for the 2002 Commonwealth Games. [94]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002 will be the biggest multi-sport event ever held in the United Kingdom. They will leave a lasting sporting, economic and social legacy.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office explained, in evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee on 20 March 2001, that Manchester City Council, with the Government, had arranged a review of the finances and organisation of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester next year as a build up to the Games moves from the planning to the implementation phase.

Following the review, conscious of the benefits the Games will bring to the nation as a whole, the Government have agreed to provide from existing resources up to £30 million to support the Games. Sport England has agreed to provide up to £30 million to support the Games' costs in addition to its existing contribution to capital facilities, and Manchester City Council will make available a further £45 million. £25 million of these funds will be held jointly by the three parties as a contingency fund. This support is additional to the £10.5 million which the Government have already made available towards the costs of the opening and closing ceremonies for the Commonwealth Games, and marks the full extent of the financial support that the Government are prepared to make available.

The Government consider that this package should give the Games' organisation sufficient certainty to deliver the Games. Manchester City Council continues to retain ultimate financial responsibility for the Games.

Discussions continue about the make up and timing of the package of financial support. The Government, Manchester City Council and Sport England will be working with the Games' organisers to strengthen the management arrangements for the control of expenditure.

Culture Online

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the cost to public funds to date of developing Culture Online. [91]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The cost of public funds to date of developing Culture Online is £1,196,543. This has been spent on: producing illustrative materials outlining how Culture Online will operate; producing the Vision for Culture Online; providing a website to host these materials and the Vision; extensive consultation with the cultural and education sectors; market research; employing consultants to develop the business case for Culture Online; and employing lawyers to advise on Intellectual Property Rights issues for Culture Online.

National Stadium

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the proposals for *(a)* Pickett's Lock athletics stadium and *(b)* Wembley Stadium. [1427]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 37W and to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W.

Community Sports Stadiums

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to expand community sports stadiums throughout the country. [2328]

Mr. Caborn: The Government support the expansion of sport and leisure facilities through various means including direct funding from the Sports Lottery Fund, Space for Sports and Arts and the New Opportunities Fund. Our Plan for Sport sets out how we aim to encourage local authorities to carry out research into the existing sport and leisure facilities in their areas and recommends that each local authority should develop a sports strategy over the next five years which, through consultation with the relevant agencies, ensures that new and enhanced indoor and outdoor facilities provide equal opportunity for participation.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Local Government Finance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish his timetable for the review of local government finance; and if he will make a statement. [1084]

Dr. Whitehead: September's local government finance Green Paper set out our plans for reform of the local government finance system. An analysis of the responses we received on this and other issues was published on our website in March. A White Paper setting out our decisions on the way forward will be published later this year.

Railways

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what moneys have been allocated to Scotland from the Railway Development Fund. [1397]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA's plans and priorities for development of the Rail Modernisation Fund will be set out in the Authority's Strategic Plan in the autumn. Funds will be allocated on the basis of value for money and affordability.

Electoral Law

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to bring section 141 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 into force; how many persons who are *(a)* eligible and *(b)* registered to vote he estimates will be disfranchised as a result; and if he will make a statement. [1290]

Mr. Raynsford: Section 141 will be brought into force shortly, when the second Commencement Order for the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act 2000 is laid.

11,496 overseas electors were registered as of 15 February 2001. But there is no requirement on electoral administrators to provide information about how long overseas electors have been resident outside the UK. Hence the figures requested are not available.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibilities his Department has for the sale of the Millennium Dome and the regeneration of the Greenwich site; and if he will make a statement. [1323]

Ms Keeble: My noble and learned Friend Lord Falconer is responsible in my Department for all issues relating to the future use of the Millennium Dome, including the sponsorship of English Partnerships, the Government's urban regeneration agency, which owns part of the Greenwich Peninsula, including the Dome site and the structure itself.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responsibilities Lord Falconer has for the sale of the Millennium Dome and the regeneration of the Greenwich site; and if he will make a statement. [1322]

Ms Keeble: My noble and learned Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton is Minister for Housing and Planning. Among other duties he is responsible for urban policy and regeneration issues, which includes sponsorship of English Partnerships, the Government's urban regeneration agency. English Partnerships own the Dome site and other land. He is responsible for the Dome sale process.

Public-Private Performance Comparisons

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what methods his Department uses to make direct comparisons of improved performance in the public and private sectors; and what have been the findings of this analysis since it was introduced. [2165]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department makes no direct comparisons between the private and public sectors. But the Government have introduced a comprehensive framework for local government to enable it to improve service delivery through best value. All authorities are required to report their performance annually against key indicators, whether the service is delivered directly by the authority, or by private sector providers. This information is published in authorities' Best Value Performance Plans by the end of March each year.

Transport Council

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the outcome was of the Transport Council meeting held in Luxembourg on 27 to 28 June. [1746]

Mr. Spellar: The Transport Council met in Luxembourg on 28 June. I represented the United Kingdom, together with Sarah Boyack MSP, Minister for Transport in the Scottish Executive.

The Council opened with debates on a number of maritime issues.

A common position was adopted on the draft regulation putting into Community law the recent agreement reached in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on the accelerated phasing in of double hull oil tankers.

The Council reached a common orientation on a draft directive which seeks to improve controls on shipping movements, notably for vessels with hazardous cargoes. Two outstanding issues were debated. Firstly, the Commission introduced a new proposal giving a precise timetable for the retrofitting of Voyage Data Recorders (VDRs) to cargo vessels if no agreement was reached in the IMO. I was among Ministers unable to accept such a precise text. On the second issue, that of restrictions on ships leaving port in exceptionally bad weather or sea conditions, I joined others in expressing concern that legal uncertainties could arise. I also sought to clarify that a member state could only enforce reporting requirements on vessels in areas where it had jurisdiction in international law. A revised text was produced on which Ministers were able to reach common orientation, although I maintained a reserve on the VDR text.

Common approaches were agreed for member states to negotiate in the IMO on the retrofitting of VDRs to cargo vessels, and in the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund (IOPCF) on an increase in the limits for compensation to be paid in cases of major oil spills.

A common orientation was also agreed on a draft directive on the harmonisation of reporting formalities for ships. The aim of the proposal is to simplify procedures for ships arriving at and departing from Community ports, through the acceptance of a common set of IMO forms.

The French Minister, Jean-Claude Gayssot, and I presented a joint proposal urging the Community to bring into force a number of International Conventions relating to marine liability and compensation and pollution from ships. We had, prior to the Council, jointly signed a letter on this issue to our EU counterparts.

The Commissioner reported on the principal elements of the forthcoming White Paper on a strategy for the Common Transport Policy. She hoped that the White Paper would be adopted soon. It is expected to outline

some 60 separate measures to address traffic congestion, increased mobility and demand, and sustainable development.

Council Conclusions were adopted on the Galileo satellite navigation project. I joined other Ministers in noting that more work was needed on the selection of services, the cost-benefit analysis and the securing of private sector finance. The Commission also presented a draft regulation on management of the development phase of Galileo by a joint undertaking.

Over lunch, there was a discussion of the Commission's Single European Sky proposals, aimed at improving air traffic management in Europe and reducing delays.

The Council discussed aircraft noise issues. The Commission reported on ongoing discussions with the US on hushkits, and said that, subject to developments at the General Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in September, a proposal would be brought forward to replace the Hushkits Regulation.

The Presidency presented a progress report on the proposed regulation to establish a European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). It sought agreement on two of the outstanding questions: coverage of third country aircraft, and the mechanism to appoint the Executive Director. The Council agreed that the Commission should bring forward proposals on application to third country aircraft, where justified, as part of future work on essential requirements for airline operations. The Council accepted that the executive Director of the EASA should be appointed by four-fifths majority of the Management Board, on the basis of a proposal by the Commission. There will be further discussion under the Belgian Presidency, notably on institutional aspects.

The Council discussed an amendment to Regulation 2027/97 on air carrier liability, and political agreement was reached on a common position. The amendment will have the effect of increasing the levels of carriers' liability to passengers. The Council has already signed the Montreal Convention, with a view to ratification, and the two measures together significantly strengthen the protection afforded to air passengers in the Community.

The Council agreed Conclusions affirming the voluntary agreements reached with airlines on air passenger rights.

There was a progress report from the Commission on proposals to update the state aid rules and procurement procedures for public transport services by rail, road and inland waterway. The Commission indicated that there were difficulties in agreeing the proposal. Sarah Boyack noted the United Kingdom's support for the general principle of the regulation, but pointed out that its application to traditional and complex underground railway systems needed careful reflection.

There was also a progress report on a draft directive on training of professional drivers for the carriage of goods or passengers.

The Commission presented its proposals on three issues in the "road package": an amendment to Directive 91/439 on driving licences; an amendment to Regulation 3820/85 on drivers' hours; and an amendment to Directive 92/6 on the use of speed limitation devices, extending compulsory fitting of them to vehicles above 3.5 tonnes. No decisions were taken.

Under other business, the Commission presented a new proposal on airport slot allocation. It also reported on the implementation of the package of rail transport measures adopted by the Council last year, noting its intention to propose a second package of measures, including a directive on rail safety regulation and the establishment of a European Rail Agency. Also under other business, the Commission reported on progress in aviation negotiations with Central and Eastern European countries and with Cyprus; co-operation with Euro-Mediterranean partners on transport and energy; and discussions with Russia on the issue of charges imposed for Siberian overflights.

Bus Deregulation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of deregulation on securing a comprehensive network of public bus services. [1730]

Ms Keeble: The historical impacts of bus deregulation in 1986 were studied closely in the policy review which preceded the 1998 Transport White Paper. In the decade after 1986, operated bus mileage outside London increased overall by 25 per cent. The position necessarily varies from place to place. It is primarily for local authorities, in developing their bus strategies within local transport plans, to assess the adequacy of the bus network and to take appropriate action within the framework of their new powers in the Transport Act 2000. We are making additional funding available through the rural bus grant and the rural and urban bus challenge schemes.

A3

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the traffic figures for the A3 between Robin Hood roundabout and Roehampton Lane for each of the last 10 years. [1749]

Mr. Jamieson: The estimated annual average daily traffic flows for all motor vehicles on the A3 at Roehampton Vale from 1990 to 2000 are:

Year	*Estimated annual average daily flow*
1991	86,200
1992	87,400
1993	85,300
1994	79,900
1995	79,900
1996	80,800
1997	93,200
1998	92,500
1999	81,600
2000	76,400

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the accident figures for the A3 between Robin Hood roundabout and Roehampton Lane for each of the last 10 years. [1750]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Accidents on the A3 between the Robin Hood roundabout and Roehampton Lane: 1991–2000

Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	All
1991	1	5	17	23
1992	0	3	19	22
1993	0	2	12	14
1994	0	1	10	11
1995	0	1	17	18
1996	0	4	10	14
1997	0	2	16	18
1998	0	0	14	14
1999	0	0	16	16
2000	0	0	9	9

Kemble/Swindon Rail Track

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with Railtrack on the re-doubling of the track between Kemble and Swindon. [1656]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* None.

East-West Rail Route

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to take forward the proposals in the Strategic Rail Authority's London East/West Study. [2211]

Mr. Jamieson: As my predecessor announced on 3 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 739W, under the guidance of the High-Level Group the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London are jointly taking forward work on project definition, including alternative service patterns, and design development of a central, cross-London, rail link, and a feasibility study of a south-west to north-east London rail link.

The SRA continues to assess the other potential schemes identified in the London East-West Study.

Mobile Phone Masts

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when guidance will be issued to local planning authorities on new consultations on the siting of mobile phone masts. [2337]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 17W.

Fire Brigade Training

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what methods are used by fire brigades to train those involved in decision making on arrival at an incident. [2314]

Dr. Whitehead: Training for incident command is undertaken at local, regional and national centres using live situations, simulations and virtual reality systems.

Guidance has also been issued to the Fire Service on Incident Command. In 1999 Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate produced "The Fire Service Manual on Incident Command" to ensure national consistency in the command systems used by all the UK Fire Brigades.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice his Department has given to fire brigades about using virtual reality in training. [2313]

Dr. Whitehead: Although the Home Office did not issue formal guidance to the Fire Service on virtual reality training systems the importance of a national incident command system for the Fire Service is recognised. Fire Brigades were encouraged by the Home Office and will be encouraged by this Department to improve emergency incident management techniques by undertaking virtual reality training.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consideration was given to bus and rail travel concessions for the disabled in Scotland and Wales when guidance on this subject was last issued. [2663]

Ms Keeble: Under the provisions of the Transport Act 2000, elderly and disabled people in England and Wales are entitled to half fare—or better—on local bus services, and the necessary travel pass must be issued free of charge. Local authorities may offer greater concessions—for example less than half fare, and cheap travel on train or ferry services—if they wish, and many do.

The Transport Act 2000 also requires the Secretary of State to issue guidance to local authorities advising on how the eligibility criteria for disabled people should be applied when applications for travel passes are considered. My Department issued such guidance to local authority associations, the bus industry and disability interests on 31 May. It is available on my Department's website at www.dtlr.gov.uk/itwp/consult/cf/disabled/index.htm.

Concessionary travel in Scotland and Wales is a devolved matter.

Housing (Slough)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many permanent dwellings were completed in Slough by *(a)* private companies, *(b)* registered social landlords and *(c)* the local authority in each of the last five years. [2518]

Ms Keeble: Figures for the estimated number of new permanent dwellings completed in Slough, for private enterprise, registered social landlords and local authorities, for the last five financial years, are given in the table.

Year	Private enterprise	Registered social landlords	Local authority	All dwellings
1996–97	287	64	0	351
1997–98	316	33	0	349
1998–99	341	0	0	341
1999–2000	449	0	0	449
2000–01	660	41	0	701

Positive Discrimination

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 22W, on positive discrimination, if he will publish the agenda and minutes of the recent seminar on women's representation in politics, indicating which officials attended the seminar; which other countries were represented; where the seminar was held and on what date; and what the total cost was of UK attendance at the seminar. [2839]

Dr. Whitehead: The seminar on Women's Representation in politics was organised by the Constitution Unit of University College, London.

The seminar was held at 7 Millbank, London, on 26 June 2001. A small team of Government Officials from the Women's Unit of the Cabinet Office lead by my noble Friend Baroness Morgan, at no cost, were present at the seminar along with representatives from all sides of the House.

There were speakers from France, Norway, Sweden and Germany and representatives from England and Scotland.

The minutes from the seminar have not yet been made available by the University College, London.

A12 Bypass

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the A12 bypass from Margaretting to Boreham has a concrete surface; and what plans there are to replace road surfaces on this road with a noise-reducing surface. [2820]

Mr. Jamieson: The whole of the A12 bypass from Margaretting to Boreham has a concrete surface, apart from some isolated areas on bridge decks.

In the Government's "Transport 2010—The Ten Year Plan" published in July 2000, we set a target of installing quieter surfacing on all concrete stretches of motorway and trunk road by 2011.

The timing of the work will be influenced by criteria which have been the subject of consultation with local authorities. The criteria have yet to be finalised but an announcement is anticipated this summer.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff were employed by the Strategic Rail Authority at the latest date for which figures are available. [2868]

Mr. Byers: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 13W.

DVLA

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what appeal process is available to those who disagree with decisions by the DVLA to refuse driving licences. [2419]

Mr. Jamieson: A statutory right of appeal to a magistrates court in England and Wales and to a sheriff court in Scotland is available to those who disagree with DVLA's decision to revoke, restrict or to refuse to grant a driving licence.

Driving Licences (Drugs)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on which date it was decided that persistent misuse of drugs was a relevant disability in respect of revocation of driving licences under section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1998. [2417]

Mr. Jamieson: Parliament decided that persistent misuse of drugs should be included in section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 as a relevant disability when the draft legislation was approved by the House of Lords on 12 July 1996 and the House of Commons on 17 July 1996. The change took effect from 1 January 1997.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what research the DVLA based its decision to revoke driving licences on the grounds of persistent drug misuse in respect of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* heroin, *(c)* medicinal drugs, *(d)* cannabis and *(e)* ecstasy. [2597]

Mr. Jamieson: In relation to alcohol and drug misuse, the medical standards for fitness to drive are based on the minimum health standards laid down in the Second EC Directive on driving licences and the expert advice of the Honorary Medical Advisory Panel on Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse and Driving. The Panel keeps abreast of medical and pharmacological research at a domestic and international level.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many driving licence applications were *(a)* refused and *(b)* withdrawn, on the grounds of misuse of drugs in each of the past 10 years broken down by each drug involved. [2418]

Mr. Jamieson: Statistics specifically relating to these circumstances are available only for the last three financial years. Separate figures for refusals and revocations are not available, but total figures are as follows:

	Number
1998–99	285
1999–2000	354
2000–01	464

No separate figures for each drug type are available.

Home Zone Challenge Fund

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements have been made for local authorities to apply for funding from the home zone challenge fund. [3072]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend has announced details of the arrangements for the Home Zone Challenge fund. All local traffic authorities in England are invited to apply for funding. Bids should be submitted by 3 October 2001. A copy of the guidance for the Home Zone

Challenge has been sent to all eligible local authorities. A copy of the guidance has also been placed in the House Library.

Local Authority Spending Formula

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the spending formula for local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [2589]

Dr. Whitehead: As part of our review of the grant distribution formulae for England, the Department published 'Modernising Local Government Finance: A Green Paper' in September 2000. The Green Paper includes an assessment of the existing formulae against our aims for a good local government finance system. In particular, the Green Paper argues that the formulae:

Have become increasingly difficult to explain and understand;

Rely too much on statistical analysis of spending, and do not recognise the extent to which past spending patterns are limited as indicators of patterns of future need;

Have not always given authorities much certainty from year to year about the level of grant they might expect, hampering forward planning; and

Do not allow for any fine-tuning to take account of the particular circumstances of individual authorities.

The Green Paper consulted on a number of options which could address these concerns. We will publish our conclusions on the way forward in a White Paper later this year.

Local government finance in Scotland and Wales is a devolved matter for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

Urban Capacity Studies

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will conduct a review of urban capacity studies completed by local authorities to ensure that they comply with the guidelines set out by his Department; and if he will place a freeze on MDA approvals pending the outcome of this review. [2586]

Ms Keeble: Local planning authorities are responsible for undertaking the urban housing capacity studies required by our planning guidance for housing (PPG3). We expect these studies to lead to updated development plans that give priority to reusing brownfields before developing greenfields. All proposals for housing development should be tested against the policies set out in PPG3 and local authorities are directed to consult the Secretary of State before giving planning permission for major housing developments on greenfield land allocated in their plans.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average level of debt of local authorities in England and Wales is. [2949]

Dr. Whitehead: The average total debt (long and short term) for English local authorities, at 31 March 2000, was about £94 million. This figure covers London boroughs, Metropolitan districts, Unitary authorities, Shire counties and Shire districts.

Total debt for each of these authorities, at 31 March 2000, is available at: http://www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/stats

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if she will list the local authorities in England and Wales which are debt-free. [2948]

Dr. Whitehead: The 103 English local authorities listed have reported that they had debt-free status as at 1 April 2001.

Barking and Dagenham
Basingstoke and Deane
Bath and North East Somerset
Bedford
Bracknell Forest Unitary Authority
Breckland
Broadland
Bromley
Bromsgrove
Broxbourne
Chichester
Chiltern
Christchurch
City of London
Congleton
Corby
Cotswold
Crawley
Dacorum
Dartford
Daventry
Dorset
East Cambridgeshire
East Devon
East Dorset
East Hampshire
Eden
Elmbridge
Epsom and Ewell
Forest Heath
Fylde
Hambleton
Harlow
Hart
Havant
Hertsmere
Horsham
Huntingdonshire
Kennet
Lichfield
Malvern Hills
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Sussex
Mole Valley
North Devon

North Dorset
North Wiltshire
Penwith
Reigate and Banstead
Runnymede
Rushmoor
Ryedale
Salisbury
Sevenoaks
South Bucks
South Cambridgeshire
South Hams
South Northamptonshire
South Oxfordshire
South Ribble
South Shropshire
South Somerset
South Staffordshire
Spelthorne
St. Edmundsbury
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stevenage
Stratford-on-Avon
Suffolk Coastal
Surrey Heath
Swale
Tandridge
Tewkesbury
Three Rivers
Tonbridge and Malling
Tunbridge Wells
Tynedale
Uttlesford
Vale of White Horse
Watford
Waverley
Welwyn Hatfield
West Berkshire UA
Windsor and Maidenhead Unitary Authority
Worthing
Wychavon
Wyre
Wyre Forest
Cambridgeshire Police Authority
Dorset Police Authority
Kent Police Authority
Suffolk Police Authority
Sussex Police Authority
Wiltshire Police Authority
Dartmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor National Park Authority
Lake District National Park
North York Moors National Park Authority
Northumberland National Park Authority
Peak National Park
The Broads Authority
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
North London Waste Authority

Note:

Definition: An authority is 'debt-free' if:

(a) at 31 March 2001, the authority's credit ceiling was nil or a negative amount; and

(b) at 1 April 2001, the authority had no money outstanding by way of external borrowing other than short-term borrowing or hard to redeem debt, as defined in Regulation 154 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997.

Source:

Capital Estimates Return

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Animal Conservation Schemes

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the support given by her Department to animal conservation schemes in each of the past four years. [1931]

Clare Short: DFID's purpose is poverty eradication, not conservation. DFID supports the sustainable management of wild animal populations where it is key to improving poor peoples' livelihood opportunities, for example through improved forest management and community wildlife initiatives.

The principal bilateral projects that DFID has supported over the past four years that contribute in this way to animal conservation are listed in Annexe 1.

Annexe 1: List of the principal DFID supported bilateral projects[1] over the past four years that contribute to animal conservation.

Name of Project	*Country*	*Period of support*	*Amount (£)*
Mbomipa Community Wildlife	Tanzania	1997–2001	1,973,000
Wildlife Intensification for Livelihood Development (WILD)	Namibia	1999–2002	1,040,000
Madikwe Community Wildlife Management	South Africa	1997–99	621,795
Amboro Rural Development	Bolivia	1996–2000	3,200,000
Mount Cameroon Project	Cameroon	1995–2002	10,602,000
Indonesian Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Programme	Indonesia	1998–2005	25,150,000
Cross River State Community Forestry Project	Nigeria	1996–2001	2,000,000
Forest Sector Development Project Phase II	Ghana	2000–04	11,963,000

[1] Includes projects of value £0.5 million or more. Excludes support through the Joint Funding Scheme (which are mostly under £0.5 million) and excludes DFID-funded research projects. Projects primarily concerned with freshwater and marine resources have also been excluded.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Recycling

John Austin: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what arrangements exist for *(a)* recycling and *(b)* re-using waste generated within the parliamentary estate; what facilities exist for the separation of waste generated within the parliamentary estate; and what proportion of such waste is recycled. [2488]

Mr. Kirkwood: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms; I have asked him to write to the hon. Gentleman.

HEALTH

Health Authority Borders (West Midlands)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he will use when deciding the borders of new health authorities in the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [799]

Mr. Hutton: Final decisions on the boundaries for the new strategic health authorities will be taken following a full public consultation exercise. Proposals for consultation are being drawn up based on two criteria:

i. The new strategic health authorities should be coterminous with an aggregate of local authority boundaries.

ii. The new strategic health authorities should be aligned with the local clinical networks.

Mental Health Services (London)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of occupancy of all acute mental health units in London *(a)* in the last month for which figures are available and *(b)* in the same month in each of the previous five years. [413]

Jacqui Smith: The information available is not collected in the format requested. Figures for London can be identified for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 when the National Health Service Executive, London regional office was in existence. Prior to this 'London' cannot be identified. The table shows bed occupancy for wards classified as mental illness in London NHS Trusts for 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

Average daily bed occupancy rate, wards open overnight, mental illness sector, NHS Trusts in London, 1998–99 and 1999–2001

Occupancy rate percentage (at midnight)

Trust name	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*
London	93.7	92.2
Barnet Community Healthcare NHS Trust	91.9	80.5
Bethlem and Maudsley	—	82.3
BHB Community Health NHS Trust	89.8	93.5
Brent, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Mental Health NHS Trust	94.6	—
Camden and Islington Community Health Service NHS Trust	99.1	96.5
City and Hackney Community Services NHS Trust	94.0	94.9
Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham Mental Health NHS Trust	97.3	—
Enfield Community Care NHS Trust	97.9	91.3
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust	93.1	95.0
Great Ormond Street Hospital For Sick Children NHS Trust	74.8	77.9
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	94.2	100.0
Haringey Health Care NHS Trust	97.3	98.9
Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare NHS Trust	97.2	98.5
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	95.6	96.8
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	97.2	94.5
Kingston and District Community NHS Trust	98.6	94.0
Lewisham and Guys Mental Health	—	98.2
Newham Community Health Services NHS Trust	82.8	79.8
North West London Mental Health	—	98.0
Oxleas NHS Trust	94.5	91.8
Parkside Health	—	82.6
Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust	77.6	84.0
Riverside Mental Health	—	91.3
Royal Free NHS Trust	94.7	91.5
South London and Maudsley NHS Trust	96.2	—
South West London and St. Georges MH NHS Trust	88.5	96.0
St. Helier	—	95.0
Tower Hamlets Healthcare NHS Trust	87.1	93.2
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	70.5	83.1
West Lambeth Community Care	—	97.1
West London Healthcare	—	98.3

Source:
DH form KH03

Care Home Standards

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received in connection with the implementation of standards 21.3 and 22.2 of the "National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People"; and if he will place them in the Library; [922]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of standards 21.3 and 22.2 of the "National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People" on the availability of beds in residential care and nursing homes; and if he will place it in the Library; [923]

(3) what estimate he has made of the impact on the number of care homes of the requirement of complying

with the "National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People"; [924]

(4) what estimate he has made of the average amount that each care home will have to spend in order to comply with the "National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People". [925]

Jacqui Smith: National minimum standards will ensure that care provision is fit for the purpose and meets the assessed needs of residents.

The need for provision of particular facilities such as passenger lifts and the costs associated with their installation will vary from home to home.

In setting these standards we listened to the concerns of providers and produced a sensible set of standards which give providers a reasonable time to adapt, and achieved the support of national organisations representing consumers and providers. We made a number of specific changes to the proposed standards in response to the concerns raised in the comments we received. I am confident that these decisions will ensure that any improvements in the quality of care homes necessary will be achieved smoothly, and that stability in the care homes sector and sufficient capacity is maintained while changes are made.

Leigh NHS Walk-in Centre

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have presented to the NHS walk-in Centre at Leigh Infirmary since it opened; and of these how many had to be referred on to a local casualty department for treatment. [1329]

Mr. Hutton: The Leigh National Health Service Walk-In Centre opened on 1 June 2000 and in its first year 32,365 patients attended. 1,225 patients were referred to the local accident and emergency department from the centre.

Foot and Mouth (Milk Products)

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the safety of milk and milk products, with particular regard to the foot and mouth outbreak. [588]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The Food Standards Agency (FSA) advise that the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom does not pose a threat to the safety of milk and milk products from animals infected with the disease. In addition, the FSA advise that the current evidence indicates no increased public health risk from dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls released from foot and mouth pyres for the vast majority of people who consume milk or dairy products produced on land within two kilometres of the pyres. Farmers and their customers who consume milk exclusively from such a source have been advised that there may be a slightly higher, although still very small, additional risk. This advice is precautionary until the results of the FSA's testing programme are available.

Mental Health Care

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the proportion of total NHS spend used to provide mental health services in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [1463]

Jacqui Smith: Information comes from health authorities and trusts and their accounts for 1999–2000, 2000–01, and 2001–02 have not yet been collated.

Heart Disease

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to enable it to develop a clinical guideline on the investigation and management of heart failure. [1413]

Mr. Hutton: The development of a guideline for heart failure was referred to National Institute for Clinical Excellence in September 2000 with the following remit:

Appropriate means of diagnosis (including consideration of possible role of new developments in diagnosis e.g. brain naturetic peptide).

Optimum symptom control using established treatments but also including relatively new evidence around drugs such as spironolactone, angiotensin-II receptor antagonists (e.g. losartan), beta blockers (and if appropriate how and where to manage treatment with beta blockers).

Appropriate make-up of medical team treating (evidence for multi-disciplinary approach).

Evidence on exercise tolerance and the possible beneficial effects of exercise on quality of life (limited evidence available but traditional advice to rest may not be appropriate in all cases).

Role of supportive care—the potential of the 'palliative care approach', when to consider supportive care (not just an end of life/terminal phase issue) and when the use of specialist palliative care services may be appropriate.

The role of primary care and community services—may these have an effect on frequent acute re-admissions?

Role of lifestyle advice.

Role of surgical interventions to treat or relieve symptoms.

Complementary Medicine

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to extend the provision of complementary and alternative medicine, with particular reference to acupuncture, chiropractice, homeopathy, herbal medicine, osteopathy and therapeutic touch, in the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement. [1423]

Yvette Cooper: We have produced an information pack for primary care trusts and primary care groups on commissioning alternative medicine, which is available in the Library and at www.doh.gov.uk/cam/index.htm.

The pack makes it clear that the provision of complementary medicine must be decided at a local level taking account of evidence of its suitability and efficacy and its effective regulation.

National Cancer Plan

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to monitor the delivery of the national cancer plan. [1688]

Yvette Cooper: Cancer services have received an additional £280 million in 2001–02 towards implementation of the NHS Cancer Plan.

Monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that investment and reform is seen across all cancer networks. This will include the high level review of spending undertaken through the services and financial framework process; the development by cancer networks of service delivery plans which will set out implementation plans for cancer services locally; and the continued central monitoring of the two week waiting time target. In addition the peer review process of cancer services will help trusts assess their progress in implementing evidence-based guidance for individual tumour groups.

NHS Consultants

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* compile and *(b)* publish performance statistics for each consultant employed in NHS hospitals. [1745]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans at the present time to compile and publish performance statistics on individual consultants.

Health Services (Dudley)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of acute beds in the Dudley group of hospitals which are unavailable to incoming patients as a result of being occupied by patients needing accommodation in a nursing home. [1805]

Yvette Cooper: At 3 July 2001, the number of acute beds being occupied by patients awaiting nursing home accommodation is 33[1].

Dudley health authority have recently identified £100,000 of non recurrent funds to alleviate immediate pressures in the short term. The local health and social services agencies are involved in discussions to seek solutions for medium to long-term.

Source:

[1] Dudley Group Hospitals National Health Service Trust

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the care of medical patients on surgical wards in the Dudley group of hospitals. [1997]

Yvette Cooper: At 3 July 2001, the Dudley Group Hospitals National Health Service Trust has 31 medical patients on surgical wards, as a result of difficulties in discharging them to long-term care. The trust has confirmed that the patients selected to be cared for on surgical wards are those whose acute problems have been addressed. These patients require basic nursing care in terms of attention, medication, etc., which the trust's nurses are well equipped to provide.

MMR Inoculations

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide assistance to the recent study by the World Health Organisation into the effects of vaccines containing mercury used for MMR inoculations. [1763]

Yvette Cooper: There is no, and never has been, thiomersal in any measles, mumps and rubella vaccine used in the United Kingdom.

The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) has been asked by the World Health Organisation to set up a study to look into the relationship between thiomersal and possible neurological outcomes using UK data.

Herbal Products

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in defining conditions for the safe use of traditional herbal products; and if he will make a statement. [1994]

Yvette Cooper: We understand that the European Commission is actively continuing development work on the draft directive to regulate those traditional herbal products which are classified as medicines. In particular, we are aware that the EC has recently been considering written comments made by European Union member states following a meeting of the European Pharmaceutical Committee in April 2001. The detailed terms of various possible provisions to safeguard public health are likely to feature prominently in the ongoing discussions on the draft directive. The Medicines Control Agency will continue to consult the United Kingdom natural health sector as work on this initiative progresses.

PFI Schemes

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that all NHS private finance initiative schemes should include transferring responsibility for the management of NHS ancillary staff to the private sector. [2212]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Pilot schemes, whereby ancillary services staff could retain their National Health Service employment terms but be managed by the private sector, are being conducted at three private finance initiative (PFI) projects currently in procurement.

The pilots will be evaluated with reference to their ability to deliver workable, value for money arrangements and will be used to inform policy on NHS ancillary staff in future PFI schemes.

Health Authority Restructuring (Essex)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the potential benefits of the proposed health authority restructuring for Essex. [1844]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The introduction of strategic health authorities is an important element in our proposals to decentralise power in the National Health Services. We will shift the balance of power in the NHS so that primary care trusts take the responsibility and resources for developing health services and improving health. Front-line staff are best placed to understand patients' needs and have the skills and experience to improve services. Empowering front-line staff and organisations to use these skills will help deliver faster and more responsive services and improve the patient experience.

The proposals for restructuring in Essex, as elsewhere, will be subject to formal consultation.

Hospices

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further staffing support he plans to provide to hospices. [2481]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan set out our commitment to increase National Health Service investment in specialist palliative care by £50 million by 2004 to ensure that the inequalities in access to specialist palliative care ends. Health authority allocations in 2001–02 included a total of £255 million to support the first year of local implementation of the NHS Cancer Plan. Priorities for this year include the development of costed strategic plans for palliative care. Cancer networks are expected to demonstrate how the additional funding will be invested over the next three years.

Cancer networks are currently developing detailed service delivery plans, which will identify the current position, future demands and gaps in services and set out action plans for further development across all areas, including staffing of teams, whether in the voluntary sector or in the NHS. We are funding the National Council for Hospices and specialist palliative care services to support cancer networks to ensure an inclusive approach to develop the palliative care element in the service delivery plans.

Christie Hospital NHS Trust

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* total level of investment and *(b)* source of funding for the recent expansion of the Christie Hospital NHS Trust. [2281]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The revenue income for the Christie Hospital National Health Service Trust is provided in the table.

£ million

	Actual 1999–2000	*Actual 2000–01*	*Forecast 2001–02*
Total income from activities (health authorities)	39.0	43.4	49.1
Other operating income	30.2	24.9	24.1
Total overall income	69.2	68.4	73.2

Notes:

1. Information extracted from Final Accounts for 1999–2000, pre-audit draft accounts for 2000–01 and the trust's plans for 2001–02.
2. The high level of other operating income in 1999–2000 relates to technical accounting adjustments.
3. The trust has received a significant recent growth in revenue funds from NHS sources. Specific areas include: funding for the implications of National Institute for Clinical Excellence drugs; revenue consequences of capital investments in capital equipment and four new consultant posts.
4. The trust's other operating income includes a substantial proportion of income from charitable sources.

The facilities at the trust will continue to be redeveloped and these will be provided from a variety of sources which will include exchequer funding, private finance initiative funding and charitable donations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to visit the Christie Hospital NHS Trust in Manchester; and if he will make a statement. [2280]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Either I or one of my ministerial colleagues will visit the Christie Hospital later in the year.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department's research programme into the effects on health of mobile phone technology has been established. [2400]

Yvette Cooper: The Stewart report on mobile phones and health made a recommendation that a substantial research programme should be set up under the aegis of a demonstrably independent panel and financed by the mobile phone companies and the public sector. This programme, jointly funded by Government and industry, has now been set up under the direction of an independent programme management committee. The first call for proposals was issued at a scientific workshop held in February. The committee is currently assessing a range of research proposals, the first group of which is expected to start in October this year. Details can be found on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/mobilephones.

Disabled People (Essex)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are registered as disabled in the *(a)* Colchester, *(b)* North Essex, *(c)* Harwich and *(d)* Braintree constituencies. [2396]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of people registered with Essex council as deaf or hard of hearing and blind or partially sighted are shown in the tables. Separate information is not available by constituency. Information is not available centrally on the number of people with other forms of disability.

Table 1: Number of people registered as deaf or hard of hearing at 31 March 1998, within the former county of Essex

	Number
Deaf	1,553
Hard of hearing	1,697
Total	3,250

Source:
SSDA 910 return

Table 2: Number of people registered as blind or partially sighted at 31 March 2000 within the former county of Essex

Area	*Blind*	*Partially sighted*	*Total*
Essex[1]	5,018	5,018	10,036
Southend	880	1,262	2,142
Thurrock	224	319	543
Former county of Essex	6,122	6,599	12,721

[1] On 1 April 1998, local government re-organisation took place and the former county of Essex was split into the unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock and the reduced area of Essex.

Source:
SSDA 902 return

Student Nurses

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the amount of money available to student nurses in receipt of a full bursary. [2684]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 13 March that there would be a substantial increase in bursary support for all national health service-funded students, including nurses.

With effect from 1 September this year the basic rate of bursary will be increased by 10.4 per cent. This is the biggest increase in bursaries since their introduction in the late 1980s and provides diploma level students (who make up the majority of the student nurse population) with an extra £500 per year.

Further bursary changes will come into effect in September providing extra help with accommodation and travel expenses for students attending practice placements.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the bursary system on the recruitment and retention of student nurses. [2685]

Mr. Hutton: National health service bursaries provide a level of support which compares favourably with that available to other students in higher education. They will increase by 10.4 per cent. from September 2001. However the level of bursary support is only one factor influencing the recruitment and retention of student nurses.

Applicants to pre-registration nursing and midwifery training course increased by 87 per cent. over the last three years, to 34,953 in 1999–2000, the latest year for which complete data are available.

The National Audit Office earlier this year reported that attrition form training was currently 17 per cent., lower than in previous years and in line with attrition from higher education generally. 'Academic failure' was the most common reason for nurses dropping out. The Department has commissioned further research on factors influencing drop out. This will report later in the summer.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received to extend the availability of loans to student nurses in receipt of a full bursary. [2683]

Mr. Hutton: The current national health service support package available to degree level students comprises 50 per cent. means-tested grant and 50 per cent. student loan. In addition the student's tuition fee contribution is paid in full. This support is more favourable than that available to other United Kingdom students studying at degree level.

Students studying at diploma level receive a non-means-tested bursary and have their contribution to tuition fees paid in full. However, because diploma students receive a higher level of non-repayable, non-means-tested support for maintenance than degree students, they are not eligible for assistance through student loans.

Student loans are a matter for the Department for Education and Skills and the Student Loans Company. The overall level of support provided to national health service-funded students is kept under review by my Department, taking into account the views of, among others, students themselves, for instance through the NHS Student Forum.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many student nurses were in receipt of a bursary in the *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2000–01 academic years; and how many of those have dropped out of training in each year. [2681]

Mr. Hutton: The bursary figures for the full academic year 2000–01 will not be known until 31 August 2001, the end of the academic year. As at 6 July 2001, the National Health Service Student Grants Unit (SGU) had authorised 4,117 NHS Bursary awards for degree level nursing students and 29,067 for those studying at diploma level.

Diploma students who started their training prior to September 1999 are paid a bursary by their university rather than the SGU.

The number of student nurses in receipt of a bursary for the full academic year 2001–02 will not be available until 31 August 2002, the end of that academic year.

Data on the number of student nurses who discontinued their training during 2000–01 will be published by the English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting later in the summer. Data for 2001–02 will not be available until next year.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on increasing the value of bursaries for student nurses. [2682]

Mr. Hutton: Departmental officials undertook a review of support arrangements for National Health Service funded students last year. Representations were received from students and student bodies, professional bodies and others.

As a result Ministers considered a range of options for changes to bursaries. The 10.4 per cent. across-the-board increase in the basic rate of bursary, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced shortly after the 2001 Budget, was in response to the representations made.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each NHS region and trust the number of three month vacancy rates for nurses and expenditure on agency nurses, indicating both the original estimate of costs and the outturn figures. [2973]

Mr. Hutton: Figures from the Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2000 on the number of three month vacancy rates for nurses per region and trust, and the expenditure on agency nurses in 1999–2000 are available in the Library. Information on the original estimate of costs and the outturn figures are not available centrally but may be available from individual National Health Service employers.

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will set out the timetable for considering the

establishment of a fund to support the development of carers services under the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000; [2809]

(2) if he will set out the criteria against which progress in implementing the National Carers Strategy is monitored; by what means progress is reported to the House; and when progress was last reported; [2970]

(3) when he plans to publish the performance framework indicator for the number of carer assessments; if he will ensure that the assessments evaluate the proportion of carers assessed at the point of hospital discharge; and if he will make a statement; [2810]

(4) if he will undertake an evaluation of the appropriateness of support offered to carers as part of strategies to reduce the number of delayed discharges from hospital; [2813]

(5) when his Department last reviewed guidance on hospital discharge with respect to carers' needs; and what arrangements are in place to monitor compliance with the guidance; [2811]

(6) if he will make a statement on progress towards implementing the National Carers Strategy requirement that general practitioners should have procedures in place to identify carers by April 2002. [2808]

Jacqui Smith: The Hospital Discharge Workbook, issued in 1994, gives guidance to the national health service, social services and other agencies on hospital discharge procedures. The workbook emphasises that the patient and carer should be made fully aware of arrangements for discharge and understand fully what is going to happen. Before an individual is discharged, checks should be made by the discharge nurse to ensure that discharge arrangements take place as planned. The chief executive of the hospital trust is responsible for ensuring that discharges take place appropriately. Work will begin soon on revising the hospital discharge workbook.

The NHS Plan acknowledged that health and social services need to do more to shape services around the needs and preferences of individual patients, their families and their carers. During 2002, older people, and where appropriate their carers, will be involved in agreeing a personal care plan, which they will hold. The personal care plan will document their current package of health and social care, their care co-ordinator, monitoring arrangements, and a list of key contacts for rapid response at home and in emergencies.

We are continuing to provide additional resources to local authorities specifically to improve the working arrangements between local authorities and the NHS. The new Promoting Independence Grant is specifically aimed at fostering partnership between health and social services in promoting the independence of adults needing community care services. The grant will encourage these partnerships to improve their arrangements for multi-disciplinary assessment and hospital discharge (including rehabilitation and recuperation services).

In addition, we have pledged to consider the establishment of a fund to support the development of carers services under the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. We have already begun preliminary discussions with key stakeholders.

The performance indicator for the number of informal carers receiving an assessment as a proportion of the total number of clients and carers receiving assessments will be published for the first time in autumn 2001. The indicator is based on information provided by local councils with social services responsibilities. Details of where the assessment took place are not available; therefore, the proportion of carers assessed at the point of hospital discharge can not be separately calculated.

Requirements for Accreditation (RFA99) issued in October 1999 included the requirements for general practitioner computer systems to include a field where the details of carers could be entered. This, aligned with all GPs having access to a desktop computer as part of project connect programme by the end of March 2002, will mean that GPs will be prompted to ask for carer details as part of the registration details of patients. When entered this information will form part of the patient record.

Progress in implementing the national carers strategy is measured against the criteria set out in the National Carers Strategy and summarised on pages 5–7 of the Strategy. Specific initiatives which take forward the strategy, such as the increases to the Carers Grant, are announced to the House at the appropriate time, and information about the implementation of the measures published as appropriate. For example the analysis which we commissioned from the Kings Fund of local authorities' carers plans for 1999–2000 was published in February 2001. The social services inspectorate's monitoring of local authorities includes questions regarding the implementation of the national carers strategy. The results will be published in the autumn.

HSC 2000/28

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to assess the level of compliance with his guidance HSC 2000/28. [2812]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) to pay particular attention to resuscitation decision-making processes as part of its rolling programme of reviews of the clinical governance arrangements put in place by national health service organisations. CHI's programme of reviews is being conducted over a four-year cycle. All trusts will have been reviewed by October 2004. CHI will work with the organisation to produce an action plan to address identified deficiencies, the implementation of which will be monitored by the NHS regional office who will ensure that any necessary action is taken to ensure compliance.

Care Services (Older People)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the work programme of the National Workforce Development Board and its associated care group workforce teams; and if he will make a statement on the establishment of the care group workforce team dealing with services for older people. [2972]

Jacqui Smith: The broad terms of reference for the National Workforce Development Board and the care group workforce teams are set out in "Investment and Reform for National Health Service Staff—Taking

Forward the NHS Plan", copies of which are available in the Library. We are currently considering in more detail how these bodies, including the care group workforce team for services for older people, will take forward their role, and will make an announcement shortly.

Intensive Care

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care beds there are in England in *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* the private sector. [2984]

Mr. Hutton: The latest figures for 15 January 2001 are given in the table. The number of available adult intensive care and high dependency beds in England are published in the bi-annual publication "Available adult intensive care and high dependency provision, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Available adult intensive care and high dependency provision at 15 January 2001—England

Intensive care beds	*Number*
Total	1,677
General	1,333
Specialist	344

Source:
Annual census of "Available adult intensive care and high dependency provision, England". Data for 15 January 2001.

Information about the private sector is not collected centrally.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from private hospitals transferred to NHS intensive care beds in the last year for which figures are available. [2985]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Drugs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to introduce to reduce deaths caused by the mis-use of *(a)* painkillers and *(b)* anti-depressants. [2368]

Yvette Cooper: The Department introduced specific measures in September 1998 reducing pack sizes of paracetamol and aspirin aimed at reducing the toxicity from impulsive overdose. New warnings on the packaging emphasised the risks and action to take in the event of overdose. Recent published studies on the impact of these measures have provided evidence that they are having a significant beneficial effect.

The majority of deaths in association with antidepressants are as a result of suicide. We take the issue of suicide very seriously. We are currently developing, under the direction of the National Director for Mental Health, Professor Louis Appleby, a coherent, national suicide prevention strategy to ensure that we are doing all we can to prevent suicide.

Advice is given to health professionals in British National Formulary, which advises that patients treated for depression should be assessed frequently for suicidal tendencies and that limited quantities of antidepressant drugs should be prescribed at any one time to reduce the risk of overdose. The summaries of product characteristics for antidepressants warn that patients at risk of suicide should be monitored closely.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in *(a)* identifying and *(b)* reducing the levels of (i) mis-use and (ii) over-use of neuroleptic drugs in residential homes for the elderly. [2369]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the misuse or overuse of neuroleptic drugs are not available centrally. However, we are well aware of concerns about the use of these drugs in older people. Several current initiatives will help to address this issue.

The National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People, published in March 2001 under section 23(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000, contains a standard for the administration of medicines. This includes requirements to take advice from pharmacists, consult general practitioners and regularly review medication. These standards come into force in April 2002.

The National Service Framework for Older People was also published in March, together with 'Medicines and Older People', covering the implementation of medicines related aspects of the NSF. One of its aims is to ensure that older people gain maximum benefit from their medication and do not suffer unnecessarily from illness caused by excessive or inappropriate consumption of medicines. One of the milestones set in the NSF is that, by April 2002, people over 75 will have their medicines reviewed at least annually, and those taking four or more medicines will have a review six-monthly. And, by 2004, every primary care trust (PCT) will have schemes in place so that older people get more help from pharmacists in using their medicines.

Finally, the NHS Plan contains a target that repeat dispensing schemes will be in place nationally by 2004. Together with management of repeat prescribing commissioned locally by PCTs, these schemes will provide further help in avoiding medication problems in older people.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of those who use *(a)* heroin and *(b)* methadone under medical prescription who have died in each of the past five years. [2373]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested.

The Department collects information relating to the number of prescriptions dispensed in the community in England (which includes prescriptions for diamorphine and methadone) but there is no means of identifying whether the recipient of the prescription subsequently dies.

Information about all deaths in England and Wales in 1995 to 1999 where the underlying cause of death is regarded as resulting from drug-related poisoning is included in the Health Statistics Quarterly report, published by the Office for National Statistics in spring 2001. The report also contains information about the number of deaths where selected substances, including heroin and/or morphine and methadone, were mentioned on the death certificate.

The table shows the numbers of deaths where heroin and/or morphine and methadone were mentioned on any death certificate and are regarded as resulting from drug-related poisoning from 1995 to 1999. The figure is given for heroin and morphine combined because heroin breaks down in the body into morphine, and the latter may be detected at post mortem and recorded on the death certificate.

Number of deaths where heroin and/or morphine and methadone were mentioned on the death certificate for England and Wales

	Drug mentioned	
Year	*All mention of heroin and morphine*	*Methadone*
1995	357	310
1996	466	368
1997	445	421
1998	645	363
1999	754	298

Note:
These figures do not include deaths where heroin, morphine and methadone were not mentioned on the death certificate, but were a causal factor; or where these substances were prescribed, but were not a causal factor in the death and so are not mentioned in the death certificate.

Allocation of Resources

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what mechanism the formula for the allocation of resources between health authorities takes account of *(a)* transient populations and *(b)* numbers of tourists. [2694]

Mr. Hutton: The formula for setting health authority resource allocation targets is based primarily on resident population. The resident populations are then adjusted to take account of patients registered with general practitioners outside their health authority of residence. These adjusted resident populations are referred to as health authority relevant populations. These exclude transient populations and tourists.

The prescribing component of the formula takes account of temporary residents who register with GPs in addition to relevant populations.

Funding for secondary healthcare for tourists and transient populations that falls outside service agreements is transferred between health authorities through the out-of-area treatment arrangements.

Parking Charges

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much revenue was raised by NHS trusts for car parking charges in financial years *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000. [2596]

Mr. Hutton: There is no prescriptive model for the provision and financing of car parking facilities at national health service trusts and not all trusts will raise revenue from car parking charges. Where trusts do raise income from car park charges there is no requirement for it to be separately identified in their annual accounts.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were blocked in each NHS trust, in each of the last three years, by elderly patients waiting to be transferred to residential care; and if he will make a statement. [2581]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the delayed discharges of patients aged over 75 years is collected from each health authority on a quarterly basis. That information has been collected on a consistent basis for the last two years and has been placed in the Library. The information collected includes the number of patients delayed due to awaiting nursing or residential home placement. In some cases patients will be exercising their right to await a place in a home of their choice.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he proposes to extend observance of human rights in *(a)* the Commonwealth and *(b)* elsewhere. [1835]

Peter Hain: The Government will continue to promote human rights in bilateral and multilateral forums. Among other things, this will include continuing to campaign worldwide for the elimination of torture and the abolition of the death penalty and taking an active part in the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism. At the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Brisbane in October, the Government will try to ensure that the Commonwealth takes an even more active role in promoting human rights. A key element will be trying to expand the remit of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) so that it can recommend action where a Commonwealth member seriously or persistently violates human rights. Currently, CMAG comes into play only when an elected Commonwealth Government have been overthrown.

The hon. Member for Neath

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department received from the South African Government about the hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), during his period as a Minister with responsibility for Africa. [1820]

Mr. Bradshaw: The South African Government welcomed my hon. Friend as Minister with responsibility for Africa and granted him access at the highest level. In an exchange of messages with the South Africans earlier this year, the then Foreign Secretary confirmed our appreciation of the candid and collaborative approach between the UK and South Africa, with which my hon. Friend was closely associated, and looked forward to it continuing.

UK Tourists (Assistance)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the average number of requests for assistance per year from UK tourists to local consular offices and their equivalents was in *(a)* Florida, *(b)* Ibiza, *(c)* Corfu, *(d)* Barcelona, *(e)* Benidorm, *(f)* Majorca, *(g)* Rhodes, *(h)* Rome, *(i)* Paris, *(j)* Venice, *(k)* Milan, *(l)* Dublin, *(m)* Capri, *(n)* Tenerife, *(o)* Cyprus, *(p)* Nice, *(q)* Cannes, *(r)* Boston, *(s)* Las Vegas,

(t) New York, *(u)* Jerusalem, *(v)* Los Angeles, *(w)* Moscow, *(x)* St. Petersburg, *(y)* Berlin, *(z)* Dubai and (aa) Sri Lanka; and what category of assistance was requested in each case. [2108]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our records do not currently allow tourists to be isolated from the total numbers of British citizens seeking assistance at UK missions overseas. However, in the period 1998–2000, the average annual number of requests for assistance (not including simple requests for information) from British citizens to local consular offices and their equivalents was as follows:

(a) Florida: 570 cases per year (cases are referred to Orlando)

(b) Ibiza: 2,000 cases per year

(c) Corfu: 450 cases per year

(d) Barcelona: 300 cases per year

(e) Benidorm: 550 cases per year (cases are referred to Malaga)

(f) Majorca: Total included in (e) above (cases are referred to Malaga)

(g) Rhodes: 250 cases per year

(h) Rome: 900 cases per year

(i) Paris: 300 cases per year

(j) Venice: 50 cases per year

(k) Milan: 70 cases

(l) Dublin: 250 cases per year

(m) Capri: 100 cases per year (cases are referred to Naples)

(n) Tenerife: 4,000 cases per year

(o) Cyprus: 300 cases per year (Nicosia)

(p) Nice: 70 cases per year (cases are referred to Marseille)

(q) Cannes: Total included in *(p)* above (cases are referred to Marseille)

(r) Boston: 30 cases per year

(s) Las Vegas: 90 cases per year

(t) New York: 150 cases per year

(u) Jerusalem: 30 cases per year

(v) Los Angeles: 70 cases per year (cases are referred to San Francisco)

(w) Moscow: 45 cases per year

(x) St. Petersburg: 15 cases per year

(y) Berlin: 120 cases per year

(z) Dubai: 500 cases per year

(aa) Sri Lanka: 30 cases per year (Colombo).

Similarly, our records do not currently allow us accurately to break down these numbers into all types of assistance sought. But the types of request we receive can range from assistance with major disasters involving ferries, aircraft, trains, buses and cars; assistance with hospitalisations, deaths, skiing accidents and welfare cases in general; helping the victims of crime including rape, child custody and abduction disputes and kidnapping incidents. We are also asked to help with repatriations and deportations, to help with searches for missing persons, to visit people detained by local authorities, to visit long-term prisoners and to arrange the deposit of funds (e.g. for prison comforts). These cases are the ones which get recorded. However, much of our work involves providing all kinds of information to help British nationals, and this is not recorded. In addition we provide notarial services where required; register marriages, births and deaths; and provide passport issuing facilities.

We are currently developing a new centralised consular database, based on one that already has a well-established track record. We hope that, in the future, this will provide a more accurate picture of the full range of tasks we undertake to assist British nationals overseas.

Embassies (Costs)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the cost of running each of Her Majesty's embassies, broken down by *(a)* staff cost, *(b)* transport costs, *(c)* premises costs, *(d)* equipment costs and *(e)* entertainment and other costs in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [2101]

Mr. MacShane: Estimates are made at FCO level and the ensuing budgets are as yet only partly devolved to embassies and other missions. However, the FCO carries out an annual accounting exercise which provides detailed information on the costs of individual embassies. This forms part of the resource accounts preparation, and for the year 2000–01 will be available this autumn.

"Rogue States"

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of *(a)* the definition of "rogue state", *(b)* the states that can be so defined and *(c)* the threat they present to the UK. [2302]

Mr. Bradshaw: "Rogue state" is generally not a term we would choose to use.

We are concerned by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery in several regions including the middle east, South Asia and the Korean Peninsula.

We judge that there is currently no significant threat to the UK from weapons of mass destruction. We continue to monitor developments closely.

Lord Levy

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of Lord Levy on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, including to whom he is accountable, and on the facilities, expenses and remuneration he receives at public expense. [3200]

Mr. Straw: From time to time, Lord Levy will travel as the Prime Minister's envoy. He will report to the Prime Minister and to me.

Lord Levy receives no remuneration and travels at his own expense. The FCO provides him with logistics and administrative support, including use of an office in London and official accommodation overseas, and briefing as necessary.

United Nations Reform

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government have for reforming the structure of the UN. [2971]

Peter Hain: We would like to see the United Nations Security Council reformed to make it more representative of the world today. We are one of a number of countries which support enlarging Council membership from 15 to 24, including expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent membership.

We are also working closely with EU and UN partners to follow up implementation of the report on UN Peace Operations drawn up by the Panel chaired by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi in 2000. In particular, we are pressing for improved early warning and analysis and for more effective rapid deployment mechanisms.

We have strongly supported the UN Secretary-General's wider efforts to streamline UN activities through a results-based approach to programme, financial and human resource management.

Plan Colombia

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress of Plan Colombia and of the United Kingdom's involvement. [2379]

Mr. MacShane: It is too early to assess the impact of Plan Colombia as it is designed to produce results over a number of years. One specific goal, for example, is to reduce the cultivation, processing and distribution of illegal drugs by 50 per cent. over a six-year period (2000–06).

There is no UK Government financial involvement in Plan Colombia, either bilaterally or through the EU. No expenditure is planned by the UK Government to support the Plan. Instead, the UK is contributing to and fully supports assistance to Colombia through the European Union of 105 million euro over the next five years. The EU package will focus on measures to support human rights, long-term economic and social development, including alternative development, and an end to violence.

Burma

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the implementation of sanctions against Burma. [2817]

Mr. Bradshaw: This Government have been at the forefront of international efforts to bring about good governance, respect for human rights and a return to democracy in Burma. Sanctions have been a significant aspect of this effort. We believe multilateral sanctions are the most effective and we were instrumental last year in securing a strengthening of the EU Common Position on Burma that includes an asset freeze and visa ban for members of the Burmese regime, an arms ban and a ban on non-humanitarian aid. In the UK, this has been implemented through the Burma (Sale, Supply and Export of Goods) (Penalties) Regulation (SI 2000/1408) and Burma (Freezing of Funds) Regulation 2000 (SI 2000/1472) and the Immigration (Designation of Travel Bans) (Amendment) Order 2000. We have given a cautious welcome to recent positive developments in Burma, such as the release of some political prisoners and the lessening of the restrictions on pressure on the National League for Democracy. But we will not soften our position until there is evidence of real change in Burma.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Burmese Government about continuing violations of human rights being committed against the Karen, Karenni and Shan people by the Burmese army. [2816]

Mr. Bradshaw: Contacts between British and Burmese officials are necessarily limited but we make representations to the Burmese authorities on their treatment of ethnic minorities whenever suitable opportunities arise. In January, a visit by EU Troika representatives to Burma raised with the regime this issue among other human rights concerns.

We also fully support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy to Burma, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who is encouraging the regime to move towards national reconciliation and a return to democracy. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Razali on 26 June to discuss these issues.

Multilaterally, we have ensured that violations of human rights in ethnic minority areas are properly covered in UNCHR and UNGA, and by the ILO in its examination of forced labour in Burma.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has discussed Burma with his predecessor. [2818]

Mr. Bradshaw: I am aware of the keen interest my right hon. Friend the then Foreign Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) took in Burma. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I look forward to carrying on the very important task of encouraging national reconciliation, respect for human rights and a return to democracy in Burma.

India

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has had since his appointment with representatives of the Indian Government; and if he will make a statement. [2587]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to Indian Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee, and Nareshwar Dayal, Indian High Commissioner in London, on 26 June. They discussed a range of regional and bilateral issues, including the consular cases of Peter Bleach and Ian Stillman. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has also spoken on the telephone with Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, about regional issues.

Malaysia

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the detention without trial in Malaysia under the Internal Security Act of 10 members of the opposition party. [2590]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 10 April 2001, seven members of the opposition party were detained under the International Security Act. Since then a further three were detained under the same legislation. Two of the detainees have been released without charge and two have been released by order of the High Court. EU Heads of Mission raised

the issue with the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs on 17 May 2001. We have raised the matter with the Malaysian High Commission in London and hope that the situation will be resolved quickly. We and our EU partners are following the situation closely.

NORTHERN IRELAND

James Alfred Cornhill

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the outcome was of the investigation into the shooting of James Alfred Cornhill on 19 April 2000; and what views were expressed by the Police Ombudsman. [1133]

Jane Kennedy: The investigation into the shooting of James Alfred Cornhill has been completed, and the Director of Public Prosecutions has returned the file to the Police Ombudsman who is now considering the disciplinary aspects of the case. Until that process is complete the Police Ombudsman's views will not be available.

RUC (Complaints)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the outcome was of the investigation into complaints against the RUC made by David McCombe and Padraig McCracken. [1091]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Ombudsman's investigation into the complaints has not yet been completed.

Police Weaponry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers have attended overseas conferences and training events on use of less-than-lethal arms and weaponry in the past 12 months; and at what cost. [1231]

Jane Kennedy: Two Royal Ulster Constabulary officers attended a Less Lethal Seminar at Pennsylvania University in April 2001 at a cost of £3,216.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims have been submitted by police officers for injuries allegedly caused by faulty equipment associated with the discharge of plastic baton rounds in each of the last 10 years; how many of these claims have been settled; and at what cost. [1226]

Jane Kennedy: There have been no such claims.

Shoot-to-kill Incidents

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response he has made to rulings of the European Court of Human Rights on alleged shoot-to-kill incidents in Northern Ireland on 1 June. [1119]

Jane Kennedy: As a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, the United Kingdom takes very seriously the findings of the European Court. The Government have three months from the date of the judgments to decide their response (ie by 4 August) and are considering this very carefully.

I should point out that none of the judgments found the UK to have breached Article 2 of the Convention (the right to life) in respect of the actual deaths, but found against the Government in respect of a number of procedural issues relating to post-death investigatory procedures in place at the time.

Robert Hamill

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Royal Ulster Constabulary officers who were present at the scene of the death of Robert Hamill on 27 April 1997 *(a)* have since left and *(b)* continue to serve in the RUC. [1055]

Jane Kennedy: Of the four officers in the vehicle near the scene of the assault on Robert Hamill on 27 April 1997 two officers have left the RUC, one officer is suspended and the other is still serving in the RUC.

Patten Reforms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means non-governmental organisations and victims' support groups may assist in monitoring implementation of the Patten reforms on policing. [1144]

Jane Kennedy: As recommended in the report of the Independent Commission on Policing, the Government have appointed a Commissioner to oversee the implementation of the policing reforms. Other groups and organisations may, of course, choose to follow implementation in areas of interest to them and many have been, and will continue to be, consulted on the introduction of changes.

Criminal Justice

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish a draft Criminal Justice Bill for Northern Ireland; and what steps he is taking to improve the record of the police service in promoting parity of esteem. [1075]

Mr. Browne: It is our intention to publish in draft soon the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill. Detailed preparation of the legislation and an implementation plan is well advanced. Subject to the outcome of consultations, we expect to bring forward the actual Bill in the autumn.

The police provide a service to the whole community in Northern Ireland.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Auld Report

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Auld report will be published. [2584]

Mr. Wills: Lord Justice Auld will complete his review of the criminal courts shortly. The Government will make arrangements for publication once his report is received.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

ATM Machines (Sub-post Offices)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations have been made by the Government to the Post Office about its proposal to charge a levy for the use of ATM machines in sub-post offices. [2362]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* Decisions about making transaction charges for use of ATM machines at sub-post offices are a commercial matter for Post Office Network. The Government do not welcome the imposition of charges for access to cash but where such charges apply this should be made clear to the user. Wherever possible, Post Office Network seek arrangements for ATM machines at sub-post offices to be free of transaction charges but in some locations it would not be financially viable to install ATMs without a transaction charge being made.

People on pensions and benefits have the option of collecting their cash free of charge over the post office counter and have no need to use a cash machine for which a transaction charge is made unless they choose to do so.

Employees Directive

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the compatibility of the EU directive establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees with the protocol on the application of subsidiarity and proportionality of the treaty of Amsterdam; and if she will make a statement. [2514]

Alan Johnson: Our view of the Commission's original proposal was that it was too prescriptive and paid insufficient regard to subsidiarity. By contrast, the text agreed by member states at the Employment and Social Affairs Council on 11 June avoids a rigid "one size fits all approach" which would be inappropriate for the UK given our diverse practices in this area. In particular the draft provides that the practical arrangements for information and consultation shall be defined and implemented in accordance with national law and industrial relations practices in individual member states.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the cost to industry of implementing the EU directive establishing a framework for informing and consulting employees. [2513]

Alan Johnson: My Department prepared a regulatory impact assessment on the Commission's original proposal. A copy was attached to Explanatory Memorandum 3099/98 submitted by my Department on 15 January 1999. This estimated that the recurring costs to the economy would be between £219 million–£257 million, and the non-recurring costs (of setting up arrangements) would be between £84 million–£88 million. The directive has yet to be finally agreed as it now goes to the European Parliament for Second Reading. A revised regulatory impact assessment will be prepared when the Government consult on the implementation of the directive in the UK.

Office of Science and Technology

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the review of the Office of Science and Technology carried out in her Department includes an examination of the research councils. [1696]

Ms Hewitt: There is no separate review being carried out of the Office of Science and Technology (OST).

The quinquennial review of the six grant-awarding Research Councils (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)) was announced on 13 February 2001 by my noble Friend Lord Sainsbury, Under-Secretary of State for Science and Innovation. Regular reviews are a key component of the Government's commitment to improving the quality and effectiveness of public services. Government agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are required to be subject to quinquennial reviews which consider the alternative options for the provision of the service, the way that the service fits into wider governmental objectives, and the extent of any synergies with other service providers.

The review of the seventh council, the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC), a non-grant awarding body, was announced on 13 June 2000. The report of stage one was published in the autumn and stage two is underway.

The cross-departmental science and research review, announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 39W, will examine the funding of the UK science base and the effectiveness of all Departments' science and research programmes to ensure that they deliver maximum long-term benefits to the economy and quality of life. This covers Government-financed research across all Government Departments, including OST.

In addition, on 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 94W, I announced a wide-ranging review of DTI priorities and structure. This will consider the broad priorities of the whole Department, including OST, and how it directs its resources to make the Department more unified, modern and effective in framing policy and delivering services to customers.

Special Advisers

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the special advisers in her Department together with their date of appointment and their responsibilities; which of them are authorised to speak to the media; and if she will make a statement. [2160]

Ms Hewitt: To date, I have appointed one special adviser, Jim Godfrey. He was appointed on 11 June. He has a range of duties including the political aspects of media handling. I have no plans to make a statement.

Productivity

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the impact of regulation on UK productivity. [2162]

Ms Hewitt: The Government keep the regulatory environment under constant review. Where it is shown that a regulation is unnecessary or ineffective, we will act to improve or abolish it. The Regulatory Reform Act 2001 provides us with a powerful and flexible tool to do this.

Strong competitive pressures across our economy are a key driver for productivity. The Government have announced that they wish the OFT and other competition authorities to advise where laws and regulations affect competition. This role applies to both existing and proposed legislation.

The International Institute of Management Development "World Competitiveness Yearbook" Indicators for 2000 show that UK labour market regulation is perceived to be significantly less restrictive than that of other major European countries and on a par with that in the United States. The OECD found in 1999 that in terms of product market regulation, the UK had the least restrictive overall regulatory environment of any member country.

Parental Leave

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to implement paid parental leave for parents with children aged five years or under. [2136]

Alan Johnson: The Government have recently extended parental leave to all parents with children who were under five at 15 December 1999, when the right was first introduced.

Experience since then suggests that parental leave has created fewer practical problems for business than may first have been anticipated, and the time is now right to increase the number of parents who are able to exercise the right.

The Green Paper "Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice" was published in December 2000, laid out a series of options to help parents balance their work and family lives and included the option to pay parental leave.

Responses to the consultation revealed that paid parental leave was not a high priority for employees or employers in comparison to other options and accordingly the Government have decided not to take this option forward.

Rural Recovery Fund

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire of 7 May concerning the Rural Recovery Fund. [2704]

Ms Hewitt: The issues raised by the hon. Member in his letter of 7 May fall within the responsibility of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The letter has therefore been transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for a reply.

Mirlees Blackstone

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what instructions she has given to the Export Credits Guarantee Department in support of Mirlees Blackstone of Hazel Grove in their bid to obtain credit for their contract with the Batman power station project in Turkey; and what action she will take to ensure UK exporters are treated no less favourably than other EU companies in securing export credit guarantees. [1713]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has considered this application for cover against its normal risk underwriting criteria and has concluded that the financial risk is at present too great for an offer of cover to be made.

The Government's objective is that ECGD cover should be broadly competitive with that available from other export credit agencies. This does not, though, mean that in order to match foreign competition, it can accept risks which fall below the minimum quality consistent with achieving its financial break-even objective.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what average compensation payment has been paid to former miners suffering from *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* respiratory diseases. [2011]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* With regard to vibration white finger the average compensation payment is currently £6,572. This mainly reflects cases of low disability where there is no claim for special damages. We expect the average to increase as more claims for special damages are processed.

In relation to respiratory disease, the average expedited payment, which is offered on the basis of initial spirometry testing, is £5,412. The average offer so far in full and final settlement following the full medical assessment process is £9,847.

WALES

St. David's Day

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Minister of the Welsh Assembly concerning declaring St. David's day a bank holiday in Wales. [2374]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet regularly with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

Last year, the National Assembly asked the Government to consider declaring St. David's day a public holiday in Wales. This raises significant issues for business, industry and the public sector. I am discussing these matters both with colleagues in Government and with the First Minister.

Regeneration Funds

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the distribution of regeneration funds in Wales. [1775]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Several funding programmes contribute towards regeneration in Wales. Significant among these are:

European Structural Funds

During the period 2000–06, Wales will be eligible for:

€1.85 billion (approximately £1.2 billion) for Objective 1 areas—which cover two-thirds of the Welsh population;

€81.39 million (approximately £51 million) for Objective 2 areas;

€39.73 million (approximately £25 million) of transitional support in areas formerly covered by Objectives 2 or 5b; and

€127 million (approximately £81 million) of Objective 3 funding—which is payable in those areas not covered by Objective 1.

Regional Selective Assistance

Paid in support of industrial investment in the Assisted Areas, which cover more than 2 million people in Wales.

Communities First

A community-centred regeneration strategy targeted at improving the living conditions and prospects of people living in the most deprived parts of Wales. A total of 88 communities—covering 119 electoral wards—will benefit from funding of £82.7 million over three years.

Distribution of funds from these and other programmes is a matter for the National Assembly.

DEFENCE

National Missile Defence

20. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of RAF Fylingdales in the missile defence system. [1202]

23. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of RAF Fylingdales in missile defence systems. [1205]

Mr. Hoon: The US Administration are considering a range of options for missile defence both in the short and long-term. These include airborne and sea-based options, as well as options similar to those considered by the previous US Administration. They have not yet decided which of these options they will seek to deploy. It therefore remains too early to say whether or not a role for RAF Fylingdales will be proposed as part of any system.

37. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the benefits to the United Kingdom of the missile defence system proposed by President Bush. [1219]

Mr. Hoon: President Bush has not yet decided what sort of missile defence system the United States will deploy. It is therefore premature to carry out any such assessment.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterparts concerning national missile defence. [1196]

Mr. Hoon: I have discussed missile defence with the US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld. I also discussed the subject regularly with his predecessor. I have consistently made it clear that we share US concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and that we will continue to work together to tackle the potential threat with a comprehensive strategy. But it remains the case that the US has not decided how it wishes to proceed with missile defence and has made no request for the use of facilities in the UK.

Aircraft Procurement

21. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new aircraft his Department plans to procure for the RAF; and if he will make a statement. [1203]

39. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new aircraft his Department plans to procure for the RAF; and if he will make a statement. [1221]

Dr. Moonie: Including aircraft on order, we currently plan to acquire 232 Eurofighter multi-role aircraft; 25 A400M transport aircraft; 25 C130J transport aircraft; 21 Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft; eight Chinook Mark 3 support helicopters; 22 Merlin Mark 3 support helicopters, and five modified Global Express jets to carry Airborne Stand-Off Radar. We will also lease four C-17 transport aircraft.

In addition, there are several projects where the exact number of aircraft which the RAF will use has still to be determined. These include: the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft; the Future Joint Combat Aircraft; the Future Offensive Air System; the Support, Amphibious and Battlefield Rotorcraft; and the UK Military Flying Training System programmes. Some of these programmes are planned to involve PFI solutions where the aircraft will not be owned by the Ministry of Defence.

BAE Systems

22. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which Governments he has made representations in the last six months on matters relating to future defence business in which BAE Systems has an interest. [1204]

Dr. Moonie: In accordance with the Government's commitment to a strong defence industry, ministers and officials in the Ministry of Defence have an on-going dialogue with many overseas Governments in support of the UK defence industry.

Bowman Communications System

24. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the award of the Bowman contract. [1206]

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a decision on the new supplier of the Bowman communications system; and if he will make a statement. [1201]

Dr. Moonie: A new competition for the Bowman communications system was announced on 25 July 2000. The competition has progressed ahead of schedule, with bids being received from Thales, General Dynamics company CDC, and TRW in February this year. All three bidders briefed Ministers recently and the Department is now in the final stages of a complex bid assessment process. We will announce a preferred supplier once we

have fully assessed all the issues. On current plans we expect this to be by the end of July, ahead of our original timetable.

Suez (Medals)

25. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about awarding a service medal to those who guarded the Suez Canal Zone in the 1950s. [1207]

Dr. Moonie: I continue to receive representations from hon. Members and members of the public on the award of a medal for service in the Canal Zone during the 1950s.

European Defence Force

26. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the European Defence Force will have a planning capability separate from NATO. [1208]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European Defence Force.

The EU has a very small military staff to support its ability to take decisions which have military implications. This staff will undertake the high level consideration of options to support political/military decision making.

Heads of State and Government agreed at Nice that the EU military staff will not have an operational planning function. They also agreed that NATO will carry out operational planning for EU-led operations that have recourse to NATO assets and capabilities. Operational planning for other operations may be carried out in existing national and multinational headquarters, such as the UK's permanent joint headquarters at Northwood.

29. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice he has received from his senior military advisers about the likely effectiveness of the proposed European defence force. [1211]

Mr. Hoon: The EU is not creating a standing European Defence Force.

The EU Headline Goal required the identification of a pool of forces potentially available for EU-led operations. Nations nominated their contributions to this pool at a Capability Commitments Conference in November 2000. Further improvements are to be identified at a second Conference later this year.

The purpose of the Headline Goal is to encourage EU member states to make improvements in military capability. It is mutually reinforcing with NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative.

These arrangements are being developed on the basis of the best professional military advice.

A400M

27. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the A400M. [1209]

Dr. Moonie: A significant step forward has recently been achieved on the A400M programme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence joined several European colleagues at the Paris Airshow on 19 June in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for this programme. This MoU commits the UK to buying 25 A400M aircraft in order to satisfy the UK's Future Transport Aircraft requirement, alongside commitments from other partners. Signature of the A400M MoU paves the way for placement of the contract with Airbus Military Company. Signature of the contract is conditional on satisfactory completion of contractual negotiations, on which some important issues remain to be resolved but we are striving with our partners to ensure contract placement as soon as possible.

Service Strengths

28. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects each of the three services to reach their full manning strength. [1210]

30. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects each of the three services to reach their full manning strength. [1212]

32. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects each of the three services to reach their full manning strength. [1214]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), *Official Report*, column 535.

Defence Medical Services

31. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he is making in recruiting medical and nursing staff into the defence medical services. [1213]

Dr. Moonie: Recruitment into training is generally satisfactory. We have increased the targets for medical cadets and trainee nurses and I am happy to say we have attracted a good response. Recruiting fully or partially trained personnel, particularly doctors and nurses, is more difficult. A new initiative has commenced with the aim of improving recruitment of fully trained personnel and will continue over the next year. We are, of course, continuing to work closely with the NHS on the issue of recruitment, as well as on many other matters.

Discrimination (Compensation)

33. **Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by his Department in setting compensation claims for those service men and women discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality following the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. [1215]

Dr. Moonie: Excluding the four cases determined by the European Court of Human Rights, 11 claims have now been settled, by negotiation, at a total cost of £139,250.

Negotiations are still ongoing between the Ministry of Defence's legal advisers and legal representatives acting for the remaining claimants with a view to reaching speedy conclusions to their cases.

Type 45 Destroyer

34. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the type 45 programme. [1216]

Dr. Moonie: The analysis of BAE Systems Marine's unsolicited bid continues and we intend to announce our decision as soon as is practicable. At our request RAND are studying a range of alternative procurement strategies for our future warship programmes, with particular focus on options for the type 45 destroyers. This study will help inform our decisions. Wider economic impacts of the way ahead, and value for money, will be taken into account when the Government reach their conclusions on the way ahead and all interested Government Departments are being consulted.

Ship Procurement

35. **Syd Rapson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ships his Department plans to procure for the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [1217]

Dr. Moonie: Our forward shipbuilding programme for the Royal Navy is the largest for many years. We plan to introduce over 30 new ships into service in the next 15–20 years. This includes two large, more capable carriers due to enter service in 2012 and 2015 respectively, up to 12 new type 45 destroyers due to enter into service from 2007 onwards, and the new future surface combatant class. In addition, there are three new astute class nuclear-powered attack submarines due to enter service from 2005 and we will be considering placing an order for further astute submarines next year.

Our procurement programme also involves major enhancements to our naval support and amphibious capabilities. Two new auxiliary oilers are expected to enter service in 2002 when we will also begin leasing three new offshore patrol vessels. In 2003, we will have two new multi-role survey vessels in service and two new landing platform docks. By 2006, we expect to have four new alternative landing ship logistics in-service.

All these vessels will be built in UK yards and this programme provides an excellent opportunity for the British shipbuilding industry. In addition, we will have all six ro-ro vessels, comprising the strategic sealift service, available for the Ministry of Defence under PFI arrangement from 2003 onwards.

This is only part of a wider modernisation programme that we are taking forward to enhance our maritime capability.

Macedonia

36. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts on Macedonia. [1218]

Mr. Hoon: I was unable to attend the North Atlantic Council Defence Ministers meeting on 7 June, but I am in regular contact with the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, and have discussed events in Macedonia with him.

Army Training Facilities

38. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to provide more UK-based training facilities for the Army. [1220]

Dr. Moonie: My Department evaluates its training facilities constantly in order to ensure that we have sufficient and appropriate facilities to allow our troops to meet their training objectives. Work is in progress in a number of areas which will help maximise the utility of our existing facilities.

Army Deployments

40. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the five largest deployments of British forces abroad. [1222]

Mr. Ingram: As of 28 June 2001, the five largest operational deployments of UK service personnel overseas are: the UK contribution to NATO operations in Kosovo; the UK contribution to NATO operations in Bosnia; the UK contribution to coalition operations in the Gulf; the UK's training, advisory and assistance team in Sierra Leone and the UK contribution to UN operations in Cyprus.

Personnel Shortfalls

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the shortfall of service men in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Marines, *(c)* the Royal Navy and *(d)* the RAF; and to what extent the shortfall is supplemented by the Territorial Army. [2140]

Mr. Ingram: The shortfalls in the trained strength of the armed forces as at 1 May 2001 are shown in the table. Column 3 shows the extent to which the shortfalls were being ameliorated by the use of Volunteer Reservists (e.g. the Territorial Army) and Regular Reservists:

	Shortfall	*FTRS*[1]	*Remaining shortfall*
Royal Navy	1,042	476	566
Royal Marines	375	51	342
Army	8,746	674	8,072
RAF	1,795	36	1,759

[1] This includes Limited Commitment (LC) and Home Commitments (HC) Full Time Reservists serving in the RAF.

Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) is a new form of reserve service introduced by the Reserve Forces Act 1996. This legislation enables reservists to be employed on a wider variety of tasks than previously. This change has been particularly well received by personnel of the Reserve Forces and is being well used. It should be noted that both members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces, such as the Territorial Army (TA), and members of the Ex-Regular Reserve Forces (i.e. ex-Regulars who have left full-time service) can undertake FTRS.

Reservists also contribute to enduring operations such as the Balkans and Sierra Leone by volunteering to be called out for permanent (i.e. mobilised) service, normally six-month tours. At present some 500 reservists are called out into permanent service. Although this further contribution by the Reserve Forces helps to relieve the Regular Forces shortfalls, it is short-term and does not count against the manpower strengths and requirements of the Regular Forces.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what instructions were given to the official stenographer relating to amending evidence given by witnesses at the inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield; and if he will make a statement; [R] [2339]

(2) if he will publish the papers relating to the Board of Inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield; if he will make copies available at no charge to the then crew of HMS Sheffield and their families; and if he will make a statement; [R] [2341]

(3) if he will establish a public inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield; and if he will make a statement; [2340]

(4) what *(a)* court martial proceedings and *(b)* disciplinary action against crew of HMS Sheffield were recommended following the inquiry into her sinking; who made the decision on prosecution; and if he will make a statement. [R] [2342]

Mr. Ingram: On 4 May 1982, HMS Sheffield was lost in action in the Falklands with the loss of 20 lives; 26 other members of the crew were injured. Our sympathies of course lie with the survivors from HMS Sheffield and with the families of those who lost their lives or suffered injury. In accordance with normal naval procedures a Board of Inquiry fully investigated the incident. I am confident that the original Board of Inquiry was conducted to the highest professional standards and there would be no useful purpose in reopening this tragic incident.

Following the Board of Inquiry and after giving due consideration to the findings, in September 1982, the then Commander in Chief Fleet concluded that it was not appropriate to take disciplinary action against any member of the crew of HMS Sheffield.

Much of the information put before the Board of Inquiry was, and remains, highly classified and I am withholding it under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Assess to Government Information which relates to defence, security and international relations.

Instructions to the official stenographer would have been recorded in the Transcript of Evidence of the Board of Inquiry, but unfortunately, in the time available, I regret it has not been possible to trace the file containing the Transcript of Evidence. I will write to the hon. Member on that point when I have further information and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Stun Grenades

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the international code is for identification of the country of origin on munitions, with particular reference to stun grenades. [1120]

Mr. Ingram: NATO uses the fifth and sixth digit of the NATO Stock Number (NSN) as an identifier of the country of origin (or manufacturer) of munitions. The NSN appears on the packaging of munitions and not necessarily on the munitions themselves.

Fertility Treatment

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to extend fertility treatment to service personnel and their families. [2401]

Dr. Moonie: Fertility treatment is not provided by the defence medical services, although contributory causes would be investigated and treated in accordance with normal medical practice. Service personnel seeking fertility treatment would need to obtain it through the national health service (NHS), or privately if they were prepared to meet the cost.

The policy on the provision of fertility treatment in the NHS is under review. When new guidelines are issued to health authorities, the Ministry of Defence will consider what changes, if any, are necessary to our current policy on the provision of fertility treatment for Service personnel.

Bullying

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of his Department's report on bullying published in 1973–74 and on infantry bullying of young recruits published in 1990–91. [2790]

Mr. Ingram: Officials are in the process of retrieving the relevant reports. Once this has been completed I will write to my right hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Menwith Hill

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance has been *(a)* asked for and *(b)* given to the US Government in transferring US personnel from Bad Aibling to Menwith Hill; and if he will make a statement. [2789]

Mr. Ingram: My officials have discussed with the US authorities the transfer of some US personnel to RAF Menwith Hill following the closure of Bad Aibling in Bavaria. Current plans are that this will result in a temporary small net increase in staff numbers at RAF Menwith Hill over the next year. The personnel transferred in will be absorbed in existing operations, and do not represent any new mission being established in the UK.

Tanker Replacement

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the engines which will power the rival bids on the tanker replacement programme. [2582]

Dr. Moonie: Two consortia submitted bids for this PFI project on 3 July, so our evaluation of their proposals is at an early stage. Many details of the solutions offered are commercially sensitive and will remain so at least until we make a final investment decision around mid-2002. However, both bidders are content for it to be known that the aircraft currently specified in their bids are powered by Rolls-Royce engines.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military personnel were employed by DARA at RAF St. Athan on 1 July. [3090]

Mr. Ingram: On 1 July 2001 DARA employed 523 service personnel and 2,344 civilian at RAF St. Athan.

MOD Housing (Gosport)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* acquisitions and *(b)* disposals of MOD housing are (i) in hand and (ii) planned in the Gosport constituency. [2828]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has no current plans to provide new service family accommodation in the Gosport constituency. Fifty-one officers' quarters are to be provided at Seafield Park, Fareham as part of a joint Bath, Bristol, Seafield Park Private Finance Initiative (PFI). A decision has also been taken to begin a second Portsmouth PFI to provide 126 officers' and 35 other ranks' quarters. The precise location of this second PFI provision, ie whether it will be in the Gosport constituency or elsewhere in the Portsmouth/Gosport area, has yet to be determined.

In the current financial year 29 properties in Old Rowner are to be returned to their owner, Annington Homes. Decisions have not yet been taken regarding any possible disposals for 2002–03 and beyond.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Minimum Income Guarantee

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many additional claims for the Minimum Income Guarantee *(a)* have been received, *(b)* have been processed and *(c)* were successful as a result of the national take-up campaign; and what his latest estimate is of the number of pensioners entitled to Income Support and not receiving it. [2390]

Mr. McCartney: Up to the end of May 2001, 227,333 additional claims for Minimum Income Guarantee have been received and processed since the beginning of the MIG take-up campaign in May 2000. Of those claims 110,744 have been successful.

The latest estimates of pensioners entitled to Income Support and not receiving it are set out in the publication "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take Up in 1998–99". A copy is available in the Library.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the timetable is for publishing the results of the quantative tracking research on pensioners' awareness of the Minimum Income Guarantee; and on what date the report on the use of the MIG claimline will be published. [2273]

Mr. McCartney: Copies of the Management Summaries of the research to track pensioners' awareness of the Minimum Income Guarantee have been placed in the Library.

We expect to publish the report on the evaluation of the Minimum Income Guarantee claim line later this year.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have become newly entitled to the Minimum Income Guarantee in each year since 1997 as a result of *(a)* benefit increases, *(b)* reduced capital and *(c)* reduced income. [2256]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons people who have responded to the Minimum Income Guarantee take-up campaign have had their claims refused, indicating the number affected by each reason. [2253]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Reasons for refused claims and numbers affected from May 2000 to May 2001

Reason	*Percentage*	*Number*
Income	54	62,958
Capital	41	47,801
Other	5	5,830

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* single and *(b)* married pensioners who have made a successful claim to the Minimum Income Guarantee as a result of the take-up campaign have received an additional weekly income of (i) less than £5, (ii) between £5 and £10, (iii) between £10 and £20, (iv) between £20 and £30, (v) between £30 and £40, (vi) between £40 and £50 and (vii) over £50. [2252]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* letters have been sent out, *(b)* telephone calls have been made to the MIG claim line, *(c)* postal packs have been sent out, *(d)* additional claims have been made and *(e)* additional successful claims there have been as a result of the MIG take-up campaign to the end of May. [2255]

Mr. McCartney: As at the end of May 2001, 227,333 additional claims have been made since the beginning of the MIG take-up campaign. Of these, 110,744 have been successful.

Between 30 May 2000 and mid-November 2000, 2.4 million Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) mailshot letters were issued and a further 102,000 were issued between 5 March 2001 and 9 March 2001.

As at the end of June 2001, the MIG claim line answered 579,260 telephone calls and 571,900 postal packs were sent out.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the number of elderly people entitled to the Minimum Income Guarantee but not claiming it; and if he will make a statement. [2132]

Mr. McCartney: The latest estimates of the numbers of elderly people entitled to Income Support (Minimum Income Guarantee since April 1999) but not claiming it

are set out in the publication "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take Up in 1998–99", a copy of which is in the Library.

Statistics and Reports

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the publication dates of statistics and reports due to be released by his Department and the agencies under his Department in the next 12 months. [374]

Mr. McCartney: Information on the release dates of statistics published by the Department under the National Statistics banner is notified in the National Statistics Update issued by the Office for National Statistics. Release dates four months ahead are given and the information is rolled forward one month at the end of each month.

International Labour Organisation

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the effect on his Department's policies of the creation of a new world commission on the social dimension of globalisation by the International Labour Organisation. [1766]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Director General of the ILO has proposed a world commission to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the social dimensions of globalisation. This proposal, which has the broad support of the EU, will be discussed in more detail at the Governing Body of the ILO in November. Any implications for the UK should then be clear.

Child Support

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if a non-resident parent's responsibility to support a child will end if that child is adopted under the child support system to be introduced in April 2002. [2145]

Malcolm Wicks: A maintenance assessment can be cancelled when the non-resident parent ceases to be a parent of the child to whom the assessment applies. The provisions for the new scheme have the same effect. When a child is adopted, the non-resident parent will normally no longer be treated as a parent of that child.

Retirement Pension (Payday Regulations)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate has been made of the savings to public funds from the retirement pension payday regulations contained in section 5 of the Social Security Act 1982; [2310]

(2) if he will review the retirement pension payday regulations contained in section 5 of the Social Security Act 1982. [2311]

Mr. McCartney: The current regulations provide for the payment of retirement pension in whole weeks.

If payment were made for part-weeks, and the recovery of overpaid benefit at the end of the claim was abandoned, we estimate the costs would be up to £20 million.

There are no plans to change the present self-balancing arrangements.

Benefit Entitlement

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to require people to have their name on the electoral register as a requirement for receipt of benefit. [2254]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not practical to require people to have their name on the electoral register as a requirement of receipt of benefit. Some people who are entitled to benefit are not entitled to vote.

Departmental Website (Search Facility)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to offer a search facility on the Department for Work and Pensions website in addition to the link to UK Online. [2262]

Malcolm Wicks: A search facility was introduced to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) site on 4 July. As well as searching the DWP site it also allows users to search the former DSS website, which continues to provide accurate and up-to-date information. The link to UK Online will remain.

Pension Credit

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide tables similar to those in the Annex to the consultation paper on the Pension Credit (Cm 4900), showing how the scheme would operate in 2013–14 and 2023–24, assuming that the Minimum Income Guarantee rises in line with earnings and the basic pension in line with prices from 2003 on. [2388]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Credit forms a key part of the Government's overall strategy for tackling pensioner poverty.

We are completing the design of the Pension Credit and will publish details of our proposals, including their long-term implications when the Bill is introduced.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he proposes to take to achieve the aim, set out on page 24 of the consultation paper on the Pension Credit (Cm 4900), that pensioners receiving full Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit should continue to do so after the introduction of the Pension Credit. [2389]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Credit forms a key part of the Government's overall strategy for tackling pensioner poverty.

We are completing the design of the Credit and will publish details of our proposals when the Bill is introduced.

New Deal for Lone Parents

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the progress of the New Deal for Lone Parents in Coventry. [2974]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: By the end of April this year, 1,562 lone parents in the Coventry district had participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents. Of these, 49 had taken up education or training to improve their skills and 578 had found work.

Across the country we are offering lone parents new choices. We are inviting lone parents into Jobcentres to give them the chance to find out about all of the measures that we have introduced. We are offering lone parents more opportunities than ever before to move off benefit and into work, providing a better future for themselves and their children.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents will be published. [2271]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The evaluation of the prototype of NDLP was published on 3 March 2000. Follow up reports and research on the national phase of the programme have been published since then and new items of research are published as they are completed. We expect to publish a report, bringing together findings from all strands of the evaluation, in 2003.

SERPS

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have contracted back into SERPS from contracted-out money purchase pension schemes and approved personal pensions in each of the last three years. [2267]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not yet available. We are currently analysing output from the NIRS2 computer system for accuracy and compatibility; this will take a number of months to complete.

Interpreting Services

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the provision of interpreting services at Jobcentres and social security offices. [1127]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: If a jobseeker whose first language is not English requires an interpreter, Employment Service (ES) policy states that the Jobcentre must provide this service to ensure our obligations to equal opportunities are met. ES staff have access to a range of interpreter provision which includes: using colleagues within the Jobcentre, local authority or community who speak the relevant language; asking if the jobseeker would like to bring a friend or relative along to translate; and, through a contract with the Benefits Agency, access to the telephone interpreting service 'Language Line'.

The Benefits Agency also have a responsibility to make appropriate provision to communicate with customers who do not speak English, who use British Sign Language, or who require the services of a lipspeaker or deafblind interpreter. The policy for the delivery of interpreting services is: where it is necessary to interview a customer who does not speak English or Welsh, arrangements must be made within one working day to provide an interpreter[1].

[1] The arrangements should be made within one working day, the interview does not have to take place within one working day.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if life insurance cover may be included in the minimum contribution level needed for a group personal pension to be accepted as an alternative to a stakeholder pension. [367]

Mr. McCartney: Yes, but the proportion of the minimum 3 per cent. contribution level that can be used for insurance premiums to provide death benefits depends on when the arrangement was set up.

If the arrangement for paying premiums via the personal pension was set up before 6 April 2001, a maximum of 5 per cent. of the employee's net relevant earnings can still be used towards the term assurance contract.

But where the arrangements commenced on or after 6 April 2001, the maximum that can be paid as a premium is 10 per cent. of the pension contribution. Thus if the only pension contribution is the employer's 3 per cent., the maximum that can be used as a premium is 10 per cent. of the 3 per cent.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research his Department is undertaking to assess the income levels of people who invest in stakeholder pensions. [375]

Mr. McCartney: As part of a wide-ranging evaluation of the impact of stakeholder pensions the Department is undertaking a programme of dedicated research and analyses of administrative and statistical information. Details of individuals' incomes have been, or will be, collected in all research among individuals undertaken by, or on behalf of, the Department in connection with the evaluation of stakeholder pensions. Questions on stakeholder pensions will, for example, be included in the Office for National Statistics (ONS's) General Household Survey and in the Department's Family Resources Survey.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions are taking place between the Government and Opra to ensure there is a clear set of guidelines by which to determine which companies are fined for breaking the new stakeholder rules; and if small firms will be offered more leeway than larger firms when the rules have been broken. [365]

Mr. McCartney: From 8 October employers who are not exempt will be required to provide their employees with access to a stakeholder pension. The new requirements on employers are not onerous; but for many this will be their first involvement with pensions.

The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) is an independent regulator. Their priority is to get employers to comply with the new arrangements. A key part of this process is to continue to educate employers about the requirements of the new arrangements.

Where an employer is reported to Opra for a breach of the rules, a warning letter will be sent by Opra to the employer. The letter will explain the new requirements and the obligations that employers now have. The employer will be asked to submit evidence of compliance. Cases where the employer continues to fail to comply

with the new arrangements will be considered by Opra on an individual basis according to the circumstances of each case. The level of any fine will depend upon the circumstances surrounding a breach, including how the employer has responded on being contacted about the breach.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Car Boot Sales

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the number of arable farms which benefit from income from car boot sales; and if she will make a statement. [2112]

Alun Michael: There are no figures available on the number of arable farms which benefit from income from car boot sales.

Energy Efficiency

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the impact on energy use of providing home buyers with tailored energy efficiency advice on properties. [1813]

Mr. Meacher: It is very difficult to provide an accurate quantification of the energy savings expected from the provision of energy efficiency advice. However, figures from the Energy Saving Trust's Energy Efficiency Advice Centres suggest that 60 per cent. of their customers act in some way to advice given. They estimate that this has resulted in energy savings per home of £26 per year, or around 1,600 kiloWatt hours.

As my hon. Friend may know, as part of our proposals to improve the home buying and selling process, the Government propose to require sellers to include an energy efficiency report, prepared by an approved home inspector, in a new seller's pack. The purpose is to put information in the hands of the buyer at the time they are most likely to be taking decisions about expenditure on a property.

Assuming that savings are similar to those resulting from advice given by the Advice Centres, we estimate that energy efficiency advice in the seller's pack could save around two TeraWatt hours per year. This is based on around 1.3 million home transactions per year in England and Wales.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the average interval between application and granting of moneys for the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme *(a)* in total, *(b)* in Gloucestershire and *(c)* the Forest of Dean. [1800]

Mr. Meacher: The average time taken from initial application to payment to installers is set out in the table. The figures identified include the time taken by HEES surveyors to identify measures to be installed and installers submitting and receiving payment of their invoices following completion of works, typically 6–8 weeks:

Days

	Insulation	*Heating*
England	96	168
Gloucestershire	91	143
Forest of Dean	93	134

Plutonium MOX Fuel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the text of the letter sent to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, dated 11 May, concerning the remit of consultants Arthur D. Little in the independent appraisal of the revised BNFL economic and market assessment for plutonium MOX fuel; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the completed ADL study. [1758]

Mr. Meacher: My letter to my hon. Friend was dated 30 May; the answer I gave on 11 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 386W, said that I would write to him. I have placed a copy of my 30 May letter in the Library of the House.

We intend to publish the Arthur D. Little report as soon as possible, excluding only that material—such as contract prices—whose publication would cause unreasonable commercial damage to BNFL's commercial operations or to the economic case for the MOX plant itself. A copy of this, too, will be placed in the Library. We propose to allow people four weeks for comment.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport regarding help for businesses that have suffered losses due to the foot and mouth crisis. [2146]

Alun Michael: My predecessor as chairman of the Rural Task Force, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), and officials in former DETR and DEFRA, have held frequent discussions with DCMS Ministers and officials as I have done since taking on this role. The Minister for Tourism, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), is a member of the Rural Task Force, and he and I have met twice since the general election. The Government have provided significant assistance for businesses indirectly affected by foot and mouth disease, including interest-free deferral of tax payments, extra central subsidy where local authorities grant hardship relief from rates, and the £50 million Business Recovery Fund administered by Regional Development Agencies.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria she has published for the re-opening of public footpaths following the foot and mouth outbreak. [1735]

Alun Michael: On 23 May we issued revised guidance to local authorities, based on the latest veterinary risk assessment published at the same time, that it was safe to re-open all public rights of way outside 3 km protection zones around infected premises. The veterinary risk assessment concluded that the likelihood of footpath users transmitting the foot and mouth disease virus was extremely small. Nevertheless, as part of our drive to

eradicate foot and mouth disease all path users are urged to observe the precautions published in the codes of conduct issued with the guidance.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the advice her Department is offering to local authorities on the re-opening of footpaths after the foot and mouth outbreak. [1675]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Guidance was issued by the Government on 23 May, based on veterinary risk assessment, that footpaths outside 3 km protection zones around Infected Premises may be safely re-opened. That guidance remains in place.

As part of our strategy for rural recovery we want to see footpaths and other rights of way re-opened wherever it is safe to do so. This is essential in order to enable rural businesses to return to normal working and is fully consistent with our priority of doing everything possible to eradicate foot and mouth disease. In addition I have announced my intention to lift the power of local authorities to impose a blanket ban on use of footpaths in an area except where a local authority can show it is needed to maintain the effectiveness of efforts to eradicate foot and mouth disease. I hope to make a further announcement shortly following the current consultation with local authorities.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when and by what means the Government announced its intention to hold an inquiry into foot and mouth disease; if she will ensure that the inquiry considers *(a)* the merits of greater use of vaccination, *(b)* the role of the Environment Agency in specifying farms and other sites suitable for burial of carcases and *(c)* the implication for local communities of mass burial sites; and if she will make a statement. [841]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 June 2001]:* There will be an inquiry, when the disease is finally over. We have always said we are keen to learn the lessons from this outbreak. The precise nature and scope of the inquiry will be a matter for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's plans to hold an independent public inquiry into the foot and mouth crisis. [269]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* It is right that we consider very carefully the full range of issues connected with the foot and mouth outbreak. The question of whether there should be a public inquiry is one for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to allow an independent audit of the official foot and mouth statistics. [273]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* There is no current plan to conduct an independent audit of the official foot and mouth statistics but the compilation and presentation of statistics will no doubt be among the areas to be considered when reviewing the issues arising from the outbreak.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes there have been for official statistical purposes to the definition of foot and mouth carcase disposal since 20 February. [209]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Carcase disposal has and continues to be defined for official statistics purposes by reference to the date on which disposal was completed. This is reflected in the statistical data published on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/. The only change has been in terms of the time taken to make information available; previously the time lag tended to make the situation appear worse than it was. Systems have been improved so that statistics are now entered much more quickly and give a more accurate picture.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date the Government defined the foot and mouth outbreak as an epidemic. [284]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Government have not set a date from which the outbreak should be considered an epidemic.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information the Government have received from studies of the genetic fingerprint of the virus responsible for the current foot and mouth epidemic in the United Kingdom; and what understanding further to the type O PanAsia strain identification of the virus. [285]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* We have looked at the genetic fingerprint of 27 isolates of foot and mouth disease virus during the current outbreak in the UK. These included representative samples from different areas of the country and from different time-points since February 2001. All were very closely related to the PanAsia strain of FMDV type O. Sequences studied in the Republic of Ireland, France and the Netherlands were essentially identical to the UK isolations.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what scientific advice the Government have received on the type and the overseas geographical source of the viruses responsible for the current foot and mouth epidemic in the United Kingdom. [283]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The PanAsia strain of FMDV type O (the virus identified in the UK outbreak) is distributed over much of southern Asia. Pinpointing an exact origin has not been possible.

Work is continuing at the Institute of Animal Health to determine the complete genome sequence of the UK outbreak strain and to compare it with the genome sequences of viruses from South Africa, China and South Korea to obtain additional data about the extent of the relationships between those strains.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the duties of EU member state Governments in respect of information and instructions received from the EU concerning restrictions on imports from non-EU countries affected by animal disease outbreaks. [282]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* It is the duty of each EU member state Government to transpose into national law all Community legal instruments adopted by the European Commission in relation to outbreaks of animal disease in non-EU countries and to enforce them accordingly.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the number of *(a)* calves, *(b)* lambs and *(c)* piglets that have been included in the foot and mouth cull but not recorded in official figures for the number of animals culled. [270]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Young animals culled as a result of foot and mouth disease are included in the total slaughter figure. This figure, including calves, lambs and piglets, is updated daily on the DEFRA foot and mouth disease website http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

Farm Animal Welfare

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the terms of reference for the proposed independent commission on farming and food will include improvements in farm animal welfare; and if she will make a statement. [2471]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 178W.

Potato Harvest

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations *(a)* she and *(b)* her predecessor received about extending the date limit on harvesting potatoes on set-aside land in Northumberland following exceptionally wet weather; and if extensions have been granted. [1173]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 28 June 2001]:* The date limit for harvesting potatoes, or other crops, from set-aside land is designed to ensure that farmers cannot receive both an EU payment for taking land out of production and revenue from agricultural operations during the set-aside period. In a normal year any previously planted crops must be harvested by 15 January at the latest in order to comply with this condition, which is laid down in implementing legislation for the EU's Arable Area Payments Scheme. In view of a number of representations from the industry at the time, the UK twice successfully applied to the European Commission to have the date postponed, initially to 31 March and subsequently to 30 April, in order to allow sufficient time for harvesting to be completed where field conditions resulting from exceptionally wet weather had earlier made this impossible. We also secured a derogation allowing failed crops to be ploughed in at any time before the 15 May claim deadline, without prejudicing eligibility for set-aside payment.

Notwithstanding these changes, my predecessor did receive some subsequent representations asking for a further postponement of the harvesting date limit beyond 30 April. The European Commission were not prepared to agree to this, pointing both to the practical difficulties of ensuring that crops harvested so late had genuinely been planted with a view to harvest by 15 January, as normally required, and to the likely condition of such crops after so long in unworkable ground.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many submissions were made to the consultation on the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy; how many of these responses recommended that the definition of fuel poverty should use a form of disposable income; and if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for assessing and responding to the consultation. [1319]

Mr. Meacher: Over 240 responses have been received on the draft UK Fuel Poverty Strategy. Since the consultation only ended every recently these are now being analysed before decisions are taken on the best way forward.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when preparations began (1) for the transfer of responsibility for environmental sustainability to the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; [276]

(2) for the reorganisation of Whitehall responsibilities involved in the creation of the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; [199]

(3) for the transfer of responsibility for the Environment Agency to the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. [197]

Margaret Beckett: *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* In keeping with normal practice, contingency work was undertaken within the civil service during the election campaign, on the basis of proposals published in party manifestos.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the role of rural advocate will change because of the creation of her Department. [267]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* No. The role of the rural advocate, as the Government's statutory adviser on the countryside, is to argue the case on countryside issues and for rural people at the highest levels across Government and outside. That task will be assisted by bringing together rural policy responsibilities in my Department but many other Departments have responsibility for policy areas with a major impact on rural communities.

Quangos

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the number of quangos previously overseen by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will reduce following the establishment of her Department. [291]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* There are no current plans to do so, but the need for each non-departmental public body is regularly reviewed.

Tractors

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what limit was agreed by the EU Employment and Social Policy Council on tractor use and the length of the transition period. [738]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The EU Employment and Social Policy Council is not seeking to impose a specific limit on tractor use. However, it has been discussing the proposed Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive which would, among other provisions, set a mandatory limit for exposure to whole body vibration. Limiting whole body vibration would affect tractor driving time but the impact will depend on the magnitude of the vibration in individual cases. The Council agreed on a maximum dose of 1.15 metres per second squared (a measure of acceleration) averaged over an 8-hour period for whole body vibration exposure. In the case of tractor use, the impact would vary, depending on factors such as seating and cab design. Under the transition arrangements proposed agriculture would not be required to comply with the whole body vibration limits until 2013.

The Directive has not been agreed and is due to be considered by the European Parliament in September.

Tourism

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the division of responsibility for tourism between her Department and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. [277]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Tourism is an increasingly important industry for many rural communities and my Department will be keen to work closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, our regional and local partners, and the Countryside Agency and other stakeholders in promoting the contribution it can make to the rural economy.

There has been no change to the responsibilities of DCMS in relation to rural tourism.

Food Safety

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the division of responsibility for food and food safety between her Department, other Government Departments and the Food Standards Agency. [278]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* This Department retains the responsibilities for food of the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which embrace all elements of the food chain from primary agricultural production to retailing and the protection of public health in relation to farm produce and to animal diseases transmissible to humans. The Department will work closely with other Departments to promote sustainable and diverse farming and food industries that work together to meet the needs of consumers. Food safety remains the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Minister in her Department will in normal circumstances attend meetings of the Agriculture Council. [204]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I will.

Fishmeal

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the restrictions in the use of fishmeal in animal feed. [210]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* A proposal to extend the restriction on the use of fishmeal in ruminant feed failed to secure a qualified majority in the Agriculture Council of 19 June. In the absence of a qualified majority against the proposal, the Commission are now free to extend the ban under their own competence, and they have expressed their intention to do so. However, they have undertaken to review the ban once a diagnostic test to differentiate between animal and fish protein is validated.

South African Meat Exports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* value and *(b)* volume of meat products exported from South Africa to the United Kingdom was in each (i) year and (ii) month since 1997. [397]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Official Overseas Trade statistics show that the value and volume of meat products exported from South Africa to the United Kingdom since 1997 was as follows:

UK imports of beef from South Africa: January 1997 to April 2001

	Carcase meat		*Meat and offal preparations*		*Total*	
Year	*Tonnes*	*£000*	*Tonnes*	*£000*	*Tonnes*	*£000*
1997						
May	13	40	—	—	13	40
September	—	—	52	97	52	97
December	59	217	35	70	93	287
1998						
March	—	—	17	32	17	32
April	—	—	52	94	52	94
July	89	236	—	—	89	236
September	15	39	—	—	15	39
October	166	455	—	—	166	455
1999						
May	209	557	67	165	276	722
June	15	37	—	—	15	37
2000						
January	—	—	17	23	17	23
February	15	12	—	—	15	12
April	58	161	—	—	58	161
May	4	16	—	—	4	16
June	—	—	17	49	17	49
October	56	143	17	59	72	203
December	—	—	34	51	34	51
2001						
January	—	—	34	51	34	51
February	—	—	34	51	34	51
March	15	29	34	51	49	80
April	—	—	51	76	51	76

UK imports of pigmeat from South Africa: January 1997 to April 2001

	Pork	
	Tonnes	£000
1997		
February	9	13
1998		
March	20	10

No imports were recorded for other meat products.

Only months for which trade was reported are shown in the tables.

Fox Numbers

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what effect the cessation of fox hunting with dogs as the result of foot and mouth disease has had on the total number of foxes. [2367]

Alun Michael: There is no information collected centrally which could provide the basis for an answer to this question. The pressure on the Department's staff—and indeed on all organisations involved—has been enormous and collation of data at this time is focused on information relevant to eradication of foot and mouth disease.

Petrol Safety

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received calling for the introduction of third party monitoring of wetstock at petrol retailers. [1577]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE does not collect statistics on the number of field visits and inspections made by environmental health officers to petrol retail outlets using underground storage tanks. Local authority petroleum officers issue licences under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 to petrol retail outlets to ensure the safe storage of petrol.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what initiatives are being undertaken to ensure that petrol retail site managers are fully trained to assess wetstock risks. [1582]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

A recent circular, jointly issued by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authority interests (PETEL 65/34 "leak detection in tanks and pipework"), gives relevant advice to petroleum officers on this topic. Petroleum officers will use this advice when carrying out inspections. The circular is available on the HSE website.

Mobile Telephone Masts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she gives to local authorities in relation to planning applications for mobile telephone masts; what research her Department is sponsoring into the health risks involved; and what proposals she has to review such advice. [2118]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Government planning policy for telecommunications is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 8 (revised): Telecommunications and the Department's Circular 4–99 "Planning for Telecommunications".

In June 2000, my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing, Planning and Construction wrote to Council Leaders in England to explain the action the Government had in hand to take forward the planning recommendations of the Stewart report ("Mobile Phones and Health") published in May 2000, and to give guidance on how local planning authorities should take into account health aspects when considering planning applications.

On 16 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 748–51W, my right hon. Friend announced a series of important changes to the planning system for telecommunications masts which will significantly strengthen the current arrangements. On that day, he wrote to the Leaders of all Councils in England and to all hon. Members for constituencies in England to advise them of the proposed changes. Copies of the letter were sent to chief planning officers.

We shall introduce the rules and publish the revised Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG8) on Telecommunications Development to implement the changes at the earliest opportunity.

In December 2000, the Department of Health announced a new research programme, costing around £7 million and funded jointly by Government and industry, which will be directed and overseen by a task force led by Sir William Stewart. It will carry out research into the effects of mobile phone technology on health and the process will ensure that Government and the public are kept up to date with new research findings.

The Government are keeping the whole area of mobile phone technologies under review in the light of further research.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to clean the roof of the dome; and if she will make a statement. [2092]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

None, although English Partnerships, as owners of the dome, will of course keep under review all matters relating to management and maintenance of their assets.

Vitamins and Minerals

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the work of the ad hoc expert advisory group on vitamins and minerals. [1993]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals was established to review the safety of high-dose vitamin and mineral supplements to ensure that the public are not put at risk.

The group expect to complete the reviews of the relevant scientific information on the safety of individual vitamins and minerals shortly. Following this, the group

will complete risk assessments for the vitamins and minerals reviewed. Its conclusions will be issued by the Food Standards Agency for public consultation with a view to publishing its final report in 2002. A copy of the final report will be sent to the Scientific Committee on Food to inform deliberations by that committee on a draft proposal for an EU Council Directive relating to the addition of nutrients to foods.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide a detailed list of the responsibilities of the Ministers in her Department. [214]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The responsibilities of Ministers in my Department are as follows:

Secretary of State: right hon. Margaret Beckett MP

Overall responsibility for all departmental issues. Will represent the UK at the EU Agriculture Council.

Minister of State (Environment): right hon. Michael Meacher MP

Sustainable development. Climate change. Environmental protection and water issues. Wildlife and conservation. SSSIs and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Energy efficiency. Will represent the UK in the EU Environment Council.

Minister of State (Rural Affairs): right hon. Alun Michael MP

Rural affairs and countryside issues. Oversight of delivery of Rural White Paper. Chairs Rural Task Force. Partnership with voluntary and community groups in rural areas. Hunting with hounds. Regional issues. Overall lead on ERDP. Department's e-business strategy.

Parliamentary Secretary (Commons): Elliot Morley MP

Animal Health, including TSEs and follow-up to Phillips Inquiry Report. Animal welfare. Fisheries (will represent the UK in EU Fisheries Council). Whaling. Forestry. Agri-environment schemes. Floods and coastal defence. Departmental administrative issues.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Lords): The Lord Whitty

Food and farming. Horticulture. Plant health. General oversight of departmental science and R&D. Rural Payments Agency. Inland Waterways.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Trainee Teachers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the drop out rate for teacher training courses for *(a)* PGCE and *(b)* BEd courses (i) for each institution and (ii) for each year since 1997. [3116]

Mr. Timms: Information for 1997–98 is not available. Information on final year trainees for 1998–99 is available in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. Information for 1999–2000 will be released on 12 July.

Students

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students dropped out of university courses in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [25]

Margaret Hodge: The latest "Performance Indicators in Higher Education" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England give an overall non-completion rate for students starting full-time first degree courses in the UK in 1997–98 of 17 per cent., a figure which has stayed roughly constant since 1991–92. Figures for students starting courses in 1998–99 will be published by HEFCE in September.

In 2000, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a table comparing estimates of drop-out rates in member countries. They showed an average of around a third of university students dropping out of their courses in OECD countries. The UK had the second lowest drop-out rate among the 30 OECD countries.

SSAs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average annual standard spending assessment is for each *(a)* primary school and *(b)* secondary school pupil in England; what the comparable figures for pupils in Somerset are for the latest available year; what her estimate is of the additional expenditure which would be necessary to bring the per pupil SSA in Somerset up to the average for England; and if she will make a statement. [1380]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The table shows for 2001–02 the education SSA per primary and secondary pupil for England and Somerset.

£

SSA	*England*	*Somerset*
Primary per pupil	2,588	2,405
Secondary per pupil	3,313	3,098

These differences amount to £12.6 million in 2001–02. Since 1997–98 Somerset's recurrent funding, including specific and special grants, has been estimated to have increased in real terms (2000–01 prices) by £570 per 5 to 15-year-old pupil. Total funding for pupils aged 5 to 15 in Somerset LEA has been provisionally estimated to amount to £198.4 million in 2001–02.

Vice-chancellors

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to scrutinise the effectiveness of vice-chancellors. [1687]

Margaret Hodge: Vice-chancellors are appointed by and are accountable to the governing body of their individual university and my right hon. Friend has no plans to alter current arrangements.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the anticipated revenue is from tuition fees in England and Wales for each of the years 2002–03 to 2006–07; and if she will make a statement. [1865]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The projected income to higher education institutions in England and Wales from tuition fees governed by the

student support regulations, the mandatory award regulations and for those post-graduate students funded by the research councils is shown in tables 1 and 2:

Table 1: Estimated tuition fee income to English institutions

£ million

	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Public contributions to fees	498	493	500
Student contributions to fees[1]	350	376	400
Total	848	869	900

[1] The student contributions are net of an estimated 5 per cent. cost for collection and any default.

Table 2: Estimated tuition fee income to Welsh institutions

£ million

	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Public contributions to fees	33.5	33.4	33.8
Student contributions to fees[1]	25.0	27.2	28.7
Total	58.5	60.6	62.5

[1] The student contributions are net of an estimated 5 per cent. cost for collection and any default.

Note:

Estimates are not available beyond 2003–04.

School Provision

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment has been made of the need to build *(a)* new primary and *(b)* new secondary schools in the West Chelmsford parliamentary constituency and Great Baddow as a result of anticipated house building in the area until 2011. [2330]

Mr. Timms: The Government believe that decisions concerning the organisation and supply of school places are best taken locally—by the main partners in the provision of education who have knowledge of local needs. It is the responsibility of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to ensure that there are sufficient school places within their area.

Should a borough council propose new housing developments as part of its local plan, we would expect the LEA's School Organisation Plan (SOP) to reflect any projected increases in the pupil population. All LEAs are required to produce a SOP, which sets out how they propose to deal with deficits and surpluses of school provision over a rolling five year period. The SOP sets the context for proposals to change school organisation in the area, and may include proposals to establish new schools or enlarge existing ones.

If, as a result of housing developments, the LEA identifies a need for additional primary and secondary school places, we would consider any future capital bids from Essex that meet the published criteria for support.

Equal Opportunities

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies for all staff in higher education institutions. [2333]

Margaret Hodge: Higher education institutions have submitted their human resource strategies to the Higher Education Funding Council for England so that it can allocate the extra £330 million the Government are providing over three years to support increases in academic and non-academic pay. To gain their share of this funding institutions need to demonstrate that their strategies include clear and practicable equal opportunities policies. The Equality Challenge Unit set up by the higher education funding councils and representative bodies will work directly with institutions to help them deliver the improvements in monitoring and performance they have promised in their equal opportunities policy statements.

Further Education

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the notional national pay scales for *(a)* lecturers and *(b)* administrative and support staff in the further education sector. [2357]

Margaret Hodge: I understand that the Association of Colleges (AoC), as the colleges' employer' group, issues notional national pay scales but these are a matter for the AoC and the relevant unions.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many colleges have not implemented the full awards of the notional national scale; and if she will make a statement. [2358]

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of further education colleges failed to award the nationally recommended pay rise in each year since 1992. [2990]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect this information. I understand that data obtained by the Association of Colleges on the extent of pay implementation for 2000–01 indicate that (from an 80 per cent. response rate) 73 per cent. of colleges that responded had made an award either equal to or in excess of the national recommended level, and that a further 12 per cent. intended to do so at a later date.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unfilled vacancies there are in the further education sector for lecturer posts; and how many there were in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1993. [2403]

John Healey: The information requested is not collected centrally. Information on staff numbers in FE sector colleges is collected via SIR (Staff Individualised Record). SIR does not include details on vacancies, leavers, salary or grade.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) collected and published information on staff numbers in the FE sector on an annual basis. The responsibilities of the FEFC have now been taken over by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time (i) lecturers and (ii) administrative and support staff were employed in the further education sector in (A) 1993, (B) 1997, (C) 2000 and (D) 2001. [2408]

John Healey: The estimated number of staff employed in the FE sector are shown in the following table:

Numbers of staff employed in the FE sector by mode and primary role

Thousand

	1997–98		*1998–99*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Teaching staff	49.1	92.7	48.1	96.6
Support staff	11.9	13.0	12.3	11.5
Other staff	35.4	29.4	35.3	30.2
Total staff	96.4	135.1	95.7	138.3

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), collected and published information on staff in the FE sector on an annual basis. The responsibilities of the FEFC have now been taken over by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Information on staff is taken from the Staff Individualised Record (SIR). The SIR covers English FE sector colleges only.

SIR data for the whole year were collected from all colleges for the first time in July 1995, relating to the 1994–95 college year. This collection was repeated for 1995–96, for 1996–97, for 1997–98 and for 1998–99. Data for 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 are not yet available. Data for 1993–94 were not collected on a comparable basis.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the further education colleges that have *(a)* implemented and *(b)* failed to implement the nationally recommended pay increase for college staff in the last five years, ranking those in each category according to the level of pay increase awarded. [2997]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect this information. I refer my hon. Friend to my reply given earlier today to his related question on the implementation of pay awards. [2990]

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to restore college lecturers' pay levels to parity with the teaching profession. [2675]

Margaret Hodge: We are aware of the historic funding gap between schools and FE created by the last Administration and have pledged to ensure upwards convergence over time and as resources allow. We have already made an unprecedented investment in the sector, which should allow colleges greater flexibility to meet the genuine aspirations of their staff. An additional £300 million is available to colleges over the next three years specifically to reward high quality teaching, as part of the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI). This is separate to any general pay rise a teacher may receive.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unfilled further education lecturer posts there were in each of the last 10 years. [2989]

John Healey: The information requested is not collected centrally. Information on staff numbers in FE sector colleges is collected via SIR (Staff Individualised Record). SIR does not include details on vacancies, leavers, salary or grade.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) collected and published information on staff numbers in the FE sector on an annual basis. The responsibilities of the FEFC have now been taken over by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

School Drinking Water

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the availability and accessibility of drinking water for pupils in schools; what plans she has to introduce regulations to ensure availability and accessibility of drinking water for pupils in schools; and what steps she proposes to take in respect of schools where drinking water is *(a)* not readily available to pupils and *(b)* only available in toilets. [2489]

Mr. Timms: It is for local education authorities and schools to decide how the provision of drinking water should be made, along with their general duty to ensure the health and safety of pupils. However, schools have a statutory requirement to provide a wholesome supply of water for domestic purposes, including a supply of drinking water.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of dehydration on pupils' concentration, learning behaviour and educational performance; and if she will make a statement. [2490]

Mr. Timms: The Department for Education and Skills has not made any assessment of the effect dehydration would have on the educational achievements or behaviour of children in schools.

Contract Lecturers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if Silver Book contract lecturers in further education are eligible for payments under the Teachers' Pay Initiative. [2503]

Margaret Hodge: Yes, they are eligible.

Teacher Training Agency

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the Teacher Training Agency budget was spent in *(a)* the northern region and *(b)* Stockton in the last financial year. [2515]

Mr. Timms: This information is not available. The Teacher Training Agency does not account for its budget on a regional basis.

Blenheim High School

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the impact of the withdrawal of capital funds for the completion of Blenheim high school in Epsom and Ewell as a consequence of the Government's abolition of grant maintained status. [2533]

Mr. Timms: Following the decision to end grant maintained status, and after consultation with external partners, transitional regulations were put in place to fund capital work at grant maintained schools where obligations had been entered into or decisions taken by the Funding Agency for Schools or the Secretary of State

before 1 September 1999. These transitional regulations enabled the Department to meet outstanding commitments for capital funding approved before this date.

I understand that Blenheim high school has already received sufficient capital funding to meet the commitments covered by the transitional regulations. However, I have asked officials to meet with the school and Surrey local education authority to confirm the position.

Sixth Forms

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the future of funding for school sixth forms following the introduction of learning and skills councils. [2534]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From 1 April 2002 school sixth forms will be funded by the learning and skills council. To assist this change, all school sixth forms have a guarantee that their funding will not fall below the funding level of 2000–01 in real terms, provided their sixth form numbers do not fall. For new sixth forms, a proxy real terms guarantee will be calculated based on local spending levels.

Supply Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of national spending on teachers' remuneration was spent on supply teachers in the last year for which figures are available. [2535]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

"Schools—Building on Success"

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings have been held with outside bodies to discuss the Green Paper 'Schools—Building on Success'. [2594]

Mr. Timms: Officials at my Department invited a cross-section of the main stakeholders to discuss the proposals in the Green Paper, "Schools—Building on Success". Meetings were held with representatives from all the teacher unions and associations, school governor associations, faith groups, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Local Government Association, and the Association of Chief Education Officers/Society of Education Officers.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to allow private sector companies to recruit and manage teaching staff in schools which are deemed to be *(a)* successful and *(b)* failing. [3112]

Mr. Timms: We proposed in the Green Paper "Schools—Building on Success" that new models would be developed to allow private or other sponsors to take responsibility for either weak, failing or successful schools. Where the private sector, or anyone else, has expertise that can help schools to improve we should use it. The forthcoming White Paper will set out the arrangements for doing so.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the meetings *(a)* she and *(b)* other ministers in her Department have had with representative bodies and others to discuss the Green Paper, 'Schools—Building on Success'. [3123]

Mr. Timms: Officials arranged and held meetings with organisations. My right hon. Friend was made aware of the issues raised. Meetings took place with a cross-section of the main stakeholders, including teacher unions and associations.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received in respect of the Green Paper, 'Schools—Building on Success'. [3124]

Mr. Timms: Officials have held meetings to discuss the proposals in the Green Paper with representatives from all the teacher unions and associations, school governor associations, faith groups, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Local Government Association, and the Association of Chief Education Officers/Society of Education Officers.

Written responses to the Green Paper consultation exercise have also been sent by a number of individuals and organisations, including those who attended the meetings.

Teachers (Stoke-on-Trent)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were employed in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Stoke-on-Trent in each year since 1997. [2667]

Mr. Timms: The full-time equivalents of regular teachers (excluding short-term supply) employed in the maintained school sector in Stoke-on-Trent local authority were as follows:

January	*Nursery/ primary*	*Secondary*	*Total*
1998	990	820	1,810
1999	980	830	1,800
2000	970	840	1,810
2001[1]	950	870	1,820

[1] Provisional—subject to validation

Note:

Totals may not be the sum of the component parts because of rounding

Stoke-on-Trent local authority was created on 1 April 1997.

Infant School Places

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many appeals were made to local education authorities in respect of infant places in schools for children in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; and if she will make a statement. [2867]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown as follows.

Appeals lodged by parents against non-admission of their children in maintained private schools

Academic year	*Number*
1999–2000	28,728
1998–99	32,194
1997–98	30,868
1996–97	32,643

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the budget is in their first year of operation for teachers' threshold payments; and how much has been spent on the preparation and implementation of and training for the scheme *(a)* from her Department's budget and *(b)* from other public education budgets. [2928]

Mr. Timms: To the end of June 2001, the Department has paid about £350 million to local authorities to cover the additional salary costs of teachers passing the threshold. The Department has a contract with Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) for the provision and deployment of threshold assessors and external advisers to governing bodies on heads' performance. It also has a contract with the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) for training in threshold assessment and performance management. The value of these contracts depends on the volume and quality of activity. To June 2001 we estimate that total CEA contract costs have been about £22 million–£24 million and CfBT contract costs about £12 million–£14 million.

The Standards Fund for 2000–01 provided £40 million to help schools introduce performance management and threshold assessment. £32 million of this came from the Department and the rest from local education authorities. £28 million is available through the Standards Fund for 2001–02 to help schools operate performance management and threshold assessment. This is 100 per cent. funded by the Department.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received in respect of the legality of departmental regulations allowing school governors to use teacher appraisal results to establish pay levels. [3109]

Mr. Timms: The National Union of Teachers has suggested in response to consultation that the proposed regulations contain provisions in relation to appraisal results and pay determination which are outside the Secretary of State's powers in relation to these regulations.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she will take to make regulations allowing governors to use teacher appraisal results to set pay levels. [3110]

Mr. Timms: The Secretary of State is satisfied that the provision permitting appraisal results to be taken into account in the exercise of pay discretions, which has been in regulations governing teachers' appraisal since 1991, is within the law.

Vulnerable Young People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be introduced to make the mapping and tracking of vulnerable young people not in education, training or employment easier. [2963]

Margaret Hodge: A comprehensive, national approach to tracking young people is being developed as part of the Connexions Service.

The system will enable Connexions partnerships to identify those not in learning more readily and support a more comprehensive approach to advice and guidance for those with multiple problems. It will also enable partnerships to support those who move between partnership areas more easily.

School Achievement Awards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the scheme for school achievement awards was devised; and what consultation took place before its introduction. [3004]

Mr. Timms: Details of the scheme were first published in the Green Paper "Teachers, meeting the challenge of change" in December 1999.

We consulted relevant national bodies about the design of the School Achievement Awards Scheme in May—June 2000. We confirmed the scheme design in September.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the criteria for the allocation of school achievement awards were announced; and if he will publish them. [3005]

Mr. Timms: Details of the scheme were first published in the Green Paper "Teachers, meeting the challenge of change" in December 1999. Details of the scheme were published in a DfES leaflet (DfEE/0159/2000) issued September 2000 and can also be found on the scheme website at www.dfes.gov.uk/teachingreforms/rewards/schoolachieve. The criteria are now being reviewed for the next round.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools received school achievement awards; and for what reasons schools received two separate allocations under the school achievement awards scheme. [3006]

Mr. Timms: The names of the award-winning schools were announced on 15 March. About 7,000 schools have won awards, equivalent to 30 per cent. of maintained schools in England. A full list of the award winning schools was posted to the House of Commons Library at the time of the announcement.

The Department had always planned to check the value of every award before paying the money to schools. In some cases we found that schools would be getting less than they should, so we topped up their awards to the correct level. This means that every award-winning school will either receive the amount it was initially told it would receive or a larger amount. The figures placed in the House of Commons Library reflect these recalculations.

Vocational A-Levels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 27 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 442W, how units in the vocational A-Level course are graded; and what are the results of the unit examinations or assessment for 2001. [3103]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Vocational A-level units are not graded. Unit results are reported to students on a scale of zero to one hundred. From these, students can work out their grade equivalents. However, vocational A-level qualifications are graded A to E.

The Joint Council for General Qualifications did not publish the January unit results.

General Teaching Council

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 364W, what is the value of the standard rate which is paid by the General Teaching Council to schools to facilitate the release of teachers for GTC work. [3104]

Mr. Timms: The value of the standard rate is a matter for the GTC to set in accordance with a scheme approved by the Secretary of State. I have asked the chief executive of the GTC to write to the hon. Member with details of the rate that is paid. A copy of her response will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers had not paid the General Teaching Council fee by 15 June 2001. [3108]

Mr. Timms: The General Teaching Council (GTC) is funded by the Government until October. No teachers have been asked to pay a fee by 15 June. The arrangements for collecting the fee are a matter for the GTC and I have asked the chief executive of the GTC to write to the hon. Member with details of the arrangements. A copy of her response will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what nominations the General Teaching Council has received for the election to the position of chairman. [3113]

Mr. Timms: The election of the chairman of the General Teaching Council (GTC) is entirely a matter for the Council. I have asked the Chief Executive of the GTC to write to the hon. Member with details of any nominations. A copy of her response will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 364W, when the chief executive of the General Teaching Council will write to the hon. Member for Maidenhead about details of payments made to members since the GTC was established and the members' support scheme. [3125]

Mr. Timms: The chief executive of the General Teaching Council wrote to the hon. Member on 11 May with information about both items. I have asked the chief executive to send a copy of the letter and enclosures that were issued to the hon. Member.

Pupil Exclusions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 363W, what financial penalties are levied on schools for non-compliance with the Department's exclusion reduction target. [3105]

Mr. Timms: The latest permanent exclusion figures for 1999–2000 indicate that exclusions have fallen to around 8,600, nearly a third less than the peak of 12,700 in 1996–97. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is satisfied that the level of exclusions we have reached is sustainable and, therefore, she does not intend to set fresh exclusion targets for reducing permanent exclusions further. My right hon. Friend has also announced new measures to: change the law on exclusions to reflect the interests of the school community; consult on extending Parenting Orders and maximising support to schools in dealing with disruptive children and violent parents; produce a positive package of preventive action to promote good behaviour; make Admissions Forums, whose role will include the re-integration of excluded pupils, mandatory.

We have significantly increased the resources available to schools and local education authorities to tackle poor behaviour and provide education to excluded pupils, from £17 million in 1996–97 to £131 million in 2000–01 and again to £174 million this year—a tenfold increase. Before April 2000 most of this money was held centrally by local authorities to support authority-wide initiatives to tackle poor behaviour and provide education to excluded pupils. For the first time in April 2000 the majority of this funding was devolved directly to schools so that they could decide how best to tackle poor behaviour. Schools have, therefore, benefited by an additional £100 million in 2000–01 and £126 million this year. Where a child has to be excluded some of the money previously held by local authorities which is now in schools reverts back to the local authority. This money can be used by the authority to provide education outside school or to support a re-integration package at a new school. This procedure follows the principle introduced by the last Conservative Government of money following the excluded pupil. By September 2002 all permanently excluded pupils must be offered full-time education and not the 2–3 hours per week all too typical in the past.

Adult Literacy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the findings of the OECD report, "Education at a Glance", in respect of UK adult literacy rates. [3106]

John Healey: The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development report, "Education at a Glance", published in June 2001 and based on fieldwork

undertaken between 1994 and 1998, notes the relationship between differences in literacy levels and income inequality. The United Kingdom performs better than some of our international competitors, including the United States, but has ground to make up to achieve the higher levels of literacy skills in countries such as Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.

The Government have recognised the vital importance to individuals and the economy of improving adult literacy and numeracy. Research suggests that improved literacy and numeracy skills can help people earn up to £50,000 more over their working life. The benefit to society of better skills has been valued at £10 billion a year. Our strategy, "Skills for Life", launched by the Prime Minister in March, will improve the basic skills of 750,000 adults by 2004. Many of these will come from groups we have prioritised for our support, including the unemployed, those in low-skilled jobs and those living in disadvantaged areas. By helping them improve their literacy and numeracy skills, we aim to create a more prosperous and more equal society. As we set out in the Labour manifesto, this is the first of our 25 steps to a better Britain.

School Teachers Review Body

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* each review that the STRB has been asked to conduct in the last year and *(b)* each matter that STRB has been asked to look into. [3111]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment gave the School Teachers Review Body (STRB) its remit for the main 2001–02 pay round on 3 August 2000, and has given the STRB two additional special remits in the last year. On 28 July 2000 he gave them a remit to examine and report on the performance threshold standards and assessment procedures for classroom teachers. He gave the STRB a further remit on 23 March 2001 to examine and report on the Government's proposal to offer a 'welcome back' bonus to qualified teachers who return to the maintained school sector in England in the period to 31 December 2001, having been out of service for at least a year.

Initial Teacher Training

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list each institution which offers an ITT course, indicating for each *(a)* how many students are on an ITT course and *(b)* how many students have passed (i) the literary skills test and (ii) the numeracy skills test for each year since their introduction. [3114]

Mr. Timms: The table contains information on the numbers of trainees registered on initial teacher training (ITT) courses for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Information on the numbers of trainees on each ITT course who have passed the literacy and numeracy skills tests is not available. Of those trainees who took the paper-based numeracy tests last year, 93 per cent. passed. The Teacher Training Agency will publish information on the pass-rates for the computerised literacy and numeracy tests in 2000–01 this autumn.

TTA: Funding and Allocations

	Postgraduate			*Undergraduate*			
1999–2000 total registrations	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*PG total*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*UG total*	*Grand total*
Institution							
Anglia Polytechnic University	46	85	131	269	54	323	454
Association of Muslim Schools	0	4	4	0	0	0	4
Bath Spa University College	168	204	372	282	0	282	654
Bexley Primary SCITT	20	0	20	0	0	0	20
Billericay Education Consortium	19	0	19	0	0	0	19
Bishop Grosseteste College	24	0	24	632	0	632	656
Borough of Poole	25	0	25	0	0	0	25
Bournemouth and East Dorset Consortium	24	0	24	0	0	0	24
Bradford and Ilkley Community College	55	46	101	355	0	355	456
Bretton Hall	28	105	133	306	0	306	439
Bromley Schools Collegiate	0	22	22	0	0	0	22
Brunel University	58	156	214	158	138	296	510
Canterbury Christ Church University College	170	312	482	631	0	631	1,113
Central School of Speech and Drama	0	55	55	0	0	0	55
Centre for British Teachers	0	49	0	0	0	0	49
Cheltenham and Gloucester CHE	92	123	215	396	0	396	611
Chester College of HE	23	51	74	397	0	397	471
Chiltern Training Group	0	32	32	0	0	0	32
Coastal Confederation	0	22	22	0	0	0	22
College of Ripon and York St. John	177	31	208	485	92	577	785
College of St. Mark and St. John	85	139	224	381	370	751	975
Cumbria Primary Teacher Training	22	0	22	0	0	0	22
De Montfort University	71	159	230	449	516	965	1,195
Devon Secondary TT Group	0	16	16	0	0	0	16
Dorset TT & Devon Partnership	25	0	25	0	0	0	25
Edge Hill College of HE	60	279	339	690	215	905	1,244
Essex Primary School Training Group	16	0	16	0	0	0	16
Gloucestershire ITE Partnership	0	12	12	0	0	0	12
Goldsmiths College	63	241	304	273	32	305	609
Grand Union Partnership	0	16	16	0	0	0	16

TTA: Funding and Allocations

1999–2000 total registrations	Postgraduate			Undergraduate			Grand total
	Primary	Secondary	PG total	Primary	Secondary	UG total	
Homerton College, Cambridge	142	294	436	205	146	351	787
Institute of Education	239	665	904	0	0	0	904
Keele University	27	267	294	49	0	49	343
Kent Training Group	0	14	14	0	0	0	14
King Alfred's College, Winchester	42	0	42	772	5	777	819
King's College London	0	188	188	0	46	46	234
Kingston University	36	67	103	333	0	333	436
Leeds Metropolitan University	27	22	49	235	367	602	651
Lindisfarne SCITT	27	0	27	0	0	0	27
Liverpool Hope	160	159	319	762	0	762	1,081
Liverpool John Moores University	0	124	124	264	625	889	1,013
London Diocesan Board	27	0	27	0	0	0	27
Loughborough University	41	144	185	0	37	37	222
Manchester Metropolitan University	212	773	985	1,248	319	1,567	2,552
Marches Consortium	0	37	37	0	0	0	37
Maryvale Institute	0	22	22	0	0	0	22
Middlesex University	25	144	169	223	23	246	415
Mid-Essex Consortium	0	24	24	0	0	0	24
Newman Catholic Partnership	0	17	17	0	0	0	17
Newman College	27	15	42	390	217	607	649
North Bedfordshire Consortium	0	17	17	0	0	0	17
North Riding College	56	0	56	146	0	146	202
North West Kent Teacher Trainers	0	20	20	0	0	0	20
Nottingham Trent University	46	48	94	363	118	481	575
Open University	0	444	444	0	0	0	444
Outstanding Schools SCITT	90	0	90	0	0	0	90
Oxford Brookes University	75	62	137	212	0	212	349
Sheffield Hallam University	193	249	444	358	331	689	1,133
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	0	36	36	0	0	0	36
Somerset SCITT Consortium	22	0	22	0	0	0	22
South Bank University	92	0	92	2	0	2	94
South East Essex	24	0	24	0	0	0	24
South West Teacher Training	0	19	19	0	0	0	19
St. Martin's College	289	342	631	1,367	43	1,410	2,041
St. Mary's College	87	93	180	409	155	564	744
Staffordshire University	0	18	18	0	0	0	18
The North London Consortium	0	24	24	0	0	0	24
The Oxfordshire Consortium	21	0	21	0	0	0	21
The Shire Foundation	18	0	18	0	0	0	18
Titan Partnership	0	13	13	0	0	0	13
Trinity and All Saints	0	109	109	418	63	481	590
University College Chichester	51	78	129	474	310	784	913
University College Northampton	63	0	63	395	0	395	458
University College Worcester	79	158	237	382	45	427	664
University of Bath	0	160	160	0	0	0	160
University of Birmingham	95	258	353	0	0	0	353
University of Brighton	49	202	251	385	611	996	1,247
University of Bristol	0	197	197	0	0	0	197
University of Cambridge	0	185	185	0	0	0	185
University of Central England	52	146	198	379	30	409	607
University of Derby	27	0	27	291	0	291	318
University of Durham	55	219	274	332	0	332	606
University of East Anglia	148	149	297	0	0	0	297
University of East London	143	0	143	0	0	0	143
University of Exeter	123	312	435	249	124	373	808
University of Greenwich	50	26	76	379	203	582	658
University of Hertfordshire	97	69	166	428	0	428	594
University of Huddersfield	0	157	157	0	36	36	193
University of Hull	46	133	179	0	12	12	191
University of Leeds	71	367	438	0	0	0	438
University of Leicester	119	178	294	0	0	0	297
University of Liverpool	20	113	133	0	0	0	133
University of Manchester	64	200	264	0	0	0	264
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	67	199	266	0	0	0	266
University of North London	52	81	133	241	11	252	385
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	75	90	165	255	24	279	444
University of Nottingham	0	301	301	0	0	0	301
University of Oxford	0	148	148	0	0	0	148
University of Plymouth	65	47	112	610	0	610	722
University of Portsmouth	0	85	85	0	0	0	85

TTA: Funding and Allocations

1999–2000 total registrations	Postgraduate			Undergraduate			Grand total
	Primary	Secondary	PG total	Primary	Secondary	UG total	
University of Reading	23	195	218	438	0	438	656
University of Sheffield	0	165	165	0	0	0	165
University of Southampton	74	190	264	0	0	0	264
University of Sunderland	27	93	120	311	382	693	813
University of Surrey Roehampton	195	194	389	904	0	904	1,293
University of Sussex	0	128	128	0	0	0	128
University of Warwick	45	194	239	478	0	478	717
University of West of England, Bristol	121	183	304	514	90	604	908
University of Wolverhampton	64	104	168	259	82	341	509
University of York	0	126	126	0	0	0	126
Urban Learning Foundation	22	10	32	0	0	0	32
Wandsworth Primary Schools' Consortium	18	0	18	0	0	0	18
West Midlands Consortium	0	31	31	0	0	0	31
Westminster College, Oxford	53	74	127	323	14	337	464
Woodrow First School	12	0	12	0	0	0	12
Grand total	5,583	12,574	18,157	21,487	5,886	27,373	45,530

Data source:
1999–2000 TTA ITT Recruitment Survey
1999–2000 HEFCE Recruitment Survey

TTA: Funding and Allocations

2000–01 total registrations	Postgraduate[1]			Undergraduate			Grand total
	Primary	Secondary	PG total	Primary	Secondary	UG total	
Institution							
Agency for Jewish Education	16	0	16	0	0	0	16
Anglia Polytechnic University	46	77	123	250	44	294	417
Association of Muslim Schools	0	7	7	0	0	0	7
Bath Spa University College	189	244	433	159	0	159	592
Bexley Primary Consortium	18	0	18	0	0	0	18
Billericay Educational Consortium	20	0	20	0	0	0	20
Bishop Grossteste College	61	0	61	653	0	653	714
Borough of Poole SCITT	25	0	25	0	0	0	25
Bournemouth and East Dorset SCITT	18	0	18	0	0	0	18
Bradford College	83	52	135	353	0	353	488
Bretton Hall	32	104	136	296	0	296	432
Bristol and Bath Catholic Partnership	0	12	12	0	0	0	12
Bromley Schools' Collegiate	0	23	23	0	0	0	23
Brunel University	84	215	299	168	123	291	590
Canterbury Bhrist Church University College	301	369	670	754	0	754	1,424
Central School of Speech and Drama	0	61	61	0	0	0	61
Centre for British Teachers	0	35	35	0	0	0	35
Cheltenham and Gloucester College	138	205	343	373	0	373	716
Chester College	38	84	122	371	0	371	493
Chiltern Training Group	0	38	38	0	0	0	38
College of Ripon and York St. John	193	26	219	495	70	565	748
College of St. Mark and St. John	98	164	262	364	334	698	960
Cornwall SCITT	0	46	46	0	0	0	46
Cumbria Primary Teacher Training	19	0	19	0	0	0	19
De Montfort University	74	147	221	444	443	887	1,108
Devon Secondary Teacher Training Group	0	18	18	0	0	0	18
Dorset Teacher Training Partnership	24	0	24	0	0	0	24
Edge Hill	60	405	465	671	303	974	1,439
Essex Primary Collegiate	18	0	18	0	0	0	18
Essex Primary Schools Training Group	12	0	12	0	0	0	12
Gatsby SCITT	0	10	10	0	0	0	10
Gloucester SCITT Consortium	0	20	20	0	0	0	20
Goldsmiths College	92	271	363	242	39	281	644
Grand Union Training Partnership	0	13	13	0	0	0	13
Homerton College	165	289	454	168	97	265	719
Institute of Education	241	686	927	0	0	0	927
Keele University	0	280	280	36	0	36	316
Kent Training Group	0	14	14	0	0	0	14

TTA: Funding and Allocations

	Postgraduate[1]			Undergraduate			
2000–01 total registrations	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*PG total*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*UG total*	*Grand total*
King Alfred's College	68	0	68	797	0	797	865
King's College	0	195	195	0	17	17	212
Kingston University	40	80	120	283	0	283	403
Leeds Metropolitan University	20	16	36	256	285	541	577
Lindisfarne SCITT	26	0	26	0	0	0	26
Liverpool Hope	237	262	499	799	0	799	1,298
Liverpool John Moores University	0	169	169	248	498	746	915
London Diocesan Board for Schools	26	0	26	0	0	0	26
Loughborough University	37	165	202	0	0	0	202
Manchester Metropolitan University	304	794	1,098	1,288	301	1,589	2,687
Marches Consortium	0	51	51	0	0	0	51
Maryvale Institute	0	22	22	0	0	0	22
Mid Essex SCITT Consortium	0	22	22	0	0	0	22
Middlesex University	30	175	205	194	16	210	415
National Secondary Music SCITT	0	14	14	0	0	0	14
Newman College	25	13	38	404	202	606	644
Newman Partnership	0	20	20	0	0	0	20
North Bedfordshire Consortium	0	20	20	0	0	0	20
North East Essex Coastal Confederation	0	24	24	0	0	0	24
North London Consortium	0	21	21	0	0	0	21
North West Kent Teacher Trainers	0	18	18	0	0	0	18
Northampton Teacher Training Partnership	0	16	16	0	0	0	16
Nottingham Trent University	59	88	147	428	115	543	690
Outstanding Primary School SCITT	88	0	88	0	0	0	88
Oxford Brookes University	189	136	325	453	0	453	778
Oxfordshire Consortium	21	0	21	0	0	0	21
Portsmouth Primary SCITT	21	0	21	0	0	0	21
Primary Catholic Partnership	24	0	24	0	0	0	24
Sheffield Hallam University	219	269	488	396	299	695	1,183
Shire Foundation	14	0	14	0	0	0	14
Solihull Secondary SCITT	0	35	35	0	0	0	35
Somerset SCITT Consortium	23	0	23	0	0	0	23
South Bank University	159	0	159	0	0	0	159
South London Teacher Training	0	21	21	0	0	0	21
South Suffolk Primary SCITT	32	0	32	0	0	0	32
South West Teacher Training	0	18	18	0	0	0	18
St. Martin's College	377	400	777	1,404	50	1,454	2,231
St. Mary's College	128	94	222	421	133	554	776
Staffordshire University	0	23	23	0	0	0	23
Thames Primary Consortium	24	0	24	0	0	0	24
Titan Partnership	0	18	18	0	0	0	18
Trinity and All Saints College	0	158	158	462	25	487	645
University College Chichester	82	104	186	392	312	704	890
University College Northampton	73	0	73	378	0	378	451
University College Worcester	84	182	266	378	44	422	688
University of Bath	0	159	159	0	0	0	159
University of Birmingham	100	277	377	0	0	0	377
University of Brighton	72	247	319	359	596	955	1,274
University of Bristol	0	219	219	0	0	0	219
University of Cambridge	0	178	178	0	0	0	178
University of Central England	76	154	230	402	27	429	659
University of Derby	66	0	66	283	0	283	349
University of Durham	53	259	312	363	0	363	675
University of East Anglia	179	158	337	0	0	0	337
University of East London	141	0	141	0	0	0	141
University of Exeter	155	322	477	156	98	254	731
University of Greenwich	55	83	138	342	157	499	637
University of Hertfordshire	117	76	193	397	0	397	590
University of Huddersfield	0	180	180	0	27	27	207
University of Hull	103	150	253	154	5	159	412
University of Leeds	80	432	512	0	0	0	512
University of Leicester	132	189	321	0	0	0	321
University of Manchester	70	228	298	0	0	0	298
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	83	206	289	0	0	0	289
University of North London	90	89	179	200	12	212	391
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	125	62	187	257	5	262	449
University of Nottingham	0	313	319	0	0	0	319
University of Oxford	0	149	149	0	0	0	149
University of Plymouth	70	51	121	565	0	565	686
University of Portsmouth	0	97	97	0	0	0	97

TTA: Funding and Allocations

2000–01 total registrations	*Postgraduate*[1]			*Undergraduate*			*Grand total*
	Primary	*Secondary*	*PG total*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*UG total*	
University of Reading	41	207	248	374	0	374	622
University of Sheffield	0	158	158	0	0	0	158
University of Southampton	78	190	268	0	0	0	268
University of Sunderland	47	152	199	296	271	567	766
University of Surrey Roehampton	238	172	410	911	0	911	1,321
University of Sussex	0	140	140	0	0	0	140
University of the West of England	158	214	372	513	33	546	918
University of Warwick	56	211	267	462	0	462	729
University of Wolverhampton	38	102	140	198	71	269	409
University of York	0	125	125	0	0	0	125
Urban Learning Foundation	25	0	25	0	0	0	25
Wandsworth Schools' Consortium	18	0	18	0	0	0	18
West Midlands Consortium	0	31	31	0	0	0	31
Grant total	6,961	13,544	20,505	21,010	5,052	26,062	46,567

[1] Includes modular trainees

Data source:
2000–01 TTA ITT Recruitment Survey

Trainee Teachers (Tests)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost is of introducing the teacher trainee tests. [3115]

Mr. Timms: The cost of the introduction of the ITT skills tests up to April 2001 was £4.7 million. This included the development and delivery of the paper-based numeracy skills tests in summer 2000; the development and delivery of the computerised ITT skills tests in numeracy and literacy introduced in February 2001; and the development of the skills tests in ICT, which will be introduced in September 2001.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers who completed their trainee skills tests last year and are now in their induction year in schools have *(a)* not passed the skills tests and *(b)* applied for an extension to their induction period in order to retake the tests. [3117]

Mr. Timms: The requirement to take a numeracy skills test during the induction period was only introduced for teachers awarded qualified teacher status last summer. These newly qualified teachers have not yet completed their induction periods.

GCSEs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received on the modularisation of GCSEs. [3118]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have not received any representations about the modularisation of GCSEs. Modular specifications represent approximately 8 per cent. of the total of new GCSE specifications to be taught in schools from September 2001.

School Inspections

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to introduce 10-yearly inspections for successful schools. [3121]

Mr. Timms: We have no plans to amend the present arrangements in which the interval between school inspections varies between two and six years, consistent with the principle that intervention should be in inverse proportion to success.

TREASURY

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a tax through the Construction Industry Training Board; and if he will make a statement. [1852]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The Government keep all taxes under review, and changes to the tax system are considered as part of the normal Budget process.

Crime Prevention Devices (VAT)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the fiscal impact of lifting VAT on security and crime prevention devices and equipment. [2025]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* In Budget 2000, the Government reduced the rate of VAT to 5 per cent. on the grant-funded supply and installation of window and door locks, bolts and security chains, spy holes and smoke alarms in homes of those aged over 60 who are in receipt of specified benefits. The reduced rate was targeted at these grant-funded supplies to ensure that extra help goes where it is most needed.

VAT relief for security and crime prevention goods purchased for DIY installation would be incompatible with EU VAT law.

Economic Stability

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecast he has made of future economic

stability; and what contingency plans he has made for changes to his economic policy in the event of a serious slowdown in world activity. [2999]

Ruth Kelly: The Government will continue to steer a course of economic stability by maintaining fiscal discipline, consistent with the fiscal rules, and by supporting the decisions of the Monetary Policy Committee in continuing to meet the inflation target. Budget 2001 (HC 279) included latest forecasts for the economy and the public finances.

VAT

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy not to increase VAT rates during this Parliament. [2294]

Mr. Boateng: Decisions on individual areas of taxation are considered on an annual basis as part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's overall Budget judgment. The Government have renewed their pledge not to extend VAT to food, children's clothes, books, newspapers and public transport fares for the duration of this Parliament.

National Insurance

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to compensate the National Insurance Fund for the loss of contribution income from employers resulting from the introduction of *(a)* the Landfill Tax, *(b)* the Climate Change Levy and *(c)* the Aggregates Levy. [2386]

Mr. Andrew Smith: None. The reductions in employers' National Insurance contributions were and are to be recycled through the proceeds of the Landfill Tax, the Climate Change Levy and the Aggregates Levy, thereby protecting UK competitiveness and employment while helping the UK to achieve its environmental objectives.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the National Insurance Fund balance at the end of the year 2000–01 exceeded the minimum level recommended by the Government Actuary. [2387]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The estimated balance of the National Insurance Fund at the end of 2000–01 is likely to have exceeded the minimum level recommended by the Government Actuary by around £10.6 billion.

Drug Deaths

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths were attributable to the use of *(a)* paracetamol, *(b)* dothiepin, *(c)* co-proxamol, *(d)* all antidepressants and *(e)* ecstasy in each of the past five years. [2376]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Paul Flynn, dated 9 July 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on how many deaths were attributable to the use of paracetamol, dothiepin, co-proxamol, all anti-depressants and ecstasy in each of the past five years (2376). I am replying in his absence.

The information requested is provided in the attached table. The data has been extracted from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) database of deaths related to drug poisoning. This database contains deaths in England and Wales where the underlying cause is drug-related poisoning.

Number of deaths from drug-related poisoning[1] for selected substances England and Wales, 1995–99

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Paracetamol	526	480	562	523	473
Dothiepin	235	279	262	244	219
Co-proxamol	189	188	214	208	200
Antidepressants	489	540	539	502	491
Ecstasy	10	16	11	15	26

[1] Deaths are coded according to the WHO International Classification of Disease, Ninth Edition (ICD9). Deaths are regarded as resulting from drug-related poisoning if the underlying cause is classified to ICD9 codes, 292, 304, 305.2–9, E950.0–5, E980.0–5 and E962.0

Telecoms Companies

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of revenues telecoms companies in the UK paid in tax and licence fees in 1997; and what proportion they pay in the current year. [1615]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1997–98 annual licensing payments and the corporation tax liability of telecommunication companies represented 0.28 per cent. of UK central Government receipts. The corresponding figure for 1999–2000, which is the latest available on a comparable basis, but which pre-dates the auction of the third generation mobile telephone licences, was 0.23 per cent.

Child Care Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on the child care tax credit during 2000–01; how many families received it; what the average amount was per family; and what his forecasts are for each category for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [2269]

Dawn Primarolo: It is provisionally estimated that the net extra expenditure in 2000–01 due to the child care tax credit element of Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) was about £200 million.

The number of families in receipt of the child care tax credit within WFTC at May, August and November 2000, and the average extra weekly amounts received per family at those dates, are shown in Table 1.3 of the November 2000 WFTC Quarterly Enquiry, a copy of which is in the Library. Figures for February 2001 are due to be published on 10 July.

Projected figures for other years are not available.

Corporate Bribes

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department has taken to ensure that British companies spending money on corrupt practices overseas are not able to claim such expenditure as legitimate business expenses for tax purposes. [2710]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to their responsibilities under the OECD Convention of the Bribery of Foreign Officials in International Business transactions. Section 577A of the Income and Corporation

Taxes Acts 1988 denies tax relief for any payment, the making of which constitutes the commission of a criminal offence. This effectively denies relief for any bribery which is contrary to the Prevention of Corruption Acts.

Transparency International Corruption Index

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the change in ranking of the UK in the Transparency International Corruption Index; and if he will *(a)* make a statement on his plans to tackle money laundering and *(b)* introduce legislation to make bribery of foreign officials a crime. [2275]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

Although the United Kingdom has shifted from 10th to 13th out of 91 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Index, it remains better placed than most other countries, including all but one of its G8 partners.

Legislation to amend the law on money laundering and corruption was announced in the Queen's Speech on 20 June 2001. The legislation on corruption will cover the bribery of foreign officials.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Public Opinion Research

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much revenue has been raised by projects undertaken by the People's Panel for clients other than his own Department for each financial year for which the figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [2679]

Mr. Leslie: The People's Panel is not intended to raise revenue for the Government. For clients other than the Cabinet Office, the costs of research undertaken using the People's Panel were none in 1998–99; £126,150 in 1999–2000; and £187,515 in 2000–01. These costs are essentially composed of fees to MORI, which conducts research through the Panel on behalf of the Government.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by what process he ensures that other Departments follow Cabinet Office guidelines on publication of research into public opinion and attitudes; and if he will make a statement. [2680]

Mr. Leslie: Guidance on Government Research into Public Attitudes and Opinion was published in May 2000 and is available on the Cabinet Office website at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/central/2000/guidance_on_government_research_attitudes.htm. This guidance was developed following extensive consultation with Departments, reflects existing best practice and reminds Departments that public expenditure must not be used for party political purposes. Departments are encouraged in the guidance to pass it to others carrying out research of this sort such as non-departmental public bodies and to publish the results of research, for example, by placing them in the House of Commons Library and making them publicly available on request and on the internet. Results must be made publicly available unless they are exempt under the terms of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information or, when the Freedom of Information Act 2000 comes into force, they are covered by an exemption in the Act.

Departmental Responsibility (Regions)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent division of regional responsibilities between different Departments. [1473]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to ministerial responsibilities.

My right hon. friend the Deputy Prime Minister is leading the preparation of a White Paper on elected regional government in England, working in close liaison with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and in co-operation with other Cabinet colleagues. The Deputy Prime Minister is also responsible for the Regional Co-ordination Unit and has overall responsibility for the Government Office network.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is responsible for regional policy as a whole and for implementation of the proposals to be included in the White paper.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is responsible for the Regional Development Agencies.

Homelessness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment his Department has made of the scale of rough sleeping and homelessness among older people; and if he will make a statement. [2975]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

An analysis of statistical returns provided to the Housing Services Agency over the past six months indicates that around 20 per cent. of rough sleepers are over 50 years old.

Across the country older rough sleepers are able to access the majority of services funded by the Rough Sleepers Unit.

In central London specific contact and assessment team workers provide support to vulnerable older rough sleepers. The unit has also funded "Night Centres" to enable older rough sleepers who have been out on the streets for a number of years to accept gradually help to come inside permanently. "Night Centres" have opened in London, Bristol and Manchester over the last year.

There are a number of hostels specifically for older residents including St. Mungo's, Harrow Road and Bondway, Robertson Street. However, all hostels, day centres and emergency shelters that do not specifically cater for younger rough sleepers will work with a broad range of clients.

Under homelessness legislation, older people are also included in the groups that are treated as being in priority need of housing.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the average cost of obtaining an antisocial behaviour order is; [1255]

(2) what the cost of unsuccessful antisocial behaviour order applications has been to date for each *(a)* police force and *(b)* local authority area in England and Wales. [1253]

Mr. Denham: The average cost of an antisocial behaviour order, based on a recent survey of 20 cases, was £5,480. Less than one in 20 applications has been refused so far. Figures for the cost of the eight applications which have been refused (listed in the table) are not available centrally.

Antisocial behaviour orders applied for and made between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2001 by police force area within England and Wales

Police force area	*Number of applications to 31 March 2001*[1,2]	*Number made from: 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000*[1]	*1 June 2000 to 31 March 2001*[2]	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	13	9	4	13
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	5	5	—	5
Cheshire	—	—	—	—
Cleveland	5	1	3	4
Cumbria	1	1	—	1
Derbyshire	11	3	8	11
Devon and Cornwall	3	1	2	3
Dorset	2	—	2	2
Durham	6	—	6	6
Essex	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	1	—	1	1
Greater Manchester	13	10	3	13
Hampshire	2	1	—	1
Hertfordshire	5	1	4	5
Humberside	10	—	10	10
Kent	10	—	10	10
Lancashire	12	5	7	12
Leicestershire	1	1	—	1
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	12	8	—	8
Metropolitan police service[3]	23	9	12	21
Norfolk	10	6	4	10
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	12	8	4	12
North Yorkshire	4	4	—	4
Nottinghamshire	5	1	4	5
South Yorkshire	4	3	1	4
Staffordshire	2	—	2	2
Suffolk	3	3	—	3
Surrey	1	—	1	1
Sussex	4	3	1	4
Thames Valley	1	1	—	1
Warwickshire	1	—	1	1
West Mercia	12	5	7	12
West Midlands	18	11	7	18
West Yorkshire	9	4	5	9
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—
England	221	104	109	213
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—
North Wales	1	—	1	1
South Wales	1	—	1	1
Wales	2	—	2	2
England and Wales	223	104	111	215

[1] Based on data collected from ACPO and GLA trawls covering period 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000
[2] Data collected centrally from magistrates courts committees as from 1 June 2000 onwards
[3] Includes City of London

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report from the Metropolitan Police Public Order Unit about the difficulties of obtaining antisocial behaviour orders; and what response he has made. [1247]

Mr. Denham: We have noted the references in the report to some of the problems faced in considering and applying for Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). It is to be expected that a new provision will take some time to bed down. We are, nevertheless, conducting a review

of these orders to evaluate their effectiveness and to identify best practice. The review should be completed later this year.

In the meantime we note from the report that 32 antisocial behaviour orders have been made in the Metropolitan police area between April 1999 and June this year and the very positive message about the benefits of the police working in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour. Paragraph 12 of the report states:

> "One of the major achievements of the work on ASBOs has been the obligation and need to work in partnership. [. . .] We are aware of no instances of Metropolitan police service officers failing to co-operate with local authority partners in applying for an ASBO. Quite the contrary, there is considerable evidence of excellent partnership working. Tentative early partnerships are maturing into collaborations with trust and understanding."

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* antisocial behaviour orders and *(b)* antisocial behaviour contracts have been issued. [2349]

Mr. Denham: As at 31 March 2001 there have been 215 antisocial behaviours orders (ASBOs) issued within England and Wales.

An acceptable behaviour contract (ABC) is a voluntary written agreement between a person, whose behaviour is causing a problem, and the police or local authority. It will normally contain a list of antisocial actions which the person undertakes not to do and may also specify certain areas which he or she undertakes not to enter. The ABC is not enforceable in itself but a breach could lead to an ASBO.

We have no plans at present to ask local partnerships to collect statistics on these.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been successfully applied for in each of the local authorities in Greater Manchester. [2336]

Mr. Denham: We understand that at least 10 antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) were issued in Greater Manchester between 1 April 1999 and 31 May 2000. From 1 June 2000 the number of such orders applied for and issued have been collected centrally. Between 1 June 2000 and 31 March 2001, three ASBOs were applied for and granted in Greater Manchester, two were issued within the North and West Greater Manchester Magistrates Courts Committee (MCC) area and one within the Trafford MCC. Figures by local authority area for the numbers of orders applied for are not held centrally.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation has been made of the effectiveness and ease of implementation of antisocial behaviour *(a)* contracts and *(b)* orders; and what advice he is giving to local councils and the police on the merits and demerits of each. [2355]

Mr. Denham: As my predecessor confirmed in a written answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 424W, we are also researching the operation and effectiveness of the antisocial behaviour order. We will also ensure the effectiveness of the acceptable behaviour scheme in Islington.

Guidance on antisocial behaviour orders was issued to the police and local authorities in March 1999 and June 2000. The previous Home Secretary made speeches and published a number of articles on the benefits of antisocial behaviour orders. Some of these also mentioned acceptable behaviour contracts. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I will do the same as the opportunity arises.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often antisocial behaviour orders have been used; and what assessment has been made of their effectiveness. [1421]

Mr. Denham: Based on figures for up to 31 March this year, 215 antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in England and Wales since 1 April 1999. The evidence so far shows that they have been used successfully in a variety of circumstances and to good effect.

We are currently conducting a comprehensive review of these orders to evaluate their effectiveness in dealing with antisocial behaviour and to identify best practice. We expect this review to be completed later this year and we will consider the report carefully.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued since the relevant provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 came into effect in each local authority area, broken down by *(a)* reason for the order, *(b)* average age of the subject of the order and *(c)* source of the order; and if he will make a statement. [2115]

Mr. Denham: Available information given in the table shows the number of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOS) made by age group of subject and police force area. Information on local authority area, the reasons for the orders and the source of the orders is not collected centrally.

The evidence so far shows that they (ASBOs) have been used successfully in a variety of circumstances and to good effect.

We are currently conducting a comprehensive review of these orders to evaluate their effectiveness in dealing with antisocial behaviour and to identify best practice. We expect this review to be completed later this year and we will consider the report carefully.

Antisocial behaviour orders made between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2001 by age group and police force area within England and Wales

Police force area	Number made from 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[1]	Number made from 1 June 2000 to 31 March 2001[2]				Total made from 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2001
		Age 10–17	Age 18+	Age unknown	Total	
Avon and Somerset	9	2	2	—	4	13
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	5	—	—	—	—	5
Cheshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cleveland	1	3	—	—	3	4
Cumbria	1	—	—	—	—	1
Derbyshire	3	1	7	—	8	11
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	1	—	2	3
Dorset	—	2	—	—	2	2
Durham	—	3	2	1	6	6
Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	—	1	—	—	1	1
Greater Manchester	10	1	2	—	3	13
Hampshire	1	—	—	—	—	1
Hertfordshire	1	—	4	—	4	5
Humberside	—	2	7	1	10	10
Kent	—	9	1	—	10	10
Lancashire	5	2	5	—	7	12
Leicestershire	1	—	—	—	—	1
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	8	—	—	—	—	8
Metropolitan police service[3]	9	4	7	1	12	21
Norfolk	6	3	1	—	4	10
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	8	2	2	—	4	12
North Yorkshire	4	—	—	—	—	4
Nottinghamshire	1	3	1	—	4	5
South Yorkshire	3	—	1	—	1	4
Staffordshire	—	—	2	—	2	2
Suffolk	3	—	—	—	—	3
Surrey	—	—	1	—	1	1
Sussex	3	1	—	—	1	4
Thames Valley	1	—	—	—	—	1
Warwickshire	—	—	1	—	1	1
West Mercia	5	2	5	—	7	12
West Midlands	11	6	1	—	7	18
West Yorkshire	4	4	1	—	5	9
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
England	104	52	54	3	109	213
Dyfed-Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Wales	—	1	—	—	1	1
South Wales	—	—	1	—	1	1
Wales	—	1	1	—	2	2
England and Wales	104	53	55	3	111	215

[1] Based on data collected from ACPO and GLA trawls covering period 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000. Information on the age of recipients not available
[2] Data collected centrally from magistrates courts committees as from 1 June 2000 onwards
[3] Includes City of London

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in respect of *(a)* juveniles and *(b)* adults; and if he will make a statement. [2962]

Mr. Denham: A total of 104 antisocial behaviour orders were issued in England and Wales between 1 April 1999 and 31 May 2000. A breakdown by age for the orders issued in this period is not held centrally. However data collected centrally from June 2000 to 31 March 2001 show a further 111 antisocial behaviour orders being made of which 53 were given to persons aged 10 to 17 years, 55 to persons aged 18 and over and three where the age is unknown.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he is making into the investigation concerning the *(a)* Landmark and *(b)* Inn on the Park in Liverpool in respect of asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [2316]

Angela Eagle: The investigation by National Asylum Support Service into the Landmark and the Inn on the Park is complex. The investigation is continuing.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers, broken down by nationality, are being held in prison. [2966]

Angela Eagle: The most recent information relates to persons detained under Immigration Act powers as at 31 May 2001. At that date 1,144 persons were detained in Prison Service establishments. This includes 428 persons detained in the dedicated detention facilities run by the Prison Service at Haslar, Rochester and Lindholme.

It is not possible to say how many of these had claimed asylum or identify their nationality except by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers held in prisons have applied for bail; and how many such bail applications have been successful. [2965]

Angela Eagle: The requested information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been held in prison since the policy was introduced; how many asylum seekers have been deported from prison; how many asylum seekers have put forward appeals since being put in prison; and how many of those appeals have been successful. [2967]

Angela Eagle: The requested information is not available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the average time taken between the receipt of *(a)* an asylum appeal and *(b)* an immigration appeal to the Independent Appellate Authority and an appeal decision, for the most recent period for which figures are available. [178]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I am assuming the hon. Member is referring to the average time from receipt in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) to determination.

The average time taken by the Immigration Appellate Authority (for both the adjudicator and the tribunal tier), from receipt to determination in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 May 2001, is 22.3 weeks for an asylum appeal and 22.1 weeks for an immigration appeal.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of occasions on which action has been taken against NASS-contracted landlords in respect of the provision of sub-standard accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [167]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The information is not available in the format requested.

As a result of its inspection programme National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has required its accommodation providers to remove approximately 350 bedspaces from use due to failure to meet the requirements of the NASS contract specification. In addition providers have voluntarily removed approximately 1,000 bedspaces. In addition there have been a number of properties where remedial work has been required.

James Ashley

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Police Complaints Authority to produce its report into the fatal shooting of James Ashley; and to whom the report will be made available. [2318]

Mr. Denham: The Police Complaints Authority do not normally produce reports of investigations. Instead they provide a statement of satisfaction about the conduct of an investigation. The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) issued statements of satisfaction on the investigations into this incident which were made available to the Chief Constable and the Police Authority.

Oldham

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the principal recommendations were of the 1993 report of the Commission for Racial Equality on the housing policies and practice pursued by Oldham council; and what provisions were made for the monitoring of the five-year plan agreed between Oldham council and the CRE. [2276]

Angela Eagle: The Commission for Racial Equality entered into a three-year agreement with Oldham council, in which the council undertook to implement the following recommendations: to make sure that the council's policies, procedures and practices (written and unwritten) used to assess housing applications and for allocating properties were appropriate for meeting housing need, and were consistently applied; to monitor all offers and allocations of housing, classified by ethnic origin of applicant, the estate and quality of property; and to keep the Commission for Racial equality fully informed.

The council also undertook to develop and carry out a training programme for councillors and housing department staff on the Race Relations Act 1976.

Oldham metropolitan borough council submitted six monthly progress reports to the Commission for Racial Equality. The Commission received the final ethnic monitoring report, required as part of the agreement, in December 1996 and was content.

Avon and Somerset Police

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in the Avon and Somerset police force for each reporting period since 1980; what forecasts he has made for the years 2001 to 2004; and if he will make a statement. [1373]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Information on police numbers for each year since March 1980 is in the table.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary had 2,960 officers on 31 March 2001, 26 more than on 31 March 2000.

The Chief Constable informs me that on the basis of its current projections up to March 2003, the force expects to have 3,098 officers by the end of March 2002 and 3,175 by March 2003. About 60 per cent. of the total increase will be

a result of the force's Crime Fighting Fund allocation of resources for 51 new recruits for 2001–02 and 77 for 2002–03. The force has made no projections as yet for 2003–04.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary—police numbers since 1980

Year[1]	Police numbers
1980	2,892
1981	2,953
1982	3,011
1983	2,970
1984	2,997
1985	2,982
1986	2,958
1987	3,009
1988	3,013
1989	3,014
1990	3,094
1991	3,092
1992	3,081
1993	3,068
1994	3,033
1995	3,000
1996	2,981
1997	2,989
1998	2,976
1999	2,999
2000	2,934
2001	2,960

[1] As at 31 March

Drunkenness

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list in descending order the greatest percentage change in the number of offences of drunkenness from 1990 to 1999 in each police authority in England and Wales; [1934]

(2) how many prosecutions for drunkenness there were per thousand head of population in each police authority in the last year in which figures are available. [1936]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Information on the number of offenders prosecuted in 1999 for offences of drunkenness per thousand head of population for each police force authority is given in table 1. Information showing, in descending order, the percentage change in the number of offenders prosecuted in 1999 compared with 1990 for offences of drunkenness in each police force authority is given in table 2. It is not possible to say what proportion of those prosecuted live in the area. Prosecutions of people from outside the area are likely to be much higher in some areas than others. This is most obvious for the City of London which has a low resident population and large numbers of visitors.

Number of prosecutions for drunkenness per thousand head of population, by police force authority, England and Wales 1999

Police force area	Prosecutions
City of London	11.73
Northumbria	2.90
Cumbria	1.92
Merseyside	1.80
West Yorkshire	1.75
North Wales	1.70
Lancashire	1.65
Cleveland	1.52
South Wales	1.37
Lincolnshire	1.12

Number of prosecutions for drunkenness per thousand head of population, by police force authority, England and Wales 1999

Police force area	Prosecutions
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	1.08
South Yorkshire	1.06
Durham	1.00
Gwent	0.92
Cheshire	0.82
North Yorkshire	0.77
Devon and Cornwall	0.76
Thames Valley	0.76
Kent	0.76
Bedfordshire	0.68
Dyfed-Powys	0.68
Warwickshire	0.68
West Mercia	0.65
Wiltshire	0.64
Nottinghamshire	0.64
Hertfordshire	0.61
Dorset	0.60
Surrey	0.57
Greater Manchester	0.56
Essex	0.55
Suffolk	0.55
Gloucestershire	0.44
Sussex	0.40
Avon and Somerset	0.37
Humberside	0.36
Derbyshire	0.33
Cambridgeshire	0.33
Staffordshire	0.31
Norfolk	0.28
Metropolitan Police District	0.28
West Midlands	0.27
Leicestershire	0.06
Northamptonshire	0.05

Percentage change in the number of prosecutions for drunkenness between 1990 and 1999 listed in descending order by police force area

Police force area	Percentage change
Cambridgeshire	390.48
Lincolnshire	340.00
Warwickshire	322.22
Essex	262.38
Gloucestershire	152.94
Surrey	151.61
Kent	144.94
Norfolk	122.47
Bedfordshire	89.60
Suffolk	86.55
Hertfordshire	67.64
Hampshire	52.64
Derbyshire	40.59
Devon and Cornwall	40.13
Lancashire	38.47
North Wales	33.88
Cumbria	31.39
Durham	25.06
Wiltshire	21.15
North Yorkshire	18.27
Leicestershire	15.38
Sussex	11.92
Cheshire	9.10
Thames Valley	7.90
Nottinghamshire	6.64
West Yorkshire	6.12
West Mercia	5.24
Dyfed-Powys	–2.68
Northumbria	–3.54
Dorset	–4.88
Avon and Somerset	–6.35

Percentage change in the number of prosecutions for drunkenness between 1990 and 1999 listed in descending order by police force area

Police force area	*Percentage change*
Cleveland	−12.31
South Wales	−13.43
Humberside	−13.48
Northamptonshire	−38.30
Merseyside	−47.59
Gwent	−55.59
Greater Manchester	−56.13
London, City of	−59.56
South Yorkshire	−62.04
Staffordshire	−67.52
West Midlands	−69.58
Metropolitan Police	−73.29

Rural Police Grant

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recruits to the North Yorkshire police will be made possible by the Rural Police Grant; how long the Rural Police Grant will be in force; and how police salaries will be financed once the Rural Police Grant expires. [2348]

Mr. Denham: Police Authorities and Chief Constables may use their rural policing fund allocations as they judge best to improve policing in sparsely populated areas. The Chief Constable of North Yorkshire plans to recruit 60 officers.

£15 million was made available to forces for rural policing in 2000–01. The allocation will be £30 million this year and in each of the next two years. Provision thereafter is one of the matters which will be considered during the next spending review.

Mentor Financial Consultants

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of Northumberland on the progress of the investigation into Mentor Financial Consultants; and if he will make a statement. [2472]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Chief Constable that the investigation by Northumbria Police into Mentor Financial Consultants is a continuing criminal investigation. It would not be right to disclose details of the investigation.

Young Offenders

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles aged 15 and 16 years have been remanded *(a)* in adult prisons and *(b)* in total in each of the last 10 years; and what has been the average period of their detention. [1681]

Beverley Hughes: Data are available only for the years shown in the tables. Table 1 shows provisional information on how many juveniles there were remanded in custody on 30 June from 1995 to 1999 inclusive.

Table 1

Year	*Total*	*Aged 15*	*Aged 16*
1995	42	11	31
1996	36	9	27
1997	6	2	4
1998	1	—	1
1999	2	1	1
2000	0	0	0
2001[1]	0	0	0

[1] Data for 31 May

Table 2 shows provisional information on how many juveniles in total have been remanded in prison service custody on 30 June in each of those years.

Table 2

Year	*Total*	*Aged 15*	*Aged 16*
1995	209	54	155
1996	254	71	183
1997	264	75	189
1998	248	79	169
1999	184	43	141
2000	161	50	111
2001[1]	148	39	109

[1] Data for 31 May

A further 66 15 and 16-year-olds were being held on remand in Local Authority Secure Units at the end of June 2000. At the end of June 2001 this figure had fallen to 50.

Table 3 shows provisional information on the average length of detention in days that juvenile offenders have spent remanded in custody in prison for the last two years.

Table 3

Year	*Average days spent remanded in custody*
1999	79
2000	65

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many secure unit places for juvenile offenders there are in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [2114]

Beverley Hughes: Currently there are 128 places in Secure Training Centres and 2,706 in juvenile Young Offender Institutions, and 268 juvenile offenders are placed in Local Authority Secure Units. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales commissions and purchases places. Over the next four years it plans to provide an additional 400 independent sector Secure Training Centre (STC) places to replace Prison Service accommodation.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what private sector criminal justice initiatives his Department supports for *(a)* juvenile offenders and *(b)* young offenders; and if he will make a statement [2117]

Beverley Hughes: We support the appropriate use of private sector skills and expertise in delivering the public sector youth justice objectives. The private sector main contributions are the management of the three Secure Training Centres, and the electronic monitoring of offenders (including juveniles) sentenced to curfew orders with an electronic monitoring requirement.

The voluntary sector also play an important role, providing services and helping with the delivery of a wide range of programmes for juveniles and young offenders.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on preparations for Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [2702]

Angela Eagle: A Home Office-led Strategic Group has been developing guidance and plans for next year's commemoration, building on the successful foundations of the first United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Day last January. The Strategic Group includes representatives from a wide range of Government Departments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

A working group chaired by the Home Office is taking forward the planning and delivery of the 2002 national event, liaising with the BBC who produced and televised the first national ceremony last January.

Updated guidance for local authorities and a wide range of voluntary and community groups on ways they can mark the day is being produced by a working group chaired by the Holocaust Adviser to the Local Government Association and involving a number of representatives of NGOs with experience and expertise in Holocaust remembrance and wider diversity issues.

The Holocaust education resource pack launched last November and intended for use by schools and others is currently being reviewed by a Department for Education and Skills led working group, consisting of NGOs with experience and expertise in Holocaust education and research. Around 30,000 of these well received packs have already been issued to about 23,000 schools.

The Strategic Group is devising a communication strategy for the promotion and delivery of the 2002 commemoration. It is envisaged that there will be a single launch date in September for all Holocaust Memorial Day promotional material. Details of relevant activities and supporting guidance will be placed onto the dedicated website www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk.

I would like to encourage all hon. Members to support and encourage activities in their constituencies to mark the 2nd United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Day. The day is relevant to all of us. Its focus is on learning the lessons of the Holocaust and other more recent atrocities that raise similar issues.

A key aim of the day is to convey the commemoration's relevance to contemporary issues of racism and victimisation and promote a democratic and tolerant society that respects and celebrates diversity and is free of the evils of prejudice. This will be reflected in all of the related guidance and plans to mark Holocaust Memorial Day next January.

Oakington Reception Centre

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of new asylum seekers, by nationality, were sent to Oakington Reception Centre in the last three months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [1508]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* The information requested is as follows:

Proportions of applications for asylum in the UK sent to Oakington Reception centre, March-May 2001, by nationality[1,2,3]

Nationality	*Total applications*	*Sent to Oakington*	*Proportion of applicants sent to Oakington (percentage)*
Albania	260	110	43
Bangladesh	105	45	43
Bolivia	10	5	56
Brazil	5	5	43
Cameroon	65	30	48
China	505	325	65
Cote D'Ivoire	75	5	4
Czech Republic	345	235	68
Estonia	10	5	33
Ghana	35	25	68
Hungary	5	*	67
India	450	205	45
Iraq	1,060	210	20
Kenya	80	30	37
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	905	105	12
Latvia	20	15	62
Lithuania	65	35	54
Nigeria	155	80	53
Pakistan	580	155	26
Poland	190	100	53
Romania	480	90	18
Slovakia	20	15	94
Tanzania	15	5	35
Uganda	110	50	45
Ukraine	120	50	44
Zimbabwe	380	250	66
Total	6,050	2,185	36

[1] All data except percentages have been rounded, where * is 1 or 2. Percentages may not reflect rounded data exactly, but are correct

[2] Data on applicants sent to Oakington do not necessarily relate exactly to total applications received within the period.

[3] All data exclude dependants.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of asylum seekers sent to Oakington Reception Centre have had their case dismissed, broken down by nationality; and if he will make a statement. [1509]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* Of those applicants whose appeal has been decided, the proportion dismissed, up to 22 June, is as follows.

Country	Percentage of dismissed appeals
Albania	75
Bangladesh	93
Cameroon	50
China	93
Cote d'Ivoire	75
Czech Republic	75
Estonia	85
Ghana	97
India	84
Iraq	83
Kenya	100
Kosovo	78
Lithuania	69
Latvia	82
Nigeria	83
Pakistan	80
Poland	68
Romania	78
Slovakia	81
Tanzania	75
Uganda	64
Ukraine	30
Yugoslavia	67
Zimbabwe	78
Total	80

Immigration Legislation

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reform immigration legislation. [1505]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* The Government are committed to having immigration rules which are clear, firm and fair. We have no immediate plans for legislation but will keep the possible need for further change under review. We want to ensure that those who come and work here continue to make a major contribution to our economic and social life. We have transferred responsibility for the work permit system to the Home Office and will be looking further at the legal entry routes for people seeking to work in Britain. Officials are currently reviewing the Immigration Rules with the aim of producing a consolidated version which incorporates all changes made since HC395, the last main Statement of Changes. These revised Rules are likely to include a number of additions and amendments.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate (Country Assessments)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what updates to Immigration and Nationality Directorate country assessments have been made in the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [1507]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* Updates to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's (IND) country assessments were made by IND's Country Information and Policy Unit in April 2001. These have been placed on the Home Office website. Country assessments are revised every six months. An assessment on Zimbabwe has been included on the website for the first time, as asylum applications from Zimbabwe have increased significantly during the past year.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has published a country assessment of Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [1506]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* A country assessment for Zimbabwe was issued in April 2001 and has been published with other country assessments for the top 35 asylum producing countries issued in April 2001. The country assessments may be accessed on the Home Office website.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost is of supporting Neighbourhood Watch schemes in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the South Ribble constituency. [1743]

Mr. Denham: In addition to the commitment of large numbers of volunteers, Neighbourhood Watch in Lancashire is actively supported by 11 police crime prevention and community safety officers. Because these officers do not devote all their time to neighbourhood watch it is not possible to estimate the cost of supporting neighbourhood watch schemes in Lancashire.

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions exist on making the name and address of Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators available to hon. Members. [1742]

Mr. Denham: The details of Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators are held by police. The police may only disclose information to the extent that they have the common-law or statutory power to do so and do not thereby breach any other relevant law, such as the common law duty of confidence. Any disclosures must also then comply with the good practice laid down in the Data Protection Act 1998, except to the extent that any relevant exemption applies.

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Neighbourhood Watch schemes exist in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the South Ribble constituency. [1744]

Mr. Denham: I understand that there are 1,876 Neighbourhood Watch schemes in Lancashire, of which 180 are in the South Ribble constituency.

Police Numbers (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of police officers per 10,000 population was in *(a)* England and *(b)* Essex on (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) the latest date for which figures are available. [2331]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is:

	31 March 1997[1]	31 March 2001
Essex police		
Number of police officers per 10,000 population	19.5	17.8
England		
Number of police officers per 10,000 population	24.1	23.4

[1] Police numbers are collected twice a year (March and September) therefore March figures have been used for 1997.

The Crime Fighting Fund is improving the position in Essex. The force increased its number by 81 between March 2000 and March 2001 to 2,887 and should have more officers by March 2002 than the 2,961 it had in March 1997.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* funded and *(b)* actual police officers there were in the Essex constabulary on (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) the latest date for which figures are available. [2332]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table. The funded police numbers have been provided by the chief constable of the Essex police. With our approval Essex police deferred their Crime Fighting Fund allocation of 70 recruits for 2000–01 to 2001–02. The Crime Fighting Fund will pay for up to 132 recruits in 2001–02 and 65 in 2002–03.

Essex police

Year	*Number of funded police posts*[1]	*Actual number of police officers*[1]
31 March 1997	2,944	2,961
31 March 2001	2,955	2,887

[1] Full-time equivalent

Note:
The funded officer posts reflect officers funded from the budget approved by the Police Authority.

Doctors (Heroin Prescriptions)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions his Department has given to police forces in the past four years concerning approaches to doctors licensed to prescribe heroin. [2372]

Mr. Denham: None.

Drug Use

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the percentage of the population who have used *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* cocaine, *(c)* amphetamines, *(d)* ecstasy and *(e)* heroin broken down by (i) lifetime use, (ii) last year use and (iii) last month use. [2380]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The British Crime Survey provides data on the levels of self-reported drug use among a representative sample of the general population in England and Wales. The data in the table have been extracted from the 1998 report which is available on the Home Office website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hors197.pdf

Percentages of respondents reporting use of cannabis, cocaine amphetamine, ecstasy, and heroin, 16 to 59-year-olds in England and Wales

	Lifetime	*Last year*	*Last month*
Cannabis	25	9	5
Cocaine	3	1	[1]—
Amphetamine	10	3	1
Ecstasy	4	1	[1]—
Heroin	1	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:
Drug Misuse Declared in 1998: results from the British Crime Survey, Home Office Research Study 197

Police

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to abolish the criteria of fitness for operational duty as a condition of serving in the police force. [2079]

Mr. Denham: There are no plans to abolish the criteria of fitness for operational duty for applicants to the police service. Police officers need to be physically fit for the range of duties they are expected to perform.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will implement Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary's recommendation to combine the recruitment and retention functions of the Metropolitan police force. [2126]

Mr. Denham: In his report in October 2000, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary provided a suggested action checklist which identified a need for a single, integrated and cohesive recruitment strategy incorporating short, medium and long-term targets for the recruitment and retention of staff.

The Metropolitan police service (MPS) inform me that a cohesive recruitment and retention plan is being constructed and many elements are already in place.

Building on the success of the Recruitment Task Force, a new Retention Task Force commenced work on 2 July.

As well as aiding the development of a retention strategy the task force will identify and progress more immediate actions to improve retention.

Targets covering recruitment and retention have been set in conjunction with the Metropolitan police authority (MPA). The MPS works closely with the MPA on all recruitment and retention issues, and a joint retention workshop is to be held on 26 July.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to promote redeployment into civilian roles within the police force, for those no longer fit for operational duty. [2080]

Mr. Denham: I will be considering a range of issues relating to police pension arrangements—including the provisions applying to officers no longer fit for the full range of operational duties—in the coming months.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people retired from the police force in 2000 *(a)* in total, *(b)* on medical grounds and *(c)* on medical grounds with an injury award. [2081]

Mr. Denham: Statistics collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for 1999–2000 show a total of 3,964 retirements from the police service in England and Wales[1]. Of those retirements 1,232 (31 per cent.) were on medical grounds. Statistics showing the number of retirements on medical grounds attracting an injury award are not available.

[1] Statistics on the number of retirements from the police service are also collected by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office for the National Statistics series. However the RDSD statistics do not include a breakdown between ordinary and medical retirements. The RDSD and HMIC figures are not strictly comparable as they come from different sources. In 1999–2000 the RDSD figure for total retirements was 3,929.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to tighten the criteria for injury awards for those taking early retirement from the police force on medical grounds. [2082]

Mr. Denham: I will be considering a range of issues relating to police pension arrangements in the coming months.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces apply the criterion that recruits may not have more than a three millimetre gap between their front teeth; and what plans he has to change this. [2125]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office issues no specific guidance on periodontal conditions. Home Office medical guidelines include a section that recommends forces should carefully consider candidates where there is "evidence of poor dental hygiene". The current guidelines are being reviewed as part of a project to develop national job-related standards for police recruitment.

We do not know whether any forces apply such a criterion. However, it is known that the Metropolitan Police Service formerly applied this criterion but abolished it in January 2001.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the practice of senior policemen being suspended on full pay pending investigation for misdemeanour. [2076]

Mr. Denham: The Secretary of State has no plans to review the arrangements. They are set out in the Police (Conduct) Regulations 1999 for officers up to Superintendent and in the Police (Conduct) (Senior Officers) Regulations 1999 for Assistant Chief Constables and upwards.

The decision to suspend an officer rests with the Chief Constable for officers up to Superintendent and with the Policy Authority for Assistant Chief Constables and above and the Secretary of State accepts that they are best placed to decide when it is appropriate to suspend an officer.

Quantum Project

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department has spent so far on the Quantum project; and what benefits it has produced in terms of providing *(a)* updated technology, *(b)* increased efficiency and *(c)* better quality of information; and if he will make a statement. [2121]

Beverley Hughes: The cost of the Quantum project to July 1998 (when it was suspended) was £8.3 million. The procurement recommenced in February 1999 and led to award of contract to Electronic Data Systems (EDS) 12 months later. Initially, EDS took responsibility for all existing Prison Service information technology and telecommunications services. From the recommendations to date, some £44 million has been spent by the Prison Service on Quantum. This includes payments to EDS for the provision of information technology and telecommunications services.

Under the terms of the Quantum agreement, EDS is responsible for updating the information technology and telecommunications infrastructure technology and telecommunications infrastructure of the Prison Service. This involves, among other things, installation of standard office computer software and equipment. The new infrastructure will be the technological platform for future business change projects and for delivering the benefits associated with improving efficiency and the quality of information.

Cricket Match Safety

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will introduce legislation to make it an offence for members of the crowd at *(a)* international cricket matches and *(b)* other sporting events to enter the field of play without good reason while the match is in progress; and if he will make a statement; [759]

(2) what action the Government are taking to improve public safety at international cricket matches; and if he will make a statement; [758]

(3) if he will introduce legislation to make it an offence for members of the crowd at *(a)* international cricket matches and *(b)* other major sporting events to set off fireworks; and if he will make a statement. [761]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Minister of Sport and I met representatives of the English Cricket Board (ECB) on 27 June to discuss the incidents at Headingly, Trent Bridge and Lords. A joint review group, comprising representatives of the ECB, Home Office, Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Association of Chief Police Officers, was asked to examine all aspects of crowd management, existing legislation and ground regulations to identify how the cricketing authorities could minimise the potential for further incidents.

Rape

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recourse is available to men who have been *(a)* acquitted of rape charges and *(b)* charged with rape but the charges were later withdrawn, with particular reference to those whose names have been published. [1816]

Mr. Keith Bradley: If the individual believed that an acquittal or withdrawal was insufficient to clear his name and there were grounds for claiming that the prosecution was malicious and brought without reasonable cause, it would be open to him to bring a civil claim against the person or authority responsible. If there was evidence to suggest that a malicious complaint had been made, it would be open to the police and Crown Prosecution Service to consider whether a criminal offence had been committed. If there had been improper or unreasonable behaviour on the part of the police, a complaint could be made to the Chief Officer of the force concerned.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men charged with rape were subsequently *(a)* acquitted and *(b)* had charges withdrawn in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [1815]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The number of men charged with rape is not recorded centrally.

Available information held centrally showing the number of men proceeded against at all courts for rape together with the numbers acquitted or who had the proceedings against them withdrawn is given in the table.

The numbers of men proceeded against for rape together with the numbers subsequently acquitted or who had the charge withdrawn, England and Wales 1990–99

	Number proceeded against	*Number acquitted or withdrawn*
1990	1,463	552
1991	1,702	614
1992	1,647	630
1993	1,701	622
1994	1,780	698
1995	1,622	718
1996	1,751	790
1997	1,948	856
1998	2,174	1,088
1999	2,153	1,103

Parenting Classes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects that his Department is funding in the current financial year that *(a)* provide parenting classes for adults and *(b)* otherwise include a parenting skills element. [1722]

Mr. Blunkett: The Family Policy Unit at the Home Office under Family Support Grant (FSG) funds voluntary sector projects aimed at providing support for parents in their parenting role. Not all projects funded provide parenting classes as it is accepted that some parents prefer other methods, though all the funded work aims at supporting parents in their parenting role. Additionally not all the funded projects provide direct face-to-face services to adults as some like the National Family and Parenting Institute and Parentline Plus have a national role, such as the provision of information or a freephone telephone helpline, while some produce support materials to be used across the voluntary sector.

Following the last Spending Review the current total available to voluntary organisations through the Family Support Grant is £5.6 million per year for a three year period beginning 1 April 2001. The emphasis of the grant is on evaluated practice, developing new or existing models of practice in new ways and on dissemination or replication of good practice and effective work rather than routinely supporting locally delivered programmes.

Following is a list of the organisations that currently receive funding under Family Support Grant. However, in addition to the list, there are other projects, funded through the Department for Education and Skills, local government and carry-over from previous Home Office programmes. Such programmes will be a key priority for the development of the Childrens Fund.

National Family and Parenting Institute

Parentline Plus (three projects)

National Council for One Parent Families (two projects)

Parenting Education Support Forum (five projects)

Contact a Family (two projects)

National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (two projects)

Trust for the Study of Adolescence (five projects)

After Adoption (two projects)

Fathers Direct (two projects)

YMCA (three projects)

PIPPIN (two projects)

Ormiston Trust

Divert Trust (three projects)

Working with Men

National Association of Child Contact Centres (two projects)

Black Development Agency

The Warren

Coram Families

National Newpin

Child Psychotherapy Trust (two projects)

Race Equality Unit (two projects)

Family Rights Group

Peers Early Education Partnerships

Newham Bengali Community Trust

Family Welfare Association

Disability Pregnancy Parenthood International/Disabled Parents Network (two projects)

Positive Parenting Publications

Family Planning Association

Health Advocacy for Turkish and Kurdish Speaking Communities

Crime Concern

Norwood Ravenswood

RPS Rainer

Young Voice (two projects)

Barnardos Byker Sands

SCOPE (two projects)

Family Matters Institute

National Children's Centre

East Lancashire Deaf Society

PACE

Community Education Development Centre (two projects)

Ealing MENCAP

Family Links

Asian Women's Project

National Childbirth Trust

YWCA

One Plus One

SENSE

Ann Craft Trust

KJ Academy

Federation of Prisoners Family Support Groups

Young Minds

Care for the Family

Drugline

St. Anne's

Leeds Animation Workshop

Kidscape

Refugee Lifeline

Kimia Clinic Trust

Change North

Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action

Drugscope

Relate South Essex

Markfield Project

Brent Irish Advisory Service

North Derbyshire Child Clubs Network.

Life Sentences

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions took place for offences carrying a potential life sentence in each year since 1974; how many resulted in conviction; and how many of those convictions were reversed at appeal. [1973]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Mediation Services

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support has been given by his Department to Mediation UK in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement about Government support for local mediation services. [2134]

Angela Eagle: In 1999, the Home Office awarded a one-off grant of £30,000 towards Mediation UK's core costs. In both 2000–01 and 2001–02 the Home Office has granted £15,000 to Mediation UK as part of a joint funding exercise to provide core funding that also includes the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Department of Health and the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The Government acknowledge the valuable work done by local mediation services but funding of this work is of course at the discretion of local authorities.

Charity and Voluntary Sector

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the review of charity and voluntary sector policy. [2941]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has asked the Performance and Innovation Unit to undertake a broad-ranging review of the legal and regulatory framework for charities and the wider voluntary and community sector and to bring forward proposals for reform. The project is expected to finish in the winter of 2001–02.

Air Weapons

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were recorded involving the use of an air weapon in each year from 1997. [2169]

Mr. Denham: The available information has been published in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1999". The details are as follows:

Year	*Number of recorded crimes involving an air weapon*
1997	7,506
1997–98	7,902
1998–99	8,665
1999–2000	10,103

1997 is the calendar year, with the others being financial years. There was a change in the counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, and hence figures before and after that date are not directly comparable.

Electoral Law

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received since 1997 in favour of permitting citizens of other EU member states to vote in general elections. [1974]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Since May 1997 there have been 28 letters from Members of Parliament seeking information about extending the parliamentary franchise to EU citizens. The Government's view is that extending the franchise in this way would need to be by reciprocal agreement with all other EU member states. There are no current proposals by the European Commission for action in this area.

Royal Travel

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of royal travel by *(a)* the Royal Flight, *(b)* the Royal Train and *(c)* commercial airlines in the last year before the grant-in-aid to the Palace for royal travel was introduced. [2085]

Mr. Byers: I have been asked to reply.

Precise information for the year in question—1996–97—is not readily available. The initial budget of £19.385 million for the grant-in-aid for royal travel by rail and air was based on the estimated costs of royal travel in 1996–97. The resource budget for air travel by 32 (The Royal) Squadron was £16.57 million after adjusting for depreciation and interest charges on the capital values, airframe and engineering costs, the expected number of royal flying hours in 1997–98, overhead and administration charges, inflation and VAT. The budget for flying by other operators was £711,000. The budget for rail travel (which included both fixed and variable costs of the Royal Train) was £18.9 million. £331,000 was allocated for administration costs.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

People's Peers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission intends to launch its regional road shows to attract applications from aspiring people's peers [1976]

Mr. Robin Cook: The House of Lords Appointments Commission launched its programme of regional visits in September 2000. I understand that it has already visited Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester and Belfast.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 July 2001

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Local Authority Boundaries

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received proposing local authority boundary changes in Merseyside; and if he will make a statement. [2105]

Dr. Whitehead: We are not aware of any such representations. Boundaries in Merseyside were last looked at in 1997 when the Local Government Boundary Commission for England was directed to carry out a review of Sefton. No changes to boundaries were recommended at that time. Under the current programme of periodic electoral reviews being carried out by the Local Government Commission, a change to local authority boundaries cannot be considered.

Harbourside, Tewkesbury

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what factors underlay his Department's inspector's recent decision to allow an appeal to build eight houses at Harbourside, Tewkesbury. [1851]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The decision to grant planning permission was made by a Planning Inspector. I have therefore asked the Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Chris Shepley to Mr. Laurence Robertson, dated 10 July 2001:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the planning appeal decision to allow housing on land at Bredon Road, Tewkesbury (the "Harbourside" site).

The Inspector issued her decision on 17 May and I am enclosing a copy of her decision that explains her reasons for allowing the development. As you will see, Tewkesbury Borough Council did not object to the principle of housing on the site and the Environment Agency confirmed that the development did not prejudice its Floodplain Management Policies. The Inspector's main issue was the effect of the dwellings on the existing development around the marina site.

It is clear from paragraphs 7–13 of the decision, that there are already two existing residential developments, along the south-western and south-eastern sides of the marina basin. The Inspector had to consider whether the proposed development, to be sited alongside the north-eastern boundary, would fit in with the existing housing and environment. The Inspector found that, in her view, the proposals would enhance the existing sense of enclosure, and produce a lively and balanced composition around the marina, integrating satisfactorily into the existing housing and the surrounding area. She concludes, in paragraph 13, that the proposal would not conflict with the Council's development plan, and subsequently granted permission, subject to a number of conditions designed to protect the sensitivity of the site and to ensure the scheme complies with the development plan.

North Circular Road

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the North Circular Road improvement programme to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [2722]

Mr. Jamieson: The North Circular Road is now the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London.

Fuel Duty Rebate System

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the rules which apply to bus and coach operators over the payment of fuel duty and the eligibility for the fuel duty rebate system. [2516]

Ms Keeble: Under the current rules, fuel duty rebate may be claimed for bus services which are registered with the Traffic Commissioner as a local bus service and which are available to the general public.

We shall be extending eligibility to claim rebate to the operators of a wide range of community transport services during this financial year.

We shall be replying shortly to a recent recommendation from the Commission for Integrated Transport that the rebate should also be available for the operators of long-distance scheduled coach services in return for the provision of half-fare concessionary fares for elderly and disabled passengers.

Housing

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to introduce new target rents for newly built or procured properties on first lettings; and if he will make a statement. [3068]

Ms Keeble: My Department's "Guide to Social Rent Reforms" which was issued last December stated that:

> "Newly-provided housing funded through Social Housing Grant, and approved for funding from 2002–03 onwards, will normally have rents set immediately at the target levels given by the restructuring formula."

This remains the Government's policy. The Housing Corporation is currently reviewing the framework for calculating grant rates for newly provided social housing so that it properly reflects the new structure of rents at which properties will be let.

Departmental Staff Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff from his Department and its predecessor were seconded to private sector companies in *(a)* May 1999 to April 2000 and *(b)* May 2000 to the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will list in each case

the companies to which staff were sent, the names and ranks of the staff involved and the duration of the secondment. [3240]

Dr. Whitehead: *(a)* 1 May 1999 to April 2000: none; *(b)* 1 May 2000 to 31 May 2001:

Staff Rank		*Duration*
1 × Pay Band 6(G7)	To Capita RAS	February 2001 to November 2001
1 × Pay Band 6 (G7)	To Shell International	August 2000 to October 2002
1 × Pay Band 4 (HEO)	To Arthur Andersen	January 2001 to January 2002
1 × Pay Band 4 (HEO)	To Carillion Ltd.	March 2001 to June 2001
1 × SCS (Grade 5)	To Carbon Trust	April 2001 to October 2001
2 × Pay Band 6(G 7)	To Carbon Trust	April 2001 to October 2001
1 × Pay Band 5 (SEO)	To Carbon Trust	April 2001 to July 2001
1 × Pay Band 2 (AO)	To Carbon Trust	May 2001 to November 2001

Informal Public Spaces

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 158–59W, what his definition is of "surplus to requirements" in the context of building on open space; and if he will make a statement. [3173]

Ms Keeble: The consultation draft of PPG17 (paragraph 15) lists the range of valuable functions that open space can perform within urban areas. If individual areas of open space no longer fulfil any of these functions, then they may be "surplus to requirements" and local authorities may consider whether they should be made available for development. Development may also be allowed on areas of open space where an exchange of land takes place to compensate for the lost open space. In particular, this may be appropriate where it will allow the release of a site for development needed to meet other economic and social objectives identified locally.

We are currently considering the responses made to the consultation draft of PPG17. We hope to publish the final version by the end of this year.

Speed Limit (Schools)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to introduce a statutory 20 mph speed limit outside schools. [2585]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The Government have given local authorities the power to introduce 20 mph zones. Our Road Safety Strategy encourages their use in the areas where the most vulnerable are present, like the areas around schools. Where 20 mph zones would not be appropriate, local authorities are encouraged to look for alternative measures to ensure child safety.

Passenger Capacity (Commercial Airlines)

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation to regulate the passenger seating capacity of commercial airlines. [2863]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority has had mandatory minimum standards for seat spacing on UK registered aircraft since 1989. These are contained in Airworthiness Notice No. 64 and were introduced to ensure the safe evacuation of an aircraft during an emergency. There is also a limit on the number of seats in each row, which determines the minimum width of the seats.

In its response to the House of Lords Select Committee Inquiry into Air Travel and Health, the Government referred to some research which is being funded by the Civil Aviation Authority to look into the relationship between aircraft seat dimension and passenger size. This study, which is being carried out on behalf of the Joint Aviation Authorities, looks at the changing size of air passengers, but also includes a review of recent research into deep vein thrombosis, and indicates additional areas where further research may be necessary. The study (and any subsequent follow-on study) will provide the Government with the information necessary to review the current regulations on seat spacing. It is due to be presented to the Joint Aviation Authorities shortly.

Departmental Title Change Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the total cost of *(a)* design, *(b)* stationery, *(c)* new name plaques and *(d)* other costs of the naming of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [3031]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department's costs have been very low as it makes extensive use of electronic templates, keeps low stocks of stationery and generally uses out-of-date stationery for purposes such as internal photocopying and notepads.

Recent changes in departmental responsibilities aim to improve efficiency in delivering Government policy. The costs of the name change to my central Department so far amount to £25,250, and are broken down in the table.

	£
(a) Design	264.37
(b) Stationery	8,782.31
(c) Name plaques	6,235
(d) Other costs:	
Templates and display panels	2,984.50
Changes to the website (c.50,000 pages)	4,398
Costs incurred by our storage and distribution company	2,585

Note:
These figures include VAT.

Landlord and Tenants Act

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many applications to challenge landlords' choice of insurers

under paragraph 8 of the schedule to the Landlord and Tenants Act 1985 have been received by leasehold valuation tribunals. [3178]

Ms Keeble: The leasehold valuation tribunals were first given jurisdiction for nominated insurer cases in September 1997. Since that time, there have been approximately 60 applications made under paragraph 8 of the schedule to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

Travel Concessions (Solent Ferries)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if pensioners will be able to use the long distance travel concessions announced on 4 July on cross-Solent ferries. [3260]

Ms Keeble: A local authority must offer at least the statutory minimum concessionary travel requirement (half-fares for elderly and disabled people, with no charge for the pass) on local buses within its boundaries. Each authority may also offer concessionary travel beyond its area and by other means of transport—for example train and ferry services—if it considers it right to do so, using its discretionary powers in the Transport Act 1985.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to place a duty on transport operators to allow disabled people to use all their vehicles. [3258]

Ms Keeble: The Government have already taken significant steps towards delivering accessible transport under the DDA. Regulations setting standards of access for trains, buses and coaches are already in force. Taxi drivers are also now under a duty to carry guide, hearing and other assistance dogs and we will be consulting in due course on access standards for licensed taxis.

My officials are involved in constructive discussions with both the transport industries and disability organisations regarding the further extension of the Disability Discrimination Act to transport operators, and the other recommendations relating to transport made by the Disability Rights Task Force in its report "From Exclusion to Inclusion."

Our aim is to find ways in which we can take forward the recommendations to deliver further improvements in access and mobility to disabled people without compromising the viability of industry. I hope to be in a position to publish a consultation paper on the options by the turn of the year.

Assistance Animals

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the airports which have facilities to process assistance animals travelling on passports for pets with their owners; [1723]

(2) if he will list the airline carriers which will allow assistance animals to travel on board with their owners under the passport for pets scheme. [1724]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Whether an airport has the facilities to process animals under the pet travel scheme is determined by the airline which seeks this Department's approval. It is the carrier that is approved, not the airport. An airline wishing to participate nominates a route, including the airport for which it can demonstrate its ability to comply with the requirements of the scheme. This forms the basis of its operational contract and foundation for the Department's approval. It is essential in order to ensure that every animal entering the country under the scheme is properly checked for compliance.

Within the limits of their agreements with this Department, it is a matter for each airline to decide how it transports pets into the UK, in light of its own operational and safety requirements. Some airlines have been able to demonstrate procedures to transport assistance animals in the cabins of their aircraft while meeting all the scheme's requirements. They are British Midland Airways, from Amsterdam, Stuttgart and Paris into London Heathrow airport, Lufthansa from Frankfurt into London Heathrow airport and British European operating an Air France flight from Toulouse into London Heathrow airport.

As additional transport companies and new routes are agreed by the Department, details (including whether they are able to carry assistance animals in the cabin of their aircraft) will be placed on the DEFRA website and made available through the PETS helpline.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the recent division of regional responsibilities between different Government Departments. [1286]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to ministerial responsibilities.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 408W.

HEALTH

Residential and Nursing Care

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential care and nursing *(a)* homes and *(b)* places he estimates there will be in (i) 2002, (ii) 2003 and (iii) 2004. [921]

Jacqui Smith: No estimates have been made centrally of the number of residential or nursing care homes in 2002, 2003 and 2004, nor of the places within those homes. On behalf of the Department, the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) has made longer term projections of future levels of demand for long-term residential and non-residential care services for older people on a range of assumptions. The PSSRU projected that, keeping pace with demographic pressures, the number of older people in residential and nursing care homes will respectively rise by 12 per cent. and 13 per cent. over the period 1996 to 2010. This is equivalent, for both types of care, to almost 1 per cent. a year.

Mental Health Care

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the cumulative additional investment on mental health care over three years from 1999 has been allocated *(a)* for each year, *(b)* between health and social services and *(c)* between different Government initiatives and programmes; [1464]

(2) when he will make allocations to health authorities under the mental health framework for 2001–02; and what is the total amount to be allocated. [1462]

Jacqui Smith: The additional central investment on mental health care over the three years from 1999 is shown in the table, *(a)* for each year and *(b)* between health and social services (in £ millions).

It is not possible to give accurate information on the split between different Government initiatives and programmes because the funding was allocated with health authority baselines to tackle local needs.

The total additional amount to be allocated in 2001–02 is £12.35 million revenue and £58 million capital. The allocation process has already begun and should be completed by the autumn. Most of this additional funding in 2001–02 will be used to provide significant improvements to high secure services.

Mental health investment: national service framework/NHS Plan implementation

£ million

Revenue investment	*NHS CAMHS (child)*	*NHS adults*	*PSS (personal social services)*
1999–2000	10.0	58.5	[1]46.0
2000–01	10.0	56.0	13.0
2001–02	[2]—	12.35	[3,4]20.0
Committed so far	20	126.85	77.0

Capital investment

	£ million
1999–2000	4.5
2000–01	9.0
2001–02	[5]58.0

[1] Eight for CAMHS

[2] The planned £10 million increase to the central funding for CAMHS was issued as part of the growth health authorities received in 2001–02—it was not separately identified. Targets are however being monitored. The £20 million central funding for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 has been added recurrently to HAs' baselines

[3] Of the £20 million, £1 million went to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for the homeless mentally ill initiative and a further £1 million is to be used for central initiatives

[4] Five for CAMHS

[5] Includes £5 million for acute psychiatric ward refurbishment, and £9 million for Fallon

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by name of report and health authority, the independent inquiries into mental health services established under HSG (94) 27 which have been published since February 1994. [2009]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by name of subject and health authority the independent inquiries into mental health services established under HSG (94) 27 which are currently under way but which have not yet published reports. [2001]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The information requested is as follows.

Independent inquiries in mental health services established under HSG (94) 27, which are currently under way, but which have not yet published reports

South West Region

SC—Dorset HA

DM—Dorset HA

JD—Gloucestershire HA

JC—Somerset HA

RG—Wiltshire HA

RG—Wiltshire HA

MM—Avon HA

Trent Region

KH—Leicestershire HA

BR—Leicestershire HA

AA—North Derbyshire HA

MS—Lincolnshire HA.

North West Region

AK—Blackpool HA

PL—Blackpool HA

RH—East Lancashire HA

AP—Liverpool HA

MA—HA

SR—HA

West Midland Region

No independent inquiries currently under way.

London Region

AB—Brent and Harrow HA

PL—Brent and Harrow HA

AC—Brent and Harrow HA

XX—Brent and Harrow HA

WT—Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA

PR—Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA

MH—East London and City HA

DN—East London and City HA

SH—East London and City HA

WH—Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA

MM—Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA

South East Region

MS—West Kent

RS—West Surrey

SL—West Sussex

WW—Berkshire

CM—North and Mid. Hampshire

PH—North and Mid. Hampshire

NL—North and Mid. Hampshire

Eastern Region

DB—Norfolk HA

KB—Norfolk HA

JN—North Essex HA

North Yorkshire Region

DM—Newcastle and North Tyneside HA

DG—Calderdale and Kirklees HA

RW- Newcastle and North Tyneside HA

AJK—Bradford HA

ME—Tees HA

GE—Leeds HA

AM—Leeds HA

SK—Calderdale and Kirklees HA

Note:

The names of the patients have been replaced by initials, as many patient names may not be in the public domain.

London NHS Housing Co-ordinator

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the principal duties of the London NHS housing co-ordinator; and what targets have been set and what resources have been allocated to the post holder. [2688]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service housing co-ordinator was appointed by the NHS Estates Agency on 1 April 2000, and is now one year into a three-year programme. He is supported by three full-time staff and has access to professional and other support staff at the London regional office, and within the NHS Estates Agency. The principal duties, and targets, have changed during this period, and now include: to improve the quality and quantity of affordable homes for NHS staff in support of the NHS's recruitment and retention requirements; to deliver the NHS Plan's target to secure 2,000 additional residential units in London; to estimate the need outside London, securing additional residential units as required, starting in the south east; establish a London wide NHS accommodation bureau; pilot a scheme to provide affordable hotel type rooms in London; consider ways of providing affordable home ownership for NHS staff; and issue guidance, advice, and best practice exemplars for providing staff accommodation. Following the initial success of the programme, the team are now rolling out the initiative to cover areas in the rest of England where high property prices impact on staff recruitment and retention.

The post holder has delivered, or is on target to deliver, these objectives. Initial milestones for the project involve securing new accommodation at Lever Street, EC1, which in addition provides 26 hotel-type rooms, Pentland House, SE13, and most recently in Kilburn at Acorn Estates. The NHS accommodation bureau has been established with access to more than 12,000 residential units in London.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Woodspring, (Dr. Fox) of 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 26W, on overseas nurses, what the nature of these representations were; to what countries his Department intends to extend the initiative offered to Spain; what countries have turned down the opportunity to enter into a similar agreement; what reasons they gave for turning down such an opportunity; and if he will make a statement. [2701]

Mr. Hutton: The countries outlined in response to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 25 June have made written or verbal representations to the Department about the availability of health care professionals from their country to work in the National Health Service.

The Department will work with these and other countries making a similar approach to agree the most appropriate means to support international co-operation in the recruitment, secondment, exchange or development of health care professionals with the NHS, which is of mutual benefit.

To date, no country has declined to work with us and no country has yet agreed a similar arrangement to the one we have with Spain.

Walk-in Centres

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many expressions of interest his Department has received about introducing NHS walk-in centres. [2523]

Mr. Hutton: We received 100 applications following the issue of Health Service Circular 1999–116 in May 1999.

39 of the 40 National Health Service walk-in centres that were approved in 1999 are open. A further three National Health Service walk-in centres were approved in 2000. By the end of 2001 all 43 will be open.

Ashworth Special Hospital

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the costs of providing additional security measures at Ashworth special hospital which arose out of the Fallon inquiry and the Tilt report. [2806]

Jacqui Smith: £4.5 million capital was invested in 1999–2000 to improve security and safety at Ashworth hospital in response to the findings of the Fallon inquiry report. A review was also undertaken at that time of the likely need for future investment on security and modernisation. As a result, an additional £3 million capital per year was allocated for this purpose to the Department's north-west regional office. £16 million of capital funding is being made available to Ashworth hospital authority, over the period 2000 to 2004, to meet the additional security measures recommended for the hospital in the Tilt report.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it cost to erect a new security fence at Ashworth special hospital; and if he will make a statement. [2805]

Jacqui Smith: The report of the review of security at the high security hospitals (the Tilt report), published in May 2000, recommended that the perimeter security of the three high security psychiatric hospitals, Ashworth, Broadmoor and Rampton, should be upgraded. The recommendation was accepted by the Government. Current estimates are that the planned additional external perimeter barrier at Ashworth hospital will cost £1.7 million capital. Schemes

linked to the external perimeter barrier, including external and internal perimeter roads, will cost a further £1.5 million capital, making a total cost of £3.2 million.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been allocated for additional security measures at Ashworth special hospital arising out of the Tilt report; and if he will make a statement. [2807]

Jacqui Smith: £16 million of capital funding is being made available to Ashworth hospital authority, over the period 2000–04, to meet the additional security measures recommended for the hospital in the Tilt report.

MRSA

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many lives were lost in NHS hospitals as a result of MRSA in each of the last 12 years. [2378]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* There are no centrally held statistics on deaths caused by hospital acquired infections, including Methicillin resistant "Staphylococcus aureus" (MRSA).

MRSA infection can take the form of many different diseases from trivial skin infection to pneumonia or septicaemia. It is difficult to tell what contribution MRSA infection makes to death. MRSA does not have a distinct code within the revision of the international classification of diseases used for coding diagnostic data in the National Health Service and death registration data at the Office for National Statistics.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances hospitals with individual trusts but combined clinical services may apply for teaching services. [2925]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The arrangements for establishing training placements for National Health Service staff will vary according to the staff group involved and the stage of training they have reached. The most important aspects local education providers will consider are the quality of training on offer and the range and depth of experience required from the placement.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce proposals to reform the clinical negligence system. [3618]

Mr. Milburn: I have announced today my intention to publish a White Paper early in 2002 on reforming the way clinical negligence claims are handled.

Head Injuries

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will respond to the Health Committee's report, "Head Injury: Rehabilitation" (HC307 Session 2000–2001). [2395]

Mr. Hutton: We expect to publish our response to the report before Parliament rises on 20 July.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the cost, per month, for each of the last six months, of the Millennium Dome to *(a)* the Millennium Commission, *(b)* Government Departments and *(c)* private funds. [76]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The New Millennium Experience company (NMEC) has advised that the monthly cost of the Dome and the site on which it stands for the last six months is as follows:

	£000
January 2001	2,615
February 2001	1,635
March 2001	1,459
April 2001	719
May 2001	687
June 2001	[1]486

[1] Budgeted costs

Note:
Final figures for June are not yet available

In addition to care and maintenance, costs for the first part of this year include expenditure incurred on Dome decommissioning.

Government Departments are not involved directly in financing the Dome. Ministers have received support from officials over the last six months in respect of the Dome sale process and any other Dome-related matters in the normal course of business; but the cost of this is not separable from the cost of support to Ministers on other matters.

I am not aware of any cost of the Millennium Dome to private funds over the last six months other than costs incurred by potential bidders. These are a matter for them.

Millennium Bridge

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the opening date of the Millennium Bridge. [80]

Tessa Jowell: *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on compensation for self-employed tour guides affected by foot and mouth restrictions. [2149]

Dr. Howells: It is the long-standing policy of successive Governments not to offer compensation for consequential losses associated with animal disease outbreaks. However, despite the restrictions needed to control foot and mouth, more and more of the countryside is open for business and there is still plenty to do and see. Visitor attractions are continuing to open and rights of way throughout England are now 68 per cent. open. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

wrote to local authority chief executives on 22 June proposing revocation of blanket closures of public rights of way. I am confident that these measures will benefit self-employed tour guides.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last met representatives of the British Hospitality Association to discuss the impact of foot and mouth on tourism. [132]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Representatives of the BHA were present when I addressed the CBI's tourism Conference, "Tourism UK—Restoration or Regeneration", on June 26, as well as the Tourism Foot and Mouth Summit which I chaired on 3 July.

On both occasions I stressed the importance I attach to my Department's sponsorship of the tourism industry, and I look forward to meeting the BHA on many occasions in the future.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is arranging a series of meetings, which will include discussions with the representatives of the British Hospitality Association.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of the foot and mouth crisis on the hotel and tourism industry on the Isle of Wight. [2695]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Our best estimate to date is that the loss of revenue in 2001–02 by the English tourist industry is likely to be around £120 million per week averaged over the eight month tourism season. We have not attempted to apportion this overall estimate to individual Regional Tourist Boards or individual tourism destinations, such as the Isle of Wight, since the available data do not enable this to be done with a sufficient degree of reliability. We are currently revising the model on which this estimate is based in the light of the latest available data.

Public Libraries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on standards of service in public libraries. [117]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 makes it a duty of library authorities to

> provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

We introduced standards of service for library authorities from 1 April 2001 to help them and users understand what is required under the Act. Since 1998, we have also encouraged better planning and accountability in public library services through the introduction of annual library plans and these will now act as the vehicle for monitoring and assessing library authorities' performance against the standards.

Film Council

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representatives of the Film Council attended the latest Cannes Film Festival; at what costs to public funds; and how many new British films were screened at the festival. [115]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* 28 Film Council and British Film Commission (BFC) staff attended the Cannes "Marché"—the commercial film market—which runs parallel with the main Film Festival, at a cost of £66,500. 100 British films were shown or promoted at the Marché.

The BFC ran a series of seminars and workshops for international/European producers and other industry professionals explaining film finance opportunities in the UK; the range of the production section in the UK; and financial and fiscal mechanisms that can benefit films that shoot in the UK. In addition the BFC organised three showcases exploring different areas of production expertise and co-hosted a reception with the British Screen Advisory Council for European producers.

Diary Appointments (Cancellations)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many diary appointments for the Secretary of State were cancelled on her taking office. [1269]

Tessa Jowell: I have not cancelled any of my diary engagements since becoming Secretary of State. Invitations accepted by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) for engagements after June 8 were accepted on the understanding that they would need to be reconsidered should a new Secretary of State be appointed.

Digital Terrestrial Television

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of digital terrestrial television. [2091]

Tessa Jowell: The Government have set out in their White Paper—A New Future for Communications—their proposals for the sector, including working with industry and viewer groups to develop a clear and effective strategy for achieving the switchover to digital broadcasting.

S4C

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the subsidy to S4C was *(a)* in total and *(b)* per viewer in the last year. [1754]

Dr. Howells: The level of S4C's grant in aid is determined by a formula introduced by the Broadcasting Act 1996. For the calendar year 2000, S4C's grant in aid was £78.218 million. The BBC also produce 10 hours per week of Welsh language programmes for broadcasting on S4C, costed at £16 million for the financial year 2000–01. This represents a cost of approximately £65 per viewer, based on S4C's estimated weekly reach of 1.441 million viewers for the year. In addition, outside peak hours S4C broadcasts the best of Channel 4's English language output.

Religious Broadcasting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will undertake a review into the quality and content of religious broadcasting on *(a)* terrestrial and *(b)* satellite television. [1660]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* No. Requirements with regard to religious broadcasting are set out in the BBC's Agreement with the Secretary of State, and in the case of other broadcasters, in their licences. It is the responsibility of the BBC Governors and the Independent Television Commission to ensure that those requirements are met.

TV Licences

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to provide free television licences to all old age pensioners. [2478]

Dr. Howells: The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over, because older pensioners are more likely to be reliant on television as their window on the world. Older pensioners are also more likely to be on low incomes. We have no plans to extend free television licences to pensioners below the age of 75.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the timetable is for the introduction of new proposals on concessionary television licences; and if she will make a statement. [2838]

Dr. Howells: We hope to set a timetable shortly for the introduction of measures to preserve the rights of beneficiaries of the Accommodation for Residential Care concessionary television licence scheme who remain in accommodation provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation, when the social mix or the level of warden cover change. We are currently consulting with the BBC on the implementation of the proposals to ensure that they will work smoothly. Regulations will then be introduced.

School Sport Co-ordinators

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 73–77W, what measures she has taken to monitor the effectiveness of the school sport co-ordinator programme. [2814]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* In addition to Sport England's standard monitoring of Lottery projects, the Government's Plan for Sport commits DCMS and DfES to commissioning an impact study to look at the effectiveness of the school sport co-ordinator programme in raising school standards, raising sporting standards and increasing participation for all young people, with an emphasis on under-represented groups. We are in discussion with Sport England, the New Opportunities Fund and the Youth Sport Trust about the nature of that impact study, which we expect to have under way in September.

World Athletics Championships

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent discussions she has had with the International Amateur Athletic Federation regarding London's ability to host the 2005 World Athletics Championships; [3197]

(2) what discussions she has had with the International Amateur Athletic Federation regarding the ability of London to host the 2005 World Athletics Championships; and if she will make a statement. [3100]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* I spoke on the telephone to Istvan Gyulai, General Secretary of the IAAF, on 2 July to reiterate the Government's support for the World Athletics Championships being staged in London in 2005.

Tennis

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to expand indoor tennis coaching facilities throughout the country. [2329]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Sport England are currently working with the Lawn Tennis Association to develop a facilities planning model to quantify the need for additional indoor tennis facilities and to identify the areas of greatest deficiency. This will be used to inform a new strategy to expand the provision of indoor facilities building on previous investments made by the Lawn Tennis Association, Sport England and the All England Club.

Space for Sport and Art Programme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what public funds are allocated for the Space for Sport and Art Programme; how much has been spent on this programme to date; and on which projects. [3255]

Tessa Jowell: £130 million has been allocated to the Space for Sport and Art Programme—£75 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund and £55 million from three lottery distributors, the New Opportunities Fund, Sport England and the Arts Council of England. As announced in March 2001, around 300 schools have been invited to develop detailed applications, which are due by the end of October. To date some £150,000 has been spent on: producing technical guidance; assessing initial bids; running regional workshops; and developing training packages for the 65 local education authorities involved in the programme.

Sports Facilities (Audit)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if her Department has completed the audit of UK sports facilities; and if she will make a statement. [3179]

Mr. Caborn: Local authorities are best placed to assess the level of provision in their area as part of their development plans. Therefore, the Government's Plan for Sport encourages local authorities in England to carry out research of Sport England, and recommends that each local authority should develop a strategy for community sports provision over the next five years which, through consultation with the relevant agencies, ensures that new and enhanced indoor and outdoor facilities provide equal opportunity for participation.

Local planning authorities will be encouraged by Sport England, through its regional offices, to consider both public and commercial provision when drawing up development plan policies for sport and recreation and

also the role of planning obligations in providing and maintaining more socially inclusive community sports facilities.

A new consultative body—the Community Sport Alliance—will encourage good practice in the development of community facilities and also identify best practice in ensuring the inclusion of community and social provision in alternative facility management models.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with representatives from the Commonwealth Development Corporation regarding the adoption of OECD guidelines for multinational companies; and if she will make a statement. [2283]

Clare Short: When CDC was transformed from a statutory corporation into a public limited company on 8 December 1999 a set of Business Principles was put in place concerning the areas of business integrity, the environment, social issues and health and safety. These confirmed CDC's commitment to best business practice. They were placed in the Library of the House during the passage of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1999.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the least developed countries that have been targeted for investment by the CDC in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [2286]

Clare Short: In the last three years CDC has invested funds in the following countries classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

1998

Laos
Lesotho
Malawi
Mozambique
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Tanzania
Uganda
Vanuatu
Zambia

1999

Bangladesh
Lesotho
Malawi
Mozambique
Tanzania
Uganda
Vanuatu
Zambia

2000

Bangladesh
Laos
Lesotho
Malawi
Mozambique
Tanzania
Uganda
Vanuatu
Zambia.

Under its operating framework CDC is required to make 70 per cent. of new investments (by aggregate value), measured over a rolling five year period, in poorer countries[1] listed in its Investment Policy.

[1] Defined as countries with a GNP per capita below the weighted mean for lower middle income countries, based on World bank data published in 1998.

Montserrat

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in providing sporting facilities in Montserrat. [1305]

Clare Short: We have provisionally allocated a maximum of £72 million for Montserrat over the next five years, subject to our normal processes of resource allocation and review, in order to continue our work to restore the economic and social fabric of the island. This will bring our total assistance to Montserrat to some £207 million since the onset of the crisis. We have an on-going dialogue with the Government of Montserrat about their priorities for the use of these funds. This includes help for recreational facilities.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Prime Minister what is the membership of each Cabinet Committee. [3617]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what role he plans for the Joint Cabinet Consultative Committee; and if he has discussed this with the Leader of the Liberal Democrats; [351]

(2) if he will list the policy areas on which he plans to *(a)* co-operate and *(b)* enter into dialogue with the leader of the Liberal Democrats; and if he will make a statement. [1991]

The Prime Minister: I have placed a copy of the current list of Cabinet Committees, their membership and terms of reference in the Library of the House. Details will also be updated on the Cabinet Office website.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of each Department of State in relation to the Dome. [3254]

The Prime Minister: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is responsible for all issues relating to the future use of the Millennium Dome. This includes the sponsorship of English Partnerships, the Government's urban regeneration agency, which, as landowner and owner of the Dome Structure, is responsible for management and maintenance of the Dome and the Dome site.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport provides advice and support to the Shareholder of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), currently Lord Falconer of Thoroton.

Incineration

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Lewes of 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 256, on what evidence he bases his statement that incineration is a cheaper option than recycling in terms of waste dispersal. [3133]

The Prime Minister: The Government's overall strategy for waste is first and foremost to cut waste and, secondly, to recycle, and only then to consider incineration and other opinions lower down the waste hierarchy. We are purchasing a range of measures intended to support recycling. These include the £40 million Waste and Resources Action Programme to overcome market barrier to re-use and recycling, increase in the Landfill Tax, and increased financial support for recycling through Spending Review 2000 and the next round of the New Opportunities Fund.

Relative costs of incineration and recycling are given in the Government's Waste Strategy 2000, Part 2 (appendix C), copies of which have been placed in the Library. This details the independent research which shows incineration is less expensive than recycling under a wide range of conditions.

Public Services

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister which teacher trade union representatives were invited to participate in recent discussions on the future of public services held at No. 10 Downing street. [3160]

The Prime Minister: I did not meet representatives from the teachers' trade unions on this occasion.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Chief Electoral Officer (Report)

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the report of the Chief Electoral Officer for 2000–01. [3532]

Dr. John Reid: I am pleased to announce that the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland for the year 2000–01 has been laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the evidence submitted by her Department to the SSRB on returner bonus payments for teachers. [3020]

Mr. Timms: On 26 June the Government published the school teachers' review body's report on welcome back bonuses for returners to teaching. I am today placing in the Library copies of the supplementary evidence that officials from my Department submitted to the review body.

Value-added League Tables

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish details of the basis of calculation for value-added league tables for the academic year 2001–02. [3023]

Mr. Timms: Our proposals in respect of value-added measures were set out in detail in the "Publication of School and College Performance Tables in 2001" consultation document issued on 30 March this year, copies of which have been placed in the Library. We are now working with some 200 volunteer schools on a pilot programme for the calculation of measures of progress made from key stage 2 to key stage 3 and from key stage 3 to GCSE/GNVQ. The results of the pilot will be published in the autumn, with a full explanation of the methodology used. The evaluation of this year's pilot, along with further consultation early next year, will inform final decisions on the publication of these two measures for all secondary schools in the 2002 performance tables.

Private Sector Consultants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the local education authorities where private sector consultants have been appointed to investigate the management and organisation of future service delivery following adverse Ofsted reports; if she will name the private sector contractor appointed in each case; and if she will publish the value of each of the contracts. [1786]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The names of the local education authorities where private sector consultants have been appointed following adverse Ofsted reports are as follows:

Bradford—PWC

Bristol—Birmingham LEA/APS Keele

Derby—Capita

Dudley—OPM

Hackney—KPMG and OPM

Haringey—Capital and PWC

Islington—PWC

Leeds—PWC and CGEY

Leicester City—OPM

Liverpool—KPMG

Redbridge—DBi
Rochdale—KPMG
Rotherham—OPM
Sandwell—KPMG
Sheffield—OPM
Southwark—KPMG
Walsall—PWC
Waltham Forest—PWC.

The total value of the contracts given is £6.1 million, including VAT on consultancy related to intervention.

The cost of individual consultancy contracts for intervention work is commercial in confidence.

Further Education Staff

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills of those students successfully completing a *(a)* BEd. and *(b)* teacher training course, how many found employment in (i) schools and (ii) the further education sector in (A) September 2000, (B) September 1999 and (C) September 1993. [2405]

Mr. Timms: Successful completers of ITT courses in England[1] in 1993 who entered service up to 31 March 1994 and successful completers of ITT courses in England[1] in 1998 who entered service up to 31 March 1999 (the latest date at which information is available) are as follows:

Calendar year completed course	*Maintained schools*	*Further Education*[2]
BEd		
1993[3]	5,510	30
1998[4]	6,440	30
PGCE		
1993[3]	9,910	220
1998[4]	10,820	130
Total		
1993[3]	15,410	240
1998[4]	17,260	160
As a percentage of all QTS completers		
1993[3]	71	1
1998[4]	70	1

[1] Includes those trained through the Open University
[2] In addition there are part-time teachers in Further Education whose service is not recorded, as they are not members of the Teachers Pension Scheme
[3] Includes 163 teachers who trained in England and entered service in maintained schools or FE in Wales
[4] Includes 148 teachers who trained in England and entered service in maintained schools or FE in Wales

Other teachers successfully completing a course of ITT will have found employment in the independent schools sector, the HE sector, or in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the problems of recruitment and retention of lecturers in the further education sector; and what action she proposes to take. [2598]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* We have supported financially a project commissioned by the Association of Colleges, "National Review of Staffing and Pay in Further Education", which was undertaken in conjunction with the nationally recognised trade unions for further education (excluding sixth form colleges). We acknowledge that colleges need help to ensure that they have the right arrangements to recruit, reward and retain excellent teachers. Starting this year, significant extra resources amounting to an additional £300 million over the next three years have been made available to the further education sector to reward high calibre staff through our Teaching Pay Initiative, £44 million of which will be shared by sixth form colleges. The total figure is over and above the annual pay round. In addition, we plan to implement arrangements for FE teachers of shortage subjects to benefit from golden hellos comparable to those already in schools and from arrangements we are piloting to help new entrants to the profession to pay off their student loans.

Further Education (Dorset)

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the Government's commitment to increase the level of funding for the lowest-funded school sixth forms will be applied by the Learning and Skills Council to schools in the Mid-Dorset and North Poole constituency. [2851]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There is significant variation at present between the levels of funding given to school sixth forms by local authorities. The Government have given an unprecedented guarantee to school sixth forms that, when the LSC takes over the responsibility for funding them in April 2002, their funding will be maintained, in real terms, at 2000–01 levels, provided their pupil numbers do not fall. This means that convergence can only be upwards. The speed at which convergence can be achieved will depend on the overall availability of resources.

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take steps to increase the level of funding for post-16 school education in the *(a)* Poole and *(b)* Dorset local education authorities. [2852]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From 2002–03 the funding of post-16 school education in these and other education authorities will be the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Funds will be passed to schools by their education authorities. The overall total from which the LSC will calculate allocations for each school has yet to be determined, but will be announced shortly. School sixth forms will be protected by a real terms guarantee whereby their funding will not fall provided they maintain their numbers on roll.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers from *(a)* Hampshire, *(b)* Southampton, *(c)* Portsmouth and *(d)* the Isle of Wight local education authorities received training on teachers' pay thresholds at (i) Winchester, (ii) Brighton and (iii) Portsmouth; and how many teachers in total received that training at each location. [2929]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Head teachers from *(a)* Hampshire, *(b)* Southampton, *(c)* Portsmouth and *(d)* the Isle of Wight local education authorities attended threshold training at Brighton and

Winchester. 148 attended training at Brighton; 237 attended training at Winchester. The total number of head teachers trained at Winchester was 675, and the total number trained at Brighton was 655.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what range of payments is available to returning teachers as returner bonus payments; [3021]

(2) what criteria are to be used for assessing the eligibility of returning teachers for returner bonus payments. [3022]

Mr. Timms: On 26 June 2001 the Government published the school teachers' review body's report on welcome back bonuses for returners to teaching and our response to this report. This response contains our proposals on eligibility for the bonuses and their value. I have placed copies of both the STRB's report and the Government's response in the Library.

Connexions Service

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many advisers have been employed for the Connexions Service; and how many vacancies remain. [3019]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The 12 partnerships that went live on 1 April 2001 are in a transition stage, building up their personal adviser staff from partner organisations, including the Careers Service and Youth Service, and by recruitment of new staff. Preliminary figures reported by partnerships at the end of May 2001 indicate that 991 full-time equivalent personal advisers were in post.

Education Committees

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department has given to local authorities on the role of external members of education committees in authorities with a leader and combined structure. [3025]

Mr. Timms: Guidance on the role of parent governor and diocesan representatives on local authority committees dealing with education is given through "Replacement Chapter 3 (Overview and scrutiny under executive arrangements) of the Local Government Act 2000: Guidance to English district councils and London borough councils". This guidance was issued on 15 March 2001 by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in conjunction with the Department for Education and Skills.

In addition, parent governor and diocesan representatives have access to the joint member training programme of the Department for Education and Skills and the Local Government Association. The programme includes a CD-ROM on school standards with guidance on council constitutions.

Examinations

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department gave to the QCA on the new Art A-level and AS-level syllabuses. [3026]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not offer advice on the content of individual specifications. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is responsible for the development of A/AS-level criteria and the accreditation of A/AS specifications.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those who were consulted prior to the determination of the new Art A-level and AS-level syllabuses. [3027]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority consulted representatives from the awarding bodies, schools, colleges, Higher Education, subject association, examiners, Welsh and Northern Ireland regulatory authorities, local education authorities and a small number of employers in developing the A/AS Art and Design criteria and accrediting the specifications.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make public the remit letter of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority inquiry into AS-level examinations. [3120]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* A copy of the remit letter will be placed in the Library together with the report of the QCA's review.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many A-level exam scripts were returned to schools for checking following publication of the results for the academic year 1999–2000; and how many results were challenged. [3162]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: A total sum of 51,572 A-level examination scripts were returned to schools. 29,628 results were challenged, which represented 3.8 per cent. of the A-level examination entries. Out of that, 4,644 resulted in a grade change, representing 0.6 per cent. of all entries.

Graduate Teacher Programme

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes have been made to the Graduate Teacher Programme since 18 January. [3028]

Mr. Timms: On 12 March my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State announced new funding to take the total number of Graduate Teacher Programme places available from 1,680 to 2,250 a year. Altogether, since 18 January 1,729 places on the programme have been allocated, 1,534 of those to schools outside London. In addition, my Department and the Teacher Training Agency have been working together on proposals to simplify the administration of the programme. The regulations needed to bring this about will be laid before Parliament in due course.

School Inspection Review

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the evidence submitted by her Department to Ofsted for its review of the inspection regime. [3029]

Mr. Timms: My Department will not be submitting evidence to Ofsted. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have discussed with HM Chief Inspector the need for the inspection regime to continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of teachers, governors, parents

and other stakeholders. We welcome the consultation exercise which HM Chief Inspector will launch later this year.

Departmental Awayday

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which Ministers and officials attended her Department's Awayday meeting; where the meeting was held; and what the cost of the meeting was. [3161]

Estelle Morris: The Department's Awayday was held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, Berkshire. Ministerial colleagues, senior civil servants and I undertook a review of current policies and strategic priorities. My ministerial colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills and I attended the Awayday along with the Department's board. The event was also attended by the Department's Whips and parliamentary private secretaries. The head of policy from No. 10 attended for part of the Awayday and the head of the No. 10 delivery unit was a guest speaker. Officials from the Department serviced the event and provided the secretariat.

The provisional cost of the event is £4,000. Should the final total differ significantly from our estimate I will write to the hon. Member with the new information and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Classroom Sizes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average classroom size of state schools is within the Greater London area. [3210]

Mr. Timms: The size of the average maintained primary and maintained secondary class in Greater London in January 2001 was 27.0 and 22.1 respectively. Comparable figures for England are 26.7 and 22.0. The latest class data were recently published in a Statistical First Release "Class Sizes in Maintained Schools in England 2001" on 6 April, copies of which are available from the Library, or alternatively can be accessed from the Department for Education and Skills' statistical website www.dfes.gsi.gov.uk/statistics.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ilisu Dam

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent consultations she has had with the Turkish Government about the building of the Ilisu Dam. [1549]

Ms Hewitt: Neither I nor my predecessor have had any discussions with the Turkish Government about the building of the Ilisu Dam. Officials at ECGD are in contact with the Turkish authorities regarding the project.

Universal Bank

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to ensure that customers of banks and building societies which are not participating members of the Universal Bank are able to withdraw cash from post offices free of charge. [2361]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* We are continuing discussions with banks and building societies not party to the Memorandum of Understanding on universal banking services.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total of *(a)* premiums received and *(b)* claims paid by the Export Credits Guarantee Department was in each business area in each of the last 10 financial years. [2732]

Ms Hewitt: For the last 10 years the figures for premium received, claims paid and recoveries are as follows:

Financial Year	*Premium*	*Claims*	*Recoveries*	*Net Position*
1990–91	158.5	967.50	477.70	– 331.30
1991–92	159.0	954.10	472.90	– 322.20
1992–93	140.0	734.30	484.00	– 110.30
1993–94	112.0	512.00	416.00	16.00
1994–95	113.0	422.00	341.10	32.10
1995–96	106.0	295.00	473.00	284.00
1996–97	130.0	231.00	558.00	457.00
1997–98	127.0	165.70	517.00	478.30
1998–99	81.0	145.00	425.00	361.00
1999–2000	102.0	296.00	343.00	149.00

ECGD does not maintain its records on a basis, which would enable it to provide a breakdown across business area as requested without disproportionate cost.

Yorkshire and Humber Region (Exports)

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the overall value of exports was from the Yorkshire and Humber region in each of the last five years to *(a)* Europe and *(b)* the USA; and if she will indicate separately the figures for steel and related products. [2964]

Alan Johnson: The available information is given in the table:

Exports of goods from Yorkshire and the Humber

£ million

	EU	*USA*
1999	4,946	754
2000	5,508	928

Notes:

1. Information prior to 1999 is not available.
2. Separate figures for steel and related products are not available.
3. Exports of goods to Europe below the Intrastat reporting threshold cannot be allocated to any region and are, therefore, excluded. Below-threshold trade accounts for some 2 to 2.5 per cent. of UK exports of goods to the EU.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she proposes to review the need for statutory action in respect of age discrimination in employment. [3093]

Alan Johnson: The Government intend, in line with the European Employment Directive (2000/78/EC), to introduce legislation to outlaw age discrimination in employment and training and will start public consultations later this year.

Small Business Service

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what operational targets she has set for the Small Business Service for 2001–02. [3665]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service was established on 3 April 2000 as an Executive Agency. It has had a successful first year and the first annual report has today been placed in the Library of the House.

The vision of the SBS is for the UK to be the best place in the world to start and grow a business. Its purpose is to build an enterprise society in which small businesses thrive and achieve their potential.

The objectives of the SBS are: to be a strong voice for small business at the heart of Government, ensuring that Government is aware of, and responsive to, the needs of all small businesses; to strive for a regulatory framework which minimises the burdens on business; to develop and maintain a world-class business support service to enhance businesses' competitiveness and profitability; and to champion the importance of entrepreneurship across society, particularly in under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

The SBS will review its plans regularly in response to the needs of small business. In line with the requirement for Executive Agencies to be given operational targets, I have set the following targets for the 2001–02 year:

Put in place a set of actions for reforming the regulatory environment for small businesses by March 2002.

Customer satisfaction at least 80 per cent. for all services.

Unprompted and prompted awareness of Business Link branded services among small businesses to rise to 20 and 80 per cent. respectively by March 2002.

All advisers delivering BL services meet new standards by April 2002.

Develop new funding streams to help plug the financing gap for start-ups and small growing firms; first investments for early stage financing of growth by December 2001.

Launch new Business Incubation Fund, by September 2001, and announce first loans by December 2001.

Increase accessibility of support, including loan finance, in under-invested areas, and have at least 105 projects, including 15 Community Finance Initiatives, covering all the English regions up and running by March 2002.

100 per cent. of valid invoices to be paid within 30 days.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will decide which Regional Development Agency chairs and board members are being reappointed. [3666]

Ms Hewitt: I am pleased to announce that I intend to re-appoint the Chairs of the eight Regional Development Agencies in England (outside London) for varying terms. The new appointments, of periods of up to three years, will take effect from 14 December 2001.

I particularly want to thank Lord Thomas (Chair of the North West Development Agency) for agreeing to stay on until March next year, allowing more time for a successor to be found and for Lord Thomas to complete his six-month term as Chair of the RDA Chairs which begins in October. I would like to thank Lord Thomas for his dedication and commitment to the North West Region over many years and to the dynamic and effective leadership he has given to the RDA since its creation in 1999.

The London Development Agency Chair is an appointment of the Mayor of London and was made on 3 July 2000.

As far as the RDA Boards are concerned, I have decided to aim to increase business representation. I hope to be able to appoint or re-appoint members with current or recent business experience to at least half of the places on board.

I intend to honour the commitment given in Parliament during the passing of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 to have four board members with local authority experience and at least one with knowledge of rural issues. As before, the rest of the places will go to those with experience of relevance to the work of the RDAs, such as trade unions, further and higher education and the voluntary sector. I expect that most board members may have experience relevant to more than one area of the RDA's work and so hope the boards will reflect as wide a range of interests as before.

Regeneration

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department is giving to EMDA's involvement in regeneration in Warsop and Warsop Vale. [2222]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* The Department is working with the East Midland Development Agency on a range of initiatives to support the regeneration of Warsop and Warsop Vale including the Meden Valley Partnership Special Purpose Vehicle and the Malcolm Sargisson Community Resource Centre.

Post Office

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Post Office on maintenance of rural deliveries in areas of foot and mouth disease. [2740]

Mr. Alexander: I have been advised by Consignia (the new name for the Post Office) that Royal Mail and Parcelforce Worldwide are following advice from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about delivering letters and parcels during the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Guidelines have been issued to all staff about deliveries in affected areas, with advice on appropriate precautions.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many premises in Cumbria are not receiving a postal service to the door because of foot and mouth disease. [2741]

Mr. Alexander: I have been advised by Consignia that 3,733 premises in Cumbria are not receiving a postal service to the door as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak.

Consignia is in constant contact with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The company is offering alternative arrangements to customers, and aims for the full service to be restored when the current outbreak has been eradicated.

International Law

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what notice her Department has received of alleged breaches of *(a)* UK sovereignty and *(b)* international law in areas covered by her Department in the last six months; and if she will make a statement. [1952]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My Department is responsible for a wide range of areas of international law. I would ask the hon. Member to write to me indicating his particular areas of concern.

Planning Laws

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received in the last 12 months concerning reform of planning laws affecting business. [1429]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has had a number of representations from the business community about the planning system. We have been consulting widely over the last year with all key stakeholders interfacing with the planning system to explore its impact on business and competitiveness.

The Government have recently announced a reform of planning and we are working closely on this with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Helmets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his Department's plans to redesign police helmets; and what criteria he proposes to use to decide on the future design. [1246]

Mr. Denham: There are no specific plans to introduce a new design for police helmets. Standards and specifications are constantly monitored to ensure that all headgear is fit for purpose and affords the appropriate level of protection, including complying with Health and Safety legislation, which has applied to the police since June 1998.

Helicopter Accident, Leicestershire

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the coroner's inquest into those who died in the Lynx helicopter crash near Tilton on the Hill, Leicestershire on 17 May 1999 will be allowed to proceed. [1081]

Beverley Hughes: The inquest was adjourned pending receipt of a copy of the Ministry of Defence Board of Inquiry report. Although this has now become available, completion of the coroner's inquiries and the absence abroad of a prospective key witness delayed finalising arrangements for the next hearing. Having regard to the witness's availability and the need to make progress in the interests of the families, I understand that the coroner expects to hold the inquest by late September or early October.

Oldham

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what remarks were made concerning Oldham in the UK periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. [2278]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom's 15th periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) was published in July 1999. The report details the legislative, judicial and administrative measures undertaken in the United Kingdom to address racism. The report provided an overview of the situation in the United Kingdom and did not therefore detail the situation in local areas or towns such a Oldham.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures he plans to take to promote improved community relations in Oldham. [2279]

Angela Eagle: Shortly after the disturbance my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary met representatives from Oldham metropolitan borough council and Greater Manchester police, as well as hon. Members representing Oldham, to discuss the situation in the town. As a result, an action plan for recovery, to be prepared in Oldham following a review which will encompass the contribution of all sectors of the local community, is to be prepared within the next four months. The Home Secretary made it clear that the Government, across all Departments, stand ready to offer whatever support and independent advice is needed to help towns such as Oldham (and Burnley, which has of course since suffered similar disorder) begin to heal their divisions and build a better future.

I visited Oldham on 25 June to meet local people about the town's problems at first hand. However, the primary job of tackling the root causes of the complex social and specific problems that give rise to divisions and disturbances of this kind must be done at local level. We do of course welcome any local initiatives that help to address these issues in a constructive manner.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of progress in eliminating racial discrimination in Oldham. [2277]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I have sought the views of our race advisers and the Commission for Racial Equality on the issue of racial discrimination in Oldham and the extent to which

it can be seen as a factor behind the recent disturbances there. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has also met representatives of Oldham council, local police, young people and local hon. Members to discuss this and other aspects of the situation. The Home Secretary has also asked the Government Office for the North-West for its views as to how matters can be improved in this area. I hope that, with our support, those who want to tackle racial discrimination in Oldham and its associated problems will identify what needs to be done over the weeks and months ahead. At the Home Secretary's meeting with local representatives it was agreed that within four months a local action programme would be prepared. This will no doubt contain, among other things, proposals for combating racial discrimination in Oldham.

Prisoners (Conditions)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much time was spent unlocked in *(a)* male local prisons, *(b)* male closed training prisons, *(c)* male young offender institutions, *(d)* female prisons and *(e)* female young offender institutions in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [2473]

Beverley Hughes: The average time out of cell per weekday in male local prisons, male closed training prisons, male young offender institutions, female prisons and female young offender institutions for the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are listed in the table. Comparable data for 1996–97 are not available. Establishments are categorised by their main role only. Female young offender institutions are included in the relevant part of the female estate.

	1999–2000[1]	*2000–01*[1]
Category B	10.7	10.6
Category C	11.3	10.8
Dispersal	9.5	9.5
Female closed	11.2	11.3
Female local	10.8	9.1
Female open	18.5	19.0
Male closed young offender	9.3	8.4
Male juvenile	10.8	10.8
Male local	8.8	8.8
Male open young offender	12.7	12.9
Male remand centre	8.1	6.9

[1] Average time out of cell (weekdays)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were *(a)* employed in industrial workshops and *(b)* employed in agriculture and horticulture, in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01; how many prisoners were employed as a percentage of the prison population in each of these periods; and if he will make a statement. [2470]

Beverley Hughes: The tables set out the number of prisoners employed in industrial workshops and in agriculture and horticulture, expressed as a percentage of the average prison population for the year from 1996 to the most recently available data.

Industrial workshops

Year	*Number of prisoners*	*As a percentage of average annual prison population*
1996–97	7,601	13.41
1999–2000	9,527	14.70
2000–01[1]	10,429	16.15

[1] Figures shown for 2000–01 are calculated from April 2000 and March 2001 figures. Workshop figures for 2000–01 include craft and charity workshops which were excluded from the figures for previous years

Agriculture and horticulture

Year	*Number of prisoners*	*As a percentage of annual prison population*
1996–97[1]	1,395	2.46
1999–2000	1,988	3.06
2000–01	1,926	2.98

[1] The figures provided are not entirely comparable because the figures for 1996–97 exclude amenity maintenance, included in later years

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total number of hours of educational study was in *(a)* male local prisons, *(b)* male open prisons, *(c)* male closed training prisons, *(d)* male young offender institutions, *(e)* female prisons and *(f)* female young offender institutions in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [2469]

Beverley Hughes: The total number of hours of educational study for male local prisons, male open prisons, male closed training prisons, male young offender institutions and female prisons in 1996–97, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is listed in the table.

Establishments are categorised by their main role only. Female young offender institutions are included in the relevant part of the female estate.

Function name	*1996–97*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Category B	1,282,248	1,536,783	1,637,976
Category C	6,038,900	6,452,503	6,681,851
Dispersal	805,420	778,398	799,868
Female closed	294,648	382,229	422,478
Female local	490,052	472,973	531,418
Female open	347,032	300,732	201,368
Male closed YOI	2,846,087	3,147,571	3,446,699
Male juvenile	94,480	136,274	125,254
Male local	4,171,057	6,511,304	6,600,486
Male open	1,620,819	1,179,529	1,196,511
Male open YOI	368,838	358,905	325,660
Male remand centre	67,699	104,159	117,943

Criminal Case Reviews

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted prisoners have asked for a review of their cases on the basis of re-examination of evidential material for DNA proof; what the response to those requests has been; and if he will make a statement. [2731]

Mr. Keith Bradley: This kind of information is not readily available from the Criminal Cases Review Commission's current management information system, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Sentences (Women)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been sentenced to imprisonment for murder by courts in England and Wales during the last 12 months. [2527]

Mr. Keith Bradley: 12 women were sentenced to life imprisonment for murder in England and Wales in 1999, the latest year for which figures are available. In addition, three were sentenced to detention under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and one to custody for life.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been sentenced to imprisonment by courts in England and Wales during the last 12 months for abuse of children. [2526]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Those who abuse children can be charged with a number of offences. Some of these offences, such as assault causing actual bodily harm and common assault do not identify the age of the victim and it is not possible to provide details of all crimes where children are victims from Home Office statistics. The table shows the statistics for those offences where it is possible to identify a child victim of whatever age.

Number of women sentenced to imprisonment, by offence type, England and Wales 1999

Indictable offences	*Sentenced to a young offender institution*	*Sentenced to an unsuspended sentence of imprisonment*	*Total sentenced to immediate custody*
Violence against the person			
Murder of infant under one year of age	—	1	1
Child destruction	—	1	1
Cruelty to, or neglect of children	3	42	45
Child abduction	1	1	2
Sexual offences			
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	—	4	4
Attempted rape of a male aged under 16[1]	1	—	1
Indecent assault on a female under 16	1	5	6
Other indictable offences			
Take or make indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children	—	1	1
Total	6	55	61

[1] Rape and attempted rape offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956, section 1, as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 142

Prison Population

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison population was in each year from 1989 to 2000 inclusive; what the expected totals are for 2001 to 2005; and what percentage in all years drug offenders represent. [2391]

Beverley Hughes: The average prison population in England and Wales from 1989 to 2000, and the percentage of these totals that were sentenced drug offenders, is shown in the table.

The average prison population for 2001 to 2005 will depend on factors prevailing during those years. 'Projections of Long Term Trends in Prison Population to 2008', available in the Library, hypothesises time scenarios. The projected figures from the middle scenarios have been included in the table. However, the percentages that are expected to be drug offences are not available.

Year	*Prison population on 30 June*	*Percentage of total serving sentences for drug offences*[1]
1989	48,610	6.61
1990	45,636	6.90
1991	45,897	6.22
1992	45,817	6.89
1993	44,566	7.20
1994	48,794	7.20
1995	51,047	8.34
1996	55,281	10.41
1997	61,114	11.74
1998	65,298	12.09
1999	64,771	12.61
2000	64,602	13.12
2001[2]	65,900	—
2002[2]	67,300	—
2003[2]	68,900	—
2004[2]	70,500	—
2005[2]	72,000	—

[1] Rounded to two decimal places

[2] Projected figures

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the UK prison population is expressed as a number per 100,000 population; and what the latest figures are for other Council of Europe member states. [2364]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Provisional information based on the average population in England and Wales in 2000, and the average population

in prisons in England and Wales in 2000, shows there were 113 people in a prison establishment per 100,000 of the general population.

Provisional information is available for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland separately. It is shown in the table along with rates for those countries in Europe for which data are available.

Country	*Rate[2] per 100,000 population in 2000*
EU member states average	
England and Wales[3]	124
Northern Ireland	60
Scotland[4]	115
Austria[5]	84
Belgium[4]	83
Cyprus	[6]37
Czech Republic[7]	208
Denmark	61
Estonia[8]	330
Finland[7]	52
France[9]	[6]89
Germany[8]	97
Greece	76
Hungary[7]	157
Ireland (Eire)	80
Italy	94
Luxembourg	[6]90
Netherlands[10]	87
Norway[3]	n/a
Poland[2]	170
Portugal	127
Russia[7]	465
Slovenia	57
Spain[7]	114
Sweden[11]	64
Switzerland	79
Australia[4]	[6]108
Canada[12]	[6]123
Japan[3]	47
New Zealand[5]	[6]149
South Africa[4]	385
USA[13]	702

[1] At 1 September: number of prisoners including pre-trial detainees
[2] Based on estimates of national population
[3] At 31 August
[4] Annual daily population
[5] Annual averages
[6] In 1999
[7] At 31 December
[8] At 31 January
[9] Metropolitan and overseas departments
[10] At 1 September
[11] At 30 September
[12] Annual average by financial year (1 April-31 March)
[13] At 30 June
n/a = not available
Source:
Statistical contacts in each country
Version:
18 June 2001

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his assessment is of the efficacy of drug treatment and testing orders in *(a)* reducing drug consumption and *(b)* reducing participation in criminal activity, expressed as a percentage of UK drug use and crime totals. [2383]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* It is too early for an assessment of the effect of the order on drug misuse and crime since roll-out in October 2000. Evaluation of the pilots run under the management of the Merseyside, south-east London and Gloucestershire probation services found that the average amount spent on drugs by offenders subject to drug treatment and testing orders fell from £400 per week in the period before arrest to £25 per week in the early stages of the order and the number of crimes committed by such offenders fell from an average of 137 offences in the month before arrest to around 34 per month after only six weeks on the order. A reconviction study will be carried out in due course.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his assessment is of the continuing effects of the drug treatment and testing orders pilot scheme undertaken in Croydon, Liverpool and Gloucester. [2384]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The independent evaluation of the three pilot schemes found that those who had completed or were nearing the completion of the order at the end of the evaluation period reported that they had stopped offending and in nearly all cases were drug free, except for cannabis use. A reconviction study will be carried out in due course.

Following successful pilots, the drug treatment and testing order was rolled-out to courts throughout England and Wales on 1 October 2000. Latest figures available show that between October 2000and May this year, over 1,750 orders have been made. The pilot evaluation has informed the development of a national standard and related guidance for the implementation of the order.

Young Offenders

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted offenders are being held in each young offenders institution, broken down by *(a)* average age, *(b)* average length of sentence and *(c)* category of offence; and if he will make a statement. [2111]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data are in a table, which has been placed in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Occupied Territories

13. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on illegal settlements in the occupied territories. [1553]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government deplore all settlement activity in the occupied territories (including East Jerusalem). It is illegal under international law and a serious obstacle to peace.

We continue to urge both parties to implement swiftly and in full the complete package of the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee report, which includes a freeze on all settlement activity.

Nice Treaty

14. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has had with ministerial counterparts from the Republic of Ireland to discuss the Nice treaty; and if he will make a statement. [1554]

Mr. Straw: I met my ministerial counterparts from the Republic of Ireland at the 11 and 25 June General Affairs Council and at the Gothenburg European Council.

As I explained to the House last week, member states have expressed their readiness to help the Irish Government find a way forward, taking into account the concerns reflected by the result of the 7 June referendum, without reopening the text of the Nice treaty.

20. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his Irish counterpart regarding the treaty of Nice. [1520]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), UIN 1554.

Sri Lanka

15. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will meet representatives of the Government of Sri Lanka to discuss human rights issues and the state's policy towards the Tamil people; and if he will make a statement. [1555]

Mr. Straw: We remain concerned by reports of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, and continue to remind the Government of the need to respect human rights. We are also concerned about the plight of civilians affected by the conflict and have urged the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to cease hostilities and work with Norway to conclude a peaceful settlement.

I look forward to discussing a range of issues with the Sri Lankan Government in due course.

30. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the peace negotiations in Sri Lanka. [1530]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to give our wholehearted support to Norway's efforts to facilitate peace talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. We urge both parties to the conflict to intensify their efforts and work with the Norwegians to find a peaceful, negotiated settlement that meets the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka.

Jews (Iran)

16. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the treatment of imprisoned Jews in Iran. [1556]

Mr. Bradshaw: Nine of the Jews sentenced in Shiraz on alleged espionage charges last year remain imprisoned. We understand that the prisoners continue to have access to newspapers, Kosher food, twice-weekly visits from their families and are held in a group cell. The sentences were reduced on appeal in September 2000.

Israel

17. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet the Foreign Minister of Israel to discuss bilateral trade and the peace process; and if he will make a statement. [1557]

Mr. Bradshaw: On his first working day in his new role on 11 June, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, and discussed the situation in the Middle East. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, on 24 June. The Middle East Peace Process featured prominently in their discussion, as did bilateral issues such as trade.

21. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about discussions which took place during the recent visit to the United Kingdom by the Prime Minister of Israel. [1521]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met Israeli Prime Minister Sharon during Prime Minister Sharon's short stop-over visit to the UK on Sunday 24 June. Much of the discussion focused on the present situation in the Middle East. The Prime Minister urged Prime Minister Sharon to take urgent steps in parallel with the Palestinians to implement in full the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee report.

Death Penalty

18. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on campaigning internationally against the death penalty. [1518]

Peter Hain: The British Government oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. We have gained a reputation as a leading advocate of worldwide abolition, not least through the work of our Death Penalty Panel.

The British Government also co-sponsor the EU resolution on the death penalty tabled at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

We shall continue to work tirelessly, both bilaterally and with the EU partners, to further the worldwide trend towards abolition of the death penalty.

Zimbabwe

19. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the political situation in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [1519]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain concerned at the situation in Zimbabwe. We would like to see an end to violence and intimidation; positive steps by the Zimbabwe Government to create the conditions for free and fair election; economic reform; and the introduction of a sustainable land reform programme, in line with the principle agreed by the Government of Zimbabwe and the international donors at the 1998 Land conference.

26. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Zimbabwe. [1526]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are concerned by continuing violence and intimidation by the war veterans. The people of Zimbabwe must be allowed to vote freely, and without fear; and to live and work in a country governed by the rule of law.

33. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit of Commonwealth Ministers to Zimbabwe. [1533]

Mr. Bradshaw: There has been no Commonwealth ministerial visit to Zimbabwe this year.

Kyoto Protocol

22. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to press for international implementation of the Kyoto protocols. [1522]

Peter Hain: Climate change is one of the most important global issues we face. It is the firm policy of this Government to press for a successful outcome to the Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP6) in Bonn and to work towards ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto Treaty in 2002.

Gibraltar

23. **Mr. Trend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on Gibraltar. [1523]

Peter Hain: The Government will continue to stand by their commitments to the people of Gibraltar as set out in the Preamble to the Gibraltar Constitution. We have agreed with Spain to resume ministerial level talks on Gibraltar under the Brussels Process, and aim to use these talks to re-establish a framework for dialogue with Spain on a number of issues concerning Gibraltar. The Government intend that the Government of Gibraltar should be fully engaged in this process.

Nepal

24. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Nepalese Government. [1524]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our Ambassador in Kathmandu has had substantive discussions with the Nepalese Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Finance Minister since the beginning of June.

Peru

25. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with Peru. [1525]

Mr. MacShane: We congratulate the Peruvian Government on the successful conclusion of their elections and look forward to working closely with the new President, Alejandro Toledo. I shall be representing my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the inauguration ceremony in Lima on 28 July. We express again our sorrow at the recent earthquake in Peru to which we pledged £250,000 of emergency relief.

World Service

27. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the work of the BBC World Service. [1527]

Mr. MacShane: The BBC World Service is the best known and most respected voice in international broadcasting, increasing respect for, and good will towards, Britain around the world. The Government aim to ensure that the World Service retains its pre-eminent position. That is why we are providing an extra £64 million for it in 2001–04.

Kashmir

28. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects of self-determination for the people of Kashmir. [1528]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is clear that any solution in Kashmir must involve, and reflect the views of, the people of Kashmir. We have therefore welcomed the Indian Government's decision to engage in dialogue with Kashmiris. We hope that all parties directly involved will find a just and lasting settlement soon.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in allowing human rights monitors to enter Indian-occupied Kashmir. [1517]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have consistently urged the Indian authorities to allow access to Kashmir for international human rights bodies, including the UN Rapporteurs on Torture and on Extra-judicial Executions and the Working Group on Disappearances, and organisations such as Amnesty International. We are disappointed that, after repeated requests from the organisations concerned, such visits have not yet been authorised.

Macedonia

31. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet with President Boris Trajkovski to discuss the situation in Macedonia. [1531]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary plans to visit Macedonia soon. He spoke to President Trajkovski on 3 July and repeated our full support for the President's efforts to bring about a political settlement through dialogue. The situation in Macedonia remains grave but is not beyond repair. Early signs of progress are now beginning to emerge with a ceasefire agreement and positive movement on a political settlement.

European Council

32. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his priorities for the European Council meetings in the coming year. [1532]

Peter Hain: We want the European Council in its meetings in the next 12 months to help maintain the momentum in the enlargement negotiations, so that these can be completed by the end of 2002 with those candidate countries which are ready; and, at the same time, to do whatever is necessary to assist the process of ratifying the Nice treaty. The European Council should promote the open debate on the future development of the EU as part of the preparation for the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference. It should continue its work in promoting a liberal global trading system, and in modernising Europe's economy to create more and better jobs, as agreed at Lisbon in 2000. It should review progress in implementing the sustainable development strategy agreed at Gothenburg last month. It should continue to create an area of freedom, security and justice, as agreed at Tampere in 1999; and in developing the common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy, and the Union's external relations more generally, to ensure that Europe's interests and objectives are properly projected on the world stage.

Kenya

34. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on bilateral relations with Kenya. [1535]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK enjoys strong bilateral ties with Kenya. The UK is Kenya's second largest export market and Kenya's largest source of imports.

We strongly support Kenya's economic reform process. This should bring sustained economic growth, greater accountability and efficiency in the public sector, and improved services to the poor.

European Parliaments

35. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to strengthen relations between Parliaments in Europe. [1536]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has proposed that representatives of national parliaments be more involved in European matters through a Second Chamber of the European Parliament which could review the EU's work and provide democratic oversight at a European level of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The role of national parliament in the European architecture is one of the agenda items for the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. We welcome all contributions to the debate on this issue.

Western Sahara

36. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Western Sahara. [1537]

Mr. Bradshaw: We fully support the efforts of the UN Secretary General, his Personal Envoy, James Baker, and the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to find a just and lasting solution to the situation in Western Sahara.

UN Commission on Human Rights (Voting Records)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the recorded outcome of the vote was, how his vote was cast, and which other states voted with him at the UN Commission on Human Rights in March and April on *(a)* statement 2001/3 submitted by Cuba on mercenaries, *(b)* statement 2001/16 submitted by the Czech Republic on Cuba, *(c)* statement 2001/26 submitted by South Africa on human rights unilateral coercive measures and *(d)* statement 2001/36 submitted by Cuba on popular participation and democracy. [2315]

Peter Hain: The Commission on Human Rights is one of the main forums in which international human rights standards are drawn up and monitored. We are committed to playing a major role at CHR, and ensuring that human rights violations, wherever they take place, are brought to the attention of the international community.

The UK voted against the Cuban resolution on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination (2001/3). It was adopted by 35 votes to 11 with six abstentions. Japan, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Norway and the US also voted against.

The UK voted for the Czech resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba (2001/16). It was adopted by 22 votes to 20 with 10 abstentions. Cameroon, Madagascar, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Argentina, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Uruguay, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the US voted with the UK.

The UK voted against the South African resolution on Human Rights and Unilateral Coercive Measures (2001/26). The resolution was adopted by 37 votes to seven with eight abstentions. (Japan, Latvia, Poland, Germany, Norway and the US also voted against).

The UK voted against the Cuban resolution on Strengthening of Popular Participation, Equity, Social Justice and Non-discrimination as Essential Foundations of Democracy (2001/36). The resolution was adopted by 28 votes to four with 21 abstentions. (Germany, Japan, and the USA also voted against).

I will send my hon. Friend a full voting record, which shows how each CHR member voted on each resolution. A copy will also be placed in the House of Commons Library.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will respond to the Foreign Affairs Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2000–01: European Union Enlargement and Nice Follow-up, HC318. [2397]

Peter Hain: The Government's response to the Foreign Affairs Committee's report will be laid before the House rises on 20 July.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been received from the Government of the Russian Federation concerning Her Majesty's Government's recent proposals to the Security Council of the United Nations on Smart sanctions on Iraq. [2707]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 1 June 2001 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1352, confirming its agreement to the principles which we and the US had proposed to change the sanctions regime against Iraq. Later this month, however, Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov sent a message to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in which he made it clear that the Russian Federation would not allow the adoption of our draft resolution detailing those new arrangements. There have also been regular discussions at official level both in New York and elsewhere in recent months. We will continue to try to resolve outstanding issues with the Council members in the hope of introducing our new approach as soon as possible.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the recent proposals by Her Majesty's Government to the Security Council of the United Nations concerning Smart sanctions on Iraq. [2733]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have placed in the Library copies of the intervention made by our Permanent Representative to the United Nations during the formal Security Council debate on Iraq on 26 and 28 June and his Explanation of Vote during consideration of the oil for food rollover resolution on 3 July. These set out the proposals we have put forward for changes to the UN sanctions regime against Iraq.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent decision by the United Nations Security Council to delay a decision on sanctions against Iraq for another five months. [2671]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 1 June 2001 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1352, confirming its agreement to the principles which we and the US had proposed to change UN controls on Iraq. The Council set itself 30 days to agree the details of arrangements to improve the flow of civilian goods to the Iraqi people while maintaining controls on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Despite widespread international support for these proposals the Council was unable to agree the details within that time scale. While we regret that we were unable to introduce the new system as early as we had wished, we remain serious about addressing the Iraqi people's needs and controls on Iraq's weapons. Work will therefore continue in New York to resolve the outstanding issues as soon as possible.

Nuclear Material (Russia)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last reviewed the aid budget allocated to assist the former Soviet Union with a programme to contain then reduce the hazards from deteriorating nuclear material in the Murmansk region. [1513]

Peter Hain: In 2000 Her Majesty's Government carried out a comprehensive review of the nuclear safety and security problems in the countries of the former Soviet Union. This included an assessment of the hazards from deteriorating nuclear material in the Murmansk region. As a result of the review the UK pledged £84 million over three years to tackle a range of nuclear problems in the former Soviet Union, including that material in the Murmansk region. This budget is regularly reviewed by an inter-departmental committee, which includes officials from the FCO.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his Russian counterparts to agree a programme for disbursing aid to assist in containing and reducing hazards from deteriorating nuclear material in the Murmansk region; and when he expects that programme to commence. [1514]

Peter Hain: The Secretary of State has not yet had the opportunity to meet his Russian counterpart to discuss the hazards from deteriorating nuclear material in the Murmansk region. His predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), most recently discussed this issue with the Russian Prime Minister on 20 September 2000. There have also been regular and frequent contacts at official level to seek to move forward with disbursing our assistance. I hope such a programme will commence in the near future, once the Russian Government agree to provide adequate legal framework arrangements.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of *(a)* the extent of the hazards of deteriorating nuclear material (i) in the Kola Peninsula and (ii) at other military establishments in Russia; and *(b)* the costs of eliminating these hazards. [1515]

Peter Hain: In 2000 Her Majesty's Government carried out a comprehensive review of the nuclear safety and security problems in the countries of the former Soviet Union. This included an assessment of the hazards of nuclear material on the Kola Peninsula and at other military establishments in Russia. As a result of the review the UK pledged £84 million over three years to tackle a range of nuclear problems in the former Soviet Union. A top priority will be work to decommission radioactive waste from decommissioned Russian nuclear submarines: it is estimated that there are over 100 such vessels in and around the Kola Peninsula, and over 70 in the rest of the Russian Federation.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy on pledging support to the Russian Federation Military Plutonium Disposition Programme; if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* all UK submissions and *(b)* other submissions relevant to UK policy to the G8 meeting this month in Genoa, in respect of the deliberation of the Russian Plutonium Programme. [3010]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK pledged £70 million over a 10-year period at the Okinawa Summit in July 2000 to support the Russian Federation Military Plutonium Disposition Programme. We have continued to play a full role in the programme through our membership of the G8 Plutonium Disposition Planning Group (PDPG), which has been dedicated to taking this work forward. The

Group has met regularly since its formation in late 2000 and has produced a report for consideration at the Genoa Summit. An unclassified copy was placed in the House of Commons Library on 9 July 2001. We are aware of no other submissions to the G8 Summit in Genoa.

Amnesty International

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to assist Amnesty International in securing the release of *(a)* U Ohn Maung, *(b)* U Sein Hla Oo, *(c)* Dr. Than Nyein and *(d)* U Tun Kywe in Burma. [3259]

Mr. Bradshaw: We take every opportunity bilaterally, through the EU and also the United Nations to press the Burmese regime to release all political prisoners.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, all four people mentioned are MPs-elect for the National League for Democracy, which overwhelmingly won the general election in Burma in 1990. The latest information we have from the National League for Democracy is that only three MPs-elect remain in prison and that all those listed have been released.

I very much welcome the recent release of over 30 MPs-elect from detention in Burma and hope this represents the start of an ongoing process leading to the early release of all political prisoners and national reconciliation.

Family Visit Visas

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown, by entry clearance post, of the number of family visit visa applications *(a)* received, *(b)* determined, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* refused in (i) April and (ii) May. [3308]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our latest information from the 108 entry clearance posts which submit monthly statistical data is as follows:

Family visit visa applications 2001

	Applications received		*Applications determined*		*Applications allowed*		*Applications refused*	
	April	*May*	*April*	*May*	*April*	*May*	*April*	*May*
1. Abidjan	26	29	24	31	23	30	1	1
2. Abu Dhabi	64	102	53	89	45	79	8	10
3. Abuja	0	27	0	15	0	9	0	6
4. Accra	1,969	2,410	1,294	2,373	302	1,346	992	1,027
5. Addis Ababa	15	10	15	11	7	4	8	7
6. Almaty	25	13	25	13	24	10	1	3
7. Amman	11	10	12	10	11	9	1	1
8. Amsterdam	48	57	48	57	43	56	5	1
9. Ankara	27	32	27	32	25	32	2	0
10. Bahrain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. Baku	13	16	13	13	13	13	0	0
12. Bangkok	69	197	125	145	88	111	37	34
13. Banjul	80	104	60	67	51	59	9	8
14. Beirut	128	183	126	181	126	181	0	0
15. Belgrade	146	85	146	96	140	83	6	13
16. Bogota	103	158	103	158	95	146	8	12
17. Bombay	2,429	2,706	2,430	2,696	1,999	2,159	431	537
18. Bratislava	153	198	146	176	146	175	0	1
19. Brussels	33	18	14	7	14	6	0	1
20. Bucharest	111	182	112	179	106	174	6	5
21. Budapest	8	6	8	6	8	4	0	2
22. Cairo	193	322	186	316	179	298	7	18
23. Calcutta	338	450	337	449	335	445	2	4
24. Canberra	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25. Casablanca	104	106	104	105	99	98	5	7
26. Chicago	200	368	182	356	180	355	2	1
27. Colombo	110	130	100	130	35	93	65	37
28. Copenhagen	45	53	43	49	43	49	0	0
29. Dakar	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
30. Damascus	50	108	49	107	45	102	4	5
31. Dar Es Salaam	90	123	89	130	79	116	10	14
32. Dhaka	521	569	421	509	246	297	175	212
33. Doha	22	45	22	45	19	43	3	2
34. Dubai	96	178	60	143	54	118	6	25
35. Dublin	16	37	20	32	18	30	2	2
36. Dusseldorf	331	316	302	261	301	258	1	3
37. Ekaterinburg	20	0	20	0	19	0	1	0
38. Geneva	65	85	62	80	61	74	1	6
39. Georgetown	47	74	62	74	61	67	1	7
40. Guangzhou	230	234	185	167	161	152	24	15
41. Hanoi	4	15	6	7	1	4	5	3
42. Harare	'—	'—	0	0	'—	'—	'—	'—
43. Havana	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	0
44. Hong Kong	44	95	34	72	34	72	0	0
45. Islamabad	2,994	'—	2,985	0	2,070	'—	915	'—
46. Istanbul	339	460	278	368	247	325	31	43
47. Jakarta	63	119	66	127	59	122	7	5

Family visit visa applications 2001

	Applications received		*Applications determined*		*Applications allowed*		*Applications refused*	
	April	*May*	*April*	*May*	*April*	*May*	*April*	*May*
48. Jeddah	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	10
49. Jerusalem	28	72	28	68	28	68	0	0
50. Kampala	186	116	175	108	148	93	27	15
51. Karachi	569	1,251	569	1,251	487	1,021	82	230
52. Kathmandu	0	152	0	117	0	98	0	19
53. Khartoum	100	115	51	78	37	58	14	20
54. Kiev	128	147	108	150	97	132	11	18
55. Kingston	118	140	113	129	103	114	10	15
56. Kuala Lumpur	17	22	18	22	15	17	3	5
57. Kuwait	42	67	42	67	35	59	7	8
58. Lagos	2,436	[1]—	1,710	0	1,614	[1]—	96	[1]—
59. Lima	21	52	21	52	21	50	0	2
60. Los Angeles	321	423	321	423	321	422	0	1
61. Luanda	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
62. Lusaka	66	[1]—	66	0	62	[1]—	4	[1]—
63. Madras	656	577	671	595	652	579	19	16
64. Madrid	29	38	29	38	29	37	0	1
65. Manila	145	223	145	223	93	155	52	68
66. Mexico City	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
67. Minsk	31	39	30	31	30	30	0	1
68. Moscow	357	438	342	400	334	386	8	14
69. Muscat	100	96	100	92	95	89	5	3
70. Nairobi	238	342	238	342	211	303	27	39
71. New Delhi	2,017	2,991	2,017	2,991	1,371	2,160	648	831
72. New York	675	985	660	969	660	968	0	1
73. Nicosia	156	252	153	6	148	0	5	6
74. Oslo	73	99	72	92	71	92	1	0
75. Ottawa	336	522	248	431	247	431	1	0
76. Paris	339	348	328	353	326	352	2	1
77. Peking	202	355	196	345	182	337	14	8
78. Port Louis	373	605	373	601	356	585	17	16
79. Port of Spain	3	10	2	12	2	12	0	0
80. Prague	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
81. Pretoria	12	19	12	11	10	9	2	2
82. Quito	18	30	18	28	18	28	0	0
83. Riga	6	[1]—	6	0	6	[1]—	0	[1]—
84. Riyadh	8	11	15	31	7	19	8	12
85. Rome	99	80	86	76	82	75	4	1
86. Sana'a	6	[1]—	6	0	4	[1]—	2	[1]—
87. Santo Domingo	3	4	3	4	2	3	1	1
88. Sarajevo	81	86	81	86	77	82	4	4
89. Shanghai	144	174	144	180	125	159	19	21
90. Singapore	36	55	32	57	31	57	1	0
91. Skopje	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	1
92. Sofia	144	151	143	148	143	147	0	1
93. St. Petersburg	78	114	78	114	75	109	3	5
94. Stockholm	106	146	129	155	126	154	3	1
95. Taipei	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
96. Tashkent	24	29	24	29	23	29	1	0
97. Tbilisi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
98. Tehran	0	1,099	1,554	1,063	1,515	1,018	39	45
99. Tirana	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
100. Tokyo	5	11	5	10	5	8	0	2
101. Tripoli	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0
102. Tunis	130	155	130	155	105	116	25	39
103. Vienna	12	9	12	9	12	9	[1]—	0
104. Warsaw	1	5	0	3	0	1	0	2
105. Washington	0	504	0	497	0	496	0	1
106. Wellington	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	0
107. Yaounde	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
108. Zagreb	137	131	132	131	127	128	5	3
Total	22,195	23,727	21,835	22,673	17,882	19,106	3,953	3,567

[1] Information not yet received from Posts

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown, by entry clearance post, of the number of family visit visa refusals in relation to which *(a)* an appeal was received, *(b)* the refusal was overturned by an entry clearance manager after receipt of an appeal and *(c)* an appeal was despatched in (i) April and (ii) May. [3309]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our latest information from the 108 entry clearance posts which submit monthly statistical data is as follows.

Family visit visa refusals 2001

	Appeals received		Refusals overturned by ECM		Appeals despatched	
	April	May	April	May	April	May
1. Abidjan	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Abu Dhabi	1	3	0	0	1	2
3. Abuja	0	9	0	0	0	4
4. Accra	22	36	2	0	24	17
5. Addis Ababa	2	1	0	0	0	2
6. Almaty	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Amman	1	0	1	0	0	0
8. Amsterdam	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Ankara	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Bahrain	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. Baku	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. Bangkok	3	11	1	0	2	9
13. Banjul	0	1	0	0	0	1
14. Beirut	0	0	0	0	0	0
15. Belgrade	0	2	0	0	0	0
16. Bogota	1	0	0	0	1	0
17. Bombay	32	42	2	4	21	32
18. Bratislava	0	0	0	0	0	0
19. Brussels	0	0	0	0	0	0
20. Bucharest	0	3	0	1	0	2
21. Budapest	0	0	0	0	0	0
22. Cairo	0	0	0	0	0	0
23. Calcutta	0	1	0	0	0	0
24. Canberra	0	0	0	0	0	0
25. Casablanca	0	0	0	0	1	0
26. Chicago	0	0	0	0	0	0
27. Colombo	8	10	1	2	7	8
28. Copenhagen	0	0	0	0	0	0
29. Dakar	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
30. Damascus	0	0	0	0	0	0
31. Dar Es Salaam	3	4	0	0	1	4
32. Dhaka	20	22	0	2	20	18
33. Doha	0	0	0	0	0	0
34. Dubai	5	0	0	3	4	6
35. Dublin	1	0	0	0	0	0
36. Dusseldorf	0	0	0	0	0	0
37. Ekaterinburg	0	0	0	0	0	0
38. Geneva	0	0	0	0	0	0
39. Georgetown	1	2	1	1	1	0
40. Guangzhou	2	2	2	0	2	0
41. Hanoi	0	0	0	0	0	0
42. Harare	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
43. Havana	0	0	0	0	0	0
44. Hong Kong	0	0	0	0	0	0
45. Islamabad	166	[1]	6	[1]	50	[1]
46. Istanbul	3	5	1	0	4	5
47. Jakarta	3	0	0	0	3	0
48. Jeddah	0	0	0	0	0	0
49. Jerusalem	0	0	0	0	0	0
50. Kampala	1	2	1	0	1	0
51. Karachi	17	12	0	3	5	18
52. Kathmandu	0	0	0	0	0	0
53. Khartoum	0	8	2	0	2	6
54. Kiev	0	1	0	0	0	0
55. Kingston	0	0	0	0	0	0
56. Kuala Lumpur	1	0	0	0	1	0
57. Kuwait	0	0	0	0	0	0
58. Lagos	47	[1]	7	[1]	45	[1]
59. Lima	0	0	0	0	0	0
60. Los Angeles	0	0	0	0	0	0
61. Luanda	0	0	0	0	0	0
62. Lusaka	0	1	0	0	0	1
63. Madras	3	1	0	0	5	2
64. Madrid	0	0	0	0	0	0
65. Manila	28	15	0	0	20	4
66. Mexico City	0	0	0	0	0	0
67. Minsk	0	0	0	0	0	0
68. Moscow	3	0	0	0	2	1
69. Muscat	1	0	0	0	1	0
70. Nairobi	2	0	0	0	2	0
71. New Delhi	45	51	4	8	31	24
72. New York	0	0	0	0	0	0
73. Nicosia	0	1	0	0	0	1
74. Oslo	1	0	0	0	0	0

Family visit visa refusals 2001

	Appeals received		Refusals overturned by ECM		Appeals despatched	
	April	May	April	May	April	May
75. Ottawa	0	0	0	0	0	0
76. Paris	0	0	0	0	0	0
77. Peking	1	0	0	0	1	0
78. Port Louis	1	4	1	0	0	4
79. Port of Spain	0	0	0	0	0	0
80. Prague	0	0	0	0	0	0
81. Pretoria	0	0	0	0	0	0
82. Quito	0	0	0	0	0	0
83. Riga	0	[1]	0	[1]	0	[1]
84. Riyadh	3	1	0	0	0	0
85. Rome	0	0	0	0	0	0
86. Sana'a	5	[1]	1	[1]	6	[1]
87. Santo Domingo	0	0	0	0	0	0
88. Sarajevo	0	0	0	0	0	0
89. Shanghai	0	0	0	0	0	0
90. Singapore	0	0	0	0	0	0
91. Skopje	0	0	0	0	0	0
92. Sofia	0	0	0	0	0	0
93. St. Petersburg	0	0	0	0	0	0
94. Stockholm	0	0	0	0	0	0
95. Taipei	0	0	0	0	0	0
96. Tashkent	0	0	0	0	0	0
97. Tbilisi	0	0	0	0	0	0
98. Tehran	2	4	0	0	1	2
99. Tirana	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
100. Tokyo	0	0	0	0	0	0
101. Tripoli	0	5	0	0	0	3
102. Tunis	1	12	0	0	1	12
103. Vienna	0	0	0	0	0	0
104. Warsaw	0	0	0	0	0	0
105. Washington	0	1	0	0	0	1
106. Wellington	0	0	0	0	0	0
107. Yaounde	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
108. Zagreb	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	436	274	33	24	266	190

[1] Information not yet received from Posts

The Balkans

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in the Balkans. [1548]

Mr. MacShane: The problems in Macedonia threaten the stability of the Balkans region. Following international facilitation, there appear to be early signs of progress: a ceasefire was agreed last week, and Macedonian party leaders are now in talks to agree a final political settlement. Regionally, we are working with partners and key international organisations to help foster peace and stability, focusing on regional co-operation, inter-ethnic reconciliation and economic reform through the Stability Pact and the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Horticultural Research Site (Efford)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the future of the horticultural research site at Efford near Lymington. [1394]

Mr. Morley: The Chief Executive of Horticulture Research International informs me that its Efford site is very much part of the future of the organisation as set out in its restructuring plan approved by my predecessor last

year. The new site manager is working closely with the horticulture industry to ensure that Efford carries out the research and knowledge transfer activities which can best support growers. HRI is also exploring the scope for collaborative work and joint ventures with Southampton University and Chilworth Science Park.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what genetically-modified crops are being grown at the horticultural research establishment at Efford near Lymington. [1395]

Mr. Meacher: HRI has informed us that a small number of genetically modified banana plants are being grown under Health and Safety Executive approved and licensed containment conditions under glass at HRI's Efford site. These plants contribute to a doctoral research project undertaken in collaboration with a UK University which is investigating the fundamental processes in the ripening of fruits.

Whaling

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress with international agreements on whaling. [1534]

Mr. Morley: The next meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) is to take place from 23–27 July in London. We shall take this opportunity to reaffirm our opposition to all forms of whaling other than some subsistence whaling by indigenous people. We shall also resist any attempts by those in support of a resumption of commercial whaling to lift the current moratorium. There will be further discussion on the Revised Management Scheme, welfare aspects of whaling killing, Whale Sanctuaries in the South Pacific and South Atlantic and on whale stocks.

The Government will be making a statement shortly on the line we propose to take at the IWC meeting.

Artificial Reef Project

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce a decision on the artificial reef project off Whitsand Bay. [2690]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The application to place a vessel on the seabed in Whitsand Bay is currently under consideration and our decision on whether to issue a licence under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 will be announced shortly.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many CAP grants were paid directly into foreign banks in each year from 1997 to date; and how much money was paid in each year. [1401]

Mr. Morley: No CAP grants were paid directly into foreign bank accounts in any of the years from 1997 to date.

Beef (Special Premium Claims)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European Commission's proposals to *(a)* reduce the UK national ceiling for beef special premium claims and *(b)* reduce the stocking density limits. [1592]

Mr. Morley: The overall effect of the proposal to reduce the EU national BSP ceilings is to reduce the potential for expansion of production. Based on recent usage figures it does not imply an immediate significant reduction in production. As the UK has historically used the majority of its available ceiling we have not had to bear the more severe cuts imposed on some other member states, and suffer only a 4 per cent. cut in ceiling. Forecasts have predicted that production in 2002–03 will be almost the same level as that of 1997. This would mean that the UK would have a total number of claims below its revised ceiling and producers would not be subjected to clawback on their beef special premium claims.

The overall effect of lowering of the stocking density limits on beef special premium and suckler cow premium claims, from 2.0 livestock units per hectare (LU/ha) to 1.9 LU/ha in 2002, is difficult to assess since the reduced limits will have different effects at the level of individual producers. In some cases it is possible that farmers might have to reduce claims in order to meet the stocking density limits. However, all assessments will be clouded by the restocking position of farmers who have been affected by foot and mouth disease controls.

Over-30-months Scheme

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will reintroduce in areas which have been declared provisionally free of foot and mouth disease the over-30-months slaughter scheme for cattle; and if she will make a statement. [2599]

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the need to reopen the over-30-months scheme. [2573]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* The over-30-months scheme has been suspended, other than in Northern Ireland and for casualty animals in Great Britain, due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. As a consequence beef and dairy producers have had to retain eligible cattle longer than they would wish, incurring feeding and other costs and without income from scheme payments. The scheme will be reopened as soon as the processing capacity, which has been diverted to deal with the foot and mouth outbreak, can be made available to the scheme.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if energy suppliers can meet energy efficiency targets set under the Energy Efficiency Commitment scheme by expansion of the gas network. [2301]

Mr. Meacher: Under the proposed Energy Efficiency Commitment for 2002–05, gas and electricity suppliers will be required to meet energy efficiency targets. It is proposed that companies should be free to develop the most cost-effective schemes. The Regulator would be responsible for determining whether any proposed action qualifies towards a supplier's energy efficiency target and, if so, what improvement in energy efficiency should be attributed to it. I propose to issue a consultation paper on the commitment in the summer.

Recycling

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to set higher targets for recycling. [1919]

Mr. Meacher: The Government set out our programme for delivering sustainable waste management in "Waste Strategy 2000", published in May last year, and have set out statutory targets under best value for local authorities to double the amount of household waste recycled within three years and almost treble it within five years. We will keep the targets for household waste recycling and composting under review, and increase them as appropriate once these initial targets have been reached.

Young Farmers

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what efforts are being made to encourage young farmers in the agricultural industry, with particular reference to family and livestock farming. [2174]

Mr. Morley: One of the key tasks for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is to work with all concerned to develop an economically viable, sustainable, diverse and dynamic farming industry. The enthusiasm and fresh ideas young farmers bring to the industry will be vital in helping to secure this aim, as are the skills of the many family-run livestock farms which are currently struggling to cope with the appalling difficulties caused by the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

The Government are supporting the industry in many ways. These include the measures in the Agriculture Strategy launched last year and the food and mouth recovery programme announced on 8 May by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Together these measures will help create the economic conditions in which a restructured industry can flourish once foot and mouth disease has been eradicated. This will be of benefit to all farmers including young farmers and family-run farms.

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to reply to the letter to her predecessor from the right hon. Member for Berkwick-upon-Tweed dated 8 February about genetically indexed flocks, to which a holding reply was sent on 12 February. [1486]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* I replied to the letter from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed on 4 July 2001.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters regarding Mr. Stephen Dorey of Norton Disney of 25 May and 12 and 18 June. [1980]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State replied to the letters from the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) on 2 July 2001.

Intervention Board

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many administrative staff were employed by the Intervention Board in each of the last 10 years. [1716]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is set out in the table.

Administrative staff employed by the Intervention Board between March 1992 and March 2001

	Permanent staff	*Casual staff*	*Total*
March 1992	972	41	1,013
March 1993	1,037	66	1,103
March 1994	984	63	1,047
March 1995	933	116	1,049
March 1996	902	76	978
March 1997	1,014	184	1,198
March 1998	1,143	302	1,445
March 1999	1,241	230	1,471
March 2000	1,280	122	1,402
March 2001	[1]1,242	[1]99	[1]1,341

[1] March 2001 figures are not yet published

Note:

Figures are based on the staff in post as at 31 March and are published in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts

Light Lambs

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the need for *(a)* a light lamb disposal scheme and *(b)* a light lamb storage scheme. [1692]

Mr. Morley: We estimate that there will be approximately 1.5 million light lambs (live lambs up to around 30 kgs in weight) born this year which, because of the foot and mouth disease-related export ban, cannot be exported to their traditional market outlets in Southern Europe. We are currently examining all possible options for dealing with the problems expected to arise as a result of the closure of export markets.

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations have been made by the farming community as to the use of foreign vets in efforts to eradicate the foot and mouth crisis. [2178]

Mr. Morley: No representations have been made by the farming community as to the use of foreign vets in efforts to eradicate the foot and mouth crisis.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the possibility of foot and mouth disease being spread as a result of burning as a disposal method. [2194]

Mr. Morley: Veterinary advice is that once rigor mortis set in (approximately 24 hours after slaughter) the consequent fall in PH rapidly destroys foot and mouth virus present in muscle tissue. Carcases are soaked in approved disinfectant to destroy any virus on external surfaces and the conditions of cremation are such that any virus surviving in other internal organs (such as lymph nodes or bone marrow) is likely to be destroyed before it could be dispersed from the pyre. Any risk of spread of the virus from a pyre is therefore considered to be minimal.

A collaborative study was carried out with input from the Institute for Animal Health (World Reference Laboratory for foot and mouth disease), the Met Office and DEFRA. The report was published in *The Veterinary Record*, 12 May 2001, pages 585–86 and concluded that disease outbreaks due to virus dispersion from pyres is unlikely to occur in general and that the data analysed showed no evidence that infection due to this cause has occurred.

Contributors to the publication "Spread of foot-and-mouth disease from the burning of animal carcases on open pyres" were John Gloster, Helen Hewson, David Mackay, Tony Garland, Alex Donaldson, Ian Mason, Richard Brown.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action will be taken against the officer in Monmouthshire who attempted to shoot sheep in a field at long range. [786]

Mr. Morley: The marksman concerned was contracted to Monmouthshire county council, who have sent a report to the National Assembly of Wales. The Assembly is considering whether further action may be required.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the need to protect hill flocks; and what plans there are to do so. [2558]

Mr. Morley: A number of measures have been taken to protect hill flocks while not jeopardising the primary objective of eradicating foot and mouth disease. Following consultation in April, the Government introduced a scheme on 3 May, providing for owners of rare breeds of sheep and goats and hefted sheep to apply for exemptions from the contiguous and 3 km culls. On 11 May exceptional arrangements were introduced for the movement of sheep, cattle and goats to common grazings in order to meet the problems affecting hill flocks. On 5 July special arrangements for sheep movement from common land to deal with shearing and other husbandry practices necessary for the welfare of sheep were also announced. We have also contributed to the establishment of the Heritage gene bank to ensure the retention of genes of sheep breeds indigenous to the UK.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many strains of the foot and mouth virus exist; whether vaccines offer protection against each; and if she will make a statement. [1982]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* There are seven serotypes of foot and mouth disease, namely: types O, A, C, South Africa type 1, South Africa type 2, South Africa type 3, and type Asia 1. Vaccination against one of the seven serotypes protects against that serotype but not necessarily against the other six serotypes.

Within the seven serotypes there are strains, some of which are sufficiently different from each other to provide little or no cross-protection. New strains of virus can and do arise in the field.

Vaccines can be manufactured to contain several serotypes and strains of virus appropriate to a given epidemiological situation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to remove all farms from D notice status within Gloucestershire. [1670]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* A substantial amount of surveillance work has already been done in Gloucestershire, but more remains to be carried out. We hope to be able to lift the remaining Protection Zones in Gloucestershire in the next two to three weeks, provided that there are no further outbreaks.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals have been slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease. [2184]

Mr. Morley: As at 2 July, 3,458,000 animals had been compulsorily slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease in Great Britain.

This information can be found on the DEFRA foot and mouth disease website (www.defr.gov.uk/footandmouth/) and is updated daily.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database—figures subject to revision as more data become available.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals have been *(a)* slaughtered and *(b)* disposed of in each day during the foot and mouth crisis. [2189]

Mr. Morley: The table shows details of the number of animals compulsorily slaughtered and disposed of on each day of the foot and mouth crisis in Great Britain. As at 2 July the cumulative total number of animals slaughtered and disposed of were 3,458,000 and 3,441,000 respectively.

Thousand

Day	*Slaughterings*	*Disposals*
23 February 2001	1	0
24 February 2001	0	0
25 February 2001	1	1
26 February 2001	0	1
27 February 2001	2	1
28 February 2001	5	0
1 March 2001	6	0
2 March 2001	7	2
3 March 2001	6	4
4 March 2001	12	3
5 March 2001	4	3
6 March 2001	17	8
7 March 2001	12	8
8 March 2001	4	17
9 March 2001	14	9
10 March 2001	14	9
11 March 2001	13	11

Thousand

Day	Slaughterings	Disposals
12 March 2001	9	5
13 March 2001	14	13
14 March 2001	27	22
15 March 2001	19	15
16 March 2001	29	26
17 March 2001	11	15
18 March 2001	40	23
19 March 2001	21	24
20 March 2001	26	27
21 March 2001	38	27
22 March 2001	53	30
23 March 2001	40	31
24 March 2001	52	51
25 March 2001	42	33
26 March 2001	47	37
27 March 2001	47	29
28 March 2001	56	46
29 March 2001	55	55
30 March 2001	102	75
31 March 2001	86	70
1 April 2001	78	57
2 April 2001	77	83
3 April 2001	90	75
4 April 2001	86	88
5 April 2001	84	110
6 April 2001	98	79
7 April 2001	90	85
8 April 2001	72	84
9 April 2001	81	82
10 April 2001	88	86
11 April 2001	85	76
12 April 2001	74	74
13 April 2001	81	70
14 April 2001	101	76
15 April 2001	78	109
16 April 2001	66	71
17 April 2001	50	63
19 April 2001	71	70
20 April 2001	60	103
21 April 2001	78	67
22 April 2001	47	87
23 April 2001	41	43
24 April 2001	46	67
25 April 2001	23	34
26 April 2001	39	41
27 April 2001	36	56
28 April 2001	27	36
29 April 2001	19	25
30 April 2001	14	41
1 May 2001	17	28
2 May 2001	10	17
3 May 2001	21	15
4 May 2001	8	22
5 May 2001	24	11
6 May 2001	15	16
7 May 2001	11	17
8 May 2001	7	10
9 May 2001	10	12
10 May 2001	12	13
11 May 2001	7	6
12 May 2001	10	8
13 May 2001	4	6
14 May 2001	12	9
15 May 2001	11	10
16 May 2001	7	13
17 May 2001	6	2
18 May 2001	6	5
19 May 2001	14	9
20 May 2001	8	15
21 May 2001	10	12
22 May 2001	11	10
23 May 2001	10	12
24 May 2001	23	15
25 May 2001	16	19
26 May 2001	12	11
27 May 2001	14	15
28 May 2001	11	8
29 May 2001	9	14
30 May 2001	10	12
31 May 2001	5	6
1 June 2001	12	11
2 June 2001	5	9
3 June 2001	12	5
4 June 2001	18	15
5 June 2001	11	19
6 June 2001	5	7
7 June 2001	8	7
8 June 2001	6	4
9 June 2001	7	7
10 June 2001	5	6
11 June 2001	16	7
12 June 2001	6	15
13 June 2001	13	13
14 June 2001	7	6
15 June 2001	4	1
16 June 2001	18	11
17 June 2001	9	11
18 June 2001	7	12
19 June 2001	8	6
20 June 2001	12	9
21 June 2001	4	7
22 June 2001	3	2
23 June 2001	6	7
24 June 2001	9	3
25 June 2001	7	15
26 June 2001	2	2
27 June 2001	4	2
28 June 2001	2	2
29 June 2001	4	3
30 June 2001	4	3
1 July 2001	5	3
2 July 2001	1	2

Source:
DEFRA Disease Control System database—figures subject to revision as more data become available

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the duration of the current foot and mouth disease outbreak. [2181]

Mr. Morley: Because of its nature, the Chief Veterinary Officer has always said that the outbreak would have a long tail. Stock owners can assist by carrying out biosecurity measures as recommended.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements are being made to compensate farmers whose livestock passed the 30-month deadline but could not be sent to abattoirs because of foot and mouth; and if she will make a statement. [2943]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* I appreciate that producers of clean cattle which cannot be marketed at under 30 months of age by virtue of foot and mouth disease movement restrictions will suffer a significant loss of return when such cattle are eventually sold into the over-30-month scheme (OTMS). We are alive to this problem and are considering what action might be appropriate in the context of further measures.

Our first priority must, however, be to isolate and eradicate the disease, so that normal patterns of marketing can be restored. Once this has been done, we will be in a better position to determine the extent to which producers have been obliged to retain cattle which would have been sold at under 30 months of age but which had subsequently to go into the OTMS, and the extent of resultant losses.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will order a public inquiry into the current outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [2094]

Mr. Morley: There will be an inquiry, when the disease is finally over. We have always said we are keen to learn the lessons from this outbreak. The precise nature and scope of the inquiry will as such be a matter for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many sheep in upland areas her Department has tested for foot and mouth; how many and what percentage carried the foot and mouth antibody; and if she will make a statement; [1489]

(2) which flocks of upland sheep and at what locations in the UK have been tested for foot and mouth disease; and how many and what percentage were found to be positive. [1981]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 and 4 July 2001]:* The Department does not categorise sheep flocks sampled for serological testing as "upland" or "lowland". There has, however, been specific testing of hefted sheep which are all found in upland areas. To date, 1,727 adult sheep in 29 hefted flocks have been sampled.

The distribution of these flocks by regional office is as follows:

Carlisle: 14

Exeter: 2

Ayr: 11

Leeds: 1

Cardiff: 1.

No animal was found to have antibodies.

Throughout England and Wales, 492,553 sheep and goats have been blood tested (as at 28 June). We have results from 471,746 animals (at 3 July) which indicate that 0.28 per cent. were antibody-positive.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many documented cases have been brought to her attention involving the slaughter of animals, as part of the programme of control of foot and mouth, which were carried out in inappropriate ways. [1491]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* No such cases have been brought to my attention since my right hon. Friend became Secretary of State in this Department. However, since the start of the foot and mouth outbreak six cases have been brought to the attention of Ministers, where it was alleged that animals had not been dealt with humanely. These incidents have been investigated and appropriate action taken.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the timetable for implementing part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, in order to achieve her Public Service Agreement target of opening up public access to mountain, moor, heath and down and registered common land by the end of 2005. [3154]

Alun Michael: Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires various regulations to be made before the right of access is brought into force. The table sets out the provisional programme for consultation on proposals for regulations and for bringing the regulations into force in order to meet our Public Service Agreement target. We are firmly committed to the 2005 target although the exact timing of each of the intermediate stages in our programme may depend on responses to the various consultation papers which we shall be issuing. I shall consider the views of respondents carefully before laying regulations before Parliament.

Regulation	*Section*	*Consultation commended*	*Date regulations in force*
Regulations regarding mapping of access land and consultation on draft maps	Section 11	March 2001	October 2001
Regulations regarding the establishment of LAFs and the appointment of members	Section 94 (Part V)	July 2001	December 2001
Regulations regarding issue of provisional maps, appeals, and issue of conclusive maps	Section 11	October 2001	April 2002
Regulations regarding dedication of land for access	Section 16	October 2001	March 2002
Regulations relating to exclusion or restriction of access under Chapter II, including appeals	Section 32	November 2001	May 2002
Regulations on removal or relaxation of restrictions on access land and to exclude access in emergencies	Paragraph 7, Schedule 2; Section 31	November 2002	May 2003
Regulations on appeals relating to notices	Section 38	February 2003	August 2003
Regulations regarding review of conclusive maps	Section 11	February 2004	August 2004
References to public places in existing enactments	Section 42	To review before general implementation of right of access	

Progress in developing regulations has been delayed by the secondment of staff to undertake vital work in responding to the foot and mouth crisis. I now expect to lay regulations during the summer recess enabling the Countryside Agency to issue the first draft maps of open country and registered common land in November. I shall review the case for giving earlier access to mountain land and registered common land in the light of experience of the first mapping exercises. This would lead to the commencement of certain regulations earlier than the proposed timetable.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Payments (Post Office)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if it is Government policy to allow indefinitely those who wish to do so to collect their state pension in cash at a post office. [3180]

Malcolm Wicks: Yes.

Occupational Pensions (Disabled People)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on access to membership of occupational pension schems for disabled people when they start employment. [3256]

Mr. McCartney: The Government want to ensure that all employees take advantage of access to good occupational pension schemes. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 inserted a "non-discrimination rule" into the rules of all occupational pension schemes which prevents the general exclusion of disabled people from occupational pension schemes although schemes can apply different eligibility criteria for benefits if the costs of providing those benefits is substantially greater.

Research undertaken in 1999 indicated that there was no evidence of systematic exclusion of disabled people from occupational pension schemes. There was evidence of the application of blanket restrictions on access to ill-health benefits. These restrictions were perceived to be difficult to challenge through existing channels.

The Disability Rights Task Force made a number of recommendations on occupational pensions including access to complaints procedures. Our response to the Task Force—'Towards Inclusion', published on 5 March 2001—proposes, when legislative time allows, amending the Disability Discrimination Act to allow disabled people to complain to an employment tribunal about discrimination by trustees or managers of an occupational pension scheme.

Invalid Carers Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to implement the changes to the invalid carers allowance detailed in his Department's press release dated 3 October 2000. [2796]

Maria Eagle: We have already introduced two of the four measures announced last autumn. In April we increased the carer premium paid through income-related benefits by £10 per week, and raised the invalid care allowance (ICA) earnings limit by £22 per week. The other changes announced enable claims to ICA to be extended to people aged 65 or over and to enable ICA to continue for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for. We intend to introduce a regulatory reform order to provide for these changes shortly.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to cover private clubs. [3257]

Maria Eagle: The Government's response to the Disability Rights Task Force, "Towards Inclusion—civil rights for disabled people", issued in March 2001, noted that the Disability Rights Commission had been asked to develop a voluntary approach instead of legislating to reduce any problems disabled people may have in joining private clubs. Replies to that report are currently being analysed.

Departmental Title Change Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of the recent renaming of his Department, including *(a)* design costs, *(b)* stationery costs, *(c)* new name plaques and *(d)* other costs; and if he will make a statement. [3013]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on 26 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 772W.

Recruit

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the nationwide implementation progress of the programme Recruit. [3017]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Recruit is a pilot initiative offering help to small businesses which employ people from deprived areas through New Deal.

Pilots have been operational since April 2001 and will run until December 2001 when its impact will be evaluated.

Recruit consolidates and simplifies the wage subsidy of the New Deal. The subsidy is currently paid weekly. Under Recruit, it will be paid in two lump sums, one on recruitment and the second to support retention after 13 weeks.

No decisions have been taken on national implementation.

DEFENCE

Defence Equipment Exhibition

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries from which buyers *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be invited to the defence systems and equipment international exhibition being held from 11 to 14 September. [2398]

Dr. Moonie: The full list of countries from which Official Defence Delegations will be invited to attend the defence systems and equipment international exhibition 2001 is still being completed. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it has been finalised.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which days the defence systems and equipment international exhibition will be open to *(a)* overseas customers, *(b)* the press, and *(c)* the public; who will be opening the exhibition; if hon. Members will be invited to it; and which ships from (i) the Royal Navy and (ii) overseas navies will be participating in the exhibition. [2399]

Dr. Moonie: The exhibition is an international trade event organised by a commercial company. It will be open to overseas visitors and fully accredited members of the media from 11 to 14 September but will not be open to the public.

I understand that the exhibition organisers will be inviting a number of hon. Members. A final decision on who will be opening the exhibition has yet to be made.

It is planned, subject to operational constraints, for Royal Navy ships to be present. The organisers have also extended invitations to a number of overseas navies to participate.

TREASURY

Child Benefit

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average increase in the income of *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* couples with children in each income decile, resulting from an increase of (i) £10, (ii) £20 and (iii) £30 in child benefit and the family premium in income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit for each family in which there is at least one child aged three or under. [1567]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact on the numbers of children in poverty in *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* couples with children in each income decile, resulting from an increase of (i) £10, (ii) £15 and (iii) £20 in the rate of child benefit and the child allowances in income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit for each child aged three or under. [1571]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to measure accurately the impact on child poverty of individual changes to the tax and benefit system. The margins of error surrounding these estimates are too large. Taken as a whole, the personal tax and benefit measures introduced over the last parliament are estimated to lift over 1.2 million children out of relative income poverty.

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average increase in the income of *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* couples with children in each income decile, resulting from an increase of (i) £10, (ii) £15 and (iii) £20 in the rate of child benefit and the child allowances in income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit, for each child aged three or under. [1570]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the impact on the numbers of children in poverty in *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* couples with children in each income decile, resulting from an increase of (i) £10, (ii) £20 and (iii) £30 in child benefit and the family premium in income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit, for each family in which there is at least one child aged three or under. [1568]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to measure accurately the impact on child poverty of individual changes to the tax and benefit system. The margins of error surrounding these estimates are too large. Taken as a whole, the personal tax and benefit measures introduced over the last parliament are estimated to lift over 1.2 million children out of relative income poverty.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from organisations in Derbyshire concerning the proposed changes to the landfill tax credit scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2511]

Mr. Boateng: I have received representations from at least one organisation in Derbyshire about the proposed changes to the landfill tax credit scheme. The Government intend to consult interested parties on how the transition from the current scheme to any replacement regime can be managed to ensure that worthwhile projects continue to receive funding.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mortality rates are at age 55 to 60 years, broken down by *(a)* class, *(b)* sex and *(c)* socio-economic ranking. [2797]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Howard Flight, dated 10 July 2001:

The National Statistician has asked me to reply to your recent question asking for the mortality rates at age 55 to 60 years broken down by (a) class, (b) sex and (c) socio-economic ranking. I am replying in his absence. (2797)

I refer you to the answer given to Parliamentary Question 161050, which as indicated by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 11 May in *Official Report*, column 435, was given in private correspondence. A copy of this letter was placed in the House of Commons library. The table below repeats this information.

(a) The table shows age-specific mortality rates for the three year period 1991–93 for men in England and Wales aged 55–59, by social class. Similar data are not available for women, because the occupation of women recorded at death is less reliable than for men. More recent figures by social class are not available,

because calculation of rates depends on knowing the size of the relevant population groups, which is currently only available from the 1991 Census.

Death rates by social class for the three year period 1991–93, England and Wales

Social class	Deaths per 100,000 male population
I (Professional)	2,057
II (Managerial and Technical)	2,148
IIIN (Skilled Non-Manual)	2,975
IIIM (Skilled Manual)	3,521
IV (Partly Skilled)	3,491
V (Unskilled)	5,534
All classes	2,966

Source:

Drever F, Whitehead M (eds). Health Inequalities. Decennial Supplement 15. London: The Stationery Office 1997

The annual age specific mortality rate for all classes in 1999 for males aged 55–59 was 828 and for females, 407.

(b) Social class based on occupation is the only socio-economic classification routinely used for the analysis of mortality.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average life expectancy is for those aged 60 years, broken down by *(a)* class, *(b)* sex and *(c)* socio-economic classification, [2798]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Howard Flight, dated 10 July 2001:

The National Statistician has asked me to reply to your recent question asking for the average life expectancy of those aged 60 by (a) class, (b) sex and (c) socio-economic classification. (2798)

These figures are not available by social class for those aged 60. The table below shows the life expectancy at age 65 for men and women in England and Wales based on data from the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS) for the five years 1992–96. The ONS Longitudinal Study is a one per cent sample of the population of England and Wales.

Life expectancy by social class in the ONS Longitudinal Study, 1992–96, England and Wales

Social Class	Life expectancy at age 65 (years) Males	Females
I (Professional)	16.8	20.8
II (Managerial and Technical)	15.5	19.5
IIIN (Skilled Non-Manual	15.1	18.9
IIIM (Skilled Manual)	14.2	17.9
IV (Partly Skilled)	13.8	17.1
V (Unskilled)	12.6	16.4
All LS sample	14.6	18.0

Source:

Hattersley L. Trends in life expectancy by social class—an update. Health Statistics Quarterly No. 2. London: The Stationery Office 1999.

Figures on life expectancy by gender for the years 1997–99 have been produced by the Government Actuary's Department. Life expectancy in England and Wales for men aged 60 was 19.1 years and for women aged 60 it was 22.8 years.

Social class based on occupation is the only socio-economic classification currently used for the analysis of life expectancy.

Treasury Costs

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Departments' final running costs outturn against their final running costs limit for 1999–2000. [3531]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The departmental final running costs limit under gross control area for 1999–2000 was set at £14,011,463,000 and Departments reported £13,614,958,000 as their final RC outturn, an underspend of £396,505,000 (2.8 per cent.). More information is given in the table.

£000

Gross control area—Class/Departments	Final RC limit	Final outturn	Final R/C under/over
Class I			
Department for Education and Employment	1,050,454	1,027,011	23,443
Financed by the windfall tax	163,896	125,269	38,627
Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England	34,226	33,497	729
Class II			
Department of Health	280,333	275,600	4,733
Class III			
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions	671,812	659,647	12,165
Health and Safety Executive	170,898	167,379	3,519
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising	12,577	10,823	1,754
Office of Water Services	11,591	10,860	731
Office of the Rail Regulators	12,241	11,045	1,196
Class IV			
Home Office	2,136,812	2,044,836	91,976
Financed by the windfall tax	163	137	26
Charity Commission	19,979	19,531	448
Class V			
Lord Chancellor's Departments	525,370	503,694	21,676
Northern Ireland Court Service	30,639	29,595	1,044
Public Record Office	28,750	26,426	2,324
Crown Prosecution Service	228,121	227,004	1,117
Serious Fraud Office	11,224	11,630	594

£000

Gross control area—Class/Departments	Final RC limit	Final outturn	Final R/C under/over
Class VII			
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	498,354	475,221	23,133
Class VIII			
Department for International Development	65,840	65,831	9
Class IX			
Department of Trade and Industry	388,600	380,917	7,683
Office of Electricity Regulation	30,000	30,191	191
Office of Gas Supply	13,830	13,414	416
Office of Telecommunications	12,296	11,607	689
Office of Fair Trading	23,784	23,156	628
Class X			
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	367,300	356,220	11,080
Intervention Board-Executive Agency	68,883	67,076	1,807
Class XI			
Department for Culture, Media and Sports	33,874	32,426	1,448
Class XII			
Department of Social Security	3,042,502	3,002,994	39,508
Financed by the Windfall Tax	11,959	10,413	1,546
Class XIII			
Scotland Office	4,215	3,519	696
Class XIV			
Office of Secretary of State for Wales	2,000	1,139	861
Class XV			
Northern Ireland Office	201,306	172,674	28,632
Class XVI			
HM Treasury	68,713	65,354	3,359
Office for National Statistics	106,645	91,058	15,587
HM Customs and Excise	801,116	787,500	13,616
Registry of Friendly Societies	2,400	1,928	472
Inland Revenue	2,174,503	2,165,419	9,084
National Savings Department	174,536	166,463	8,073
National Investment and Loans Office	1,562	1,435	127
Class XVII			
Cabinet Office	114,982	104,586	10,276
Security and Intelligence Services	410,982	399,203	11,779
Privy Council Office	2,315	2,313	2
Total gross running costs limit	14,011,463	13,614,958	396,505

Offshore Financial Centres

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on offshore financial centres and the steps he has taken in respect of their regulation and taxation. [3030]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's policy is to encourage all offshore centres to meet the highest standards of regulation, supervision and to comply with international initiatives to eliminate unfair tax practices. To this end the Government have been working with international organisations such as the Financial Stability Forum, the Financial Action Task Force, the OECD, and also with EU partners.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the extent to which other Government Departments are performing in relation to the targets set out in their public service agreements. [3012]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Departments published performance against their 1998 public service agreement (PSA) targets in their departmental annual reports, so that people can judge for themselves how well they are doing. It is too early to make an assessment against Departments' 2000 PSAs.

Widow's Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much it would cost to allow widowers whose spouses have died in the past six years to claim widow's bereavement allowance. [3181]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not generally hold information on whether men are widowed and therefore any costing is very approximate. It is

estimated that the cost of extending widow's bereavement allowance to men retrospectively whose wives died between 1995–96 and 1999–2000 could be about £150 million.

Currency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the *(a)* retail business sector and *(b)* overall business sector of accepting both sterling and euro as a means of exchange. [935]

Ruth Kelly: No estimate of these costs has been made, and it would not be a simple task to carry out such an assessment. It is a commercial decision for each UK business to determine whether or not it wishes to accept the euro or, indeed, any foreign currency.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Family Visitor Appeals

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many family visitor appeals the Immigration Appellate Authority plans to deal with *(a)* at an oral hearing and *(b)* on the papers only in the financial years (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03. [3310]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Immigration Appellate Authority expects to deal with approximately 8,860 family visit visa appeals during 2001–02 and 10,000 such cases in 2002–03.

Of these numbers, 60 per cent. of cases are expected to be for oral hearing and 40 per cent. for determination on the papers alone.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals have been received by the Immigration Appellate Authority since 2 October 2000 in which (i) the Immigration Advisory Service and (ii) a Citizens Advice Bureau has been identified as representing the applicant. [3311]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Immigration Appellate Authority has identified 145 cases received between 2 October 2000 and 30 June 2001 in which the Immigration Advisory Service represented the appellant at the adjudicator tier. Of this number, 124 were for an oral hearing and 21 for paper alone.

A Citizens Advice Bureau has been identified as representing the appellant in one oral hearing over the same period.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals have been received by the Immigration Appellate Authority since 2 October 2000 in which (i) a solicitor or barrister and (ii) nobody has been identified as representing the applicant. [3312]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All 1,807 family visitor cases received by the Immigration Appellate Authority record that the appellant has been represented. Of this number, 820 of cases were for oral hearing and 987 for determination on the papers alone. It is not possible to provide a breakdown between solicitor or barrister representation without incurring disproportionate cost.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average time taken by the Immigration Appellate Authority to process, from receipt to determination *(a)* oral family visitor appeals, *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals, *(c)* asylum appeals and *(d)* other immigration appeals. [3314]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The current average times, for this business year, by the Immigration Appellate Authority to process cases from receipt to determination, are:

(a) 6.63 weeks for oral family visitor appeals

(b) 3.66 weeks for paper only family visitor appeals

(c) 21.79 weeks for asylum appeals

(d) 19.6 weeks for other immigration appeals.

Asylum Appeals

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time adjudicators are available to deal with asylum appeals. [3313]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are currently 78 full-time and 323 part-time adjudicators available to hear asylum appeals.

Judicial Appointments

James Purnell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor will appoint a judicial appointments commissioner to oversee judicial appointments in Northern Ireland. [3616]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Pending a decision on the devolution of justice matters, which are expected matters under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and which would require primary legislation, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has decided to subject the appointment of judges and silks in Northern Ireland to supervision and scrutiny by a Commissioner. The Lord Chancellor has consulted the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and others on the necessary adaptations to the model suggested by Sir Leonard Peach for England and Wales, and the post will be advertised in the press from tomorrow.

The early appointment of a Commissioner to audit, oversee and monitor all aspects of the existing appointments procedures is a practical step which will advance public confidence and provide strong reassurance about the integrity of the current system.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further progress the Lord Chancellor has made in establishing a commission to oversee judicial appointments and Queen's Counsel appointment procedures in England and Wales. [3615]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Professor Sir Colin Campbell was appointed as First Commissioner for Judicial Appointments by Order in Council made on 14 March 2001. He started work immediately on developing the Commission's roles of auditing the judicial appointments and Queen's Counsel appointment procedures and

investigating individual complaints. Sir Colin and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor are very keen to progress to the next stage in the establishment of the Commission, which will be the appointment of the first few Deputy Commissioners. There is also to be a Commissioner for Judicial Appointments for Northern Ireland, who will additionally serve as a Deputy Commissioner in England and Wales. The posts will be advertised in the press from tomorrow, with a view to the appointments being made around the end of the year.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 July 2001

HEALTH

Anti-psychotic Medication

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the prescribing rates in the last three years for which figures are available for atypical, anti-psychotic medication. [1586]

Jacqui Smith: The number of items dispensed in the community in England for atypical, anti-psychotic preparations for the period 1998–2000 is shown in the table.

Thousand

Year	*Prescription items*
1998	469.7
1999	772.6
2000	1,149.4

The data are from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system and are based on a full analysis of all prescriptions dispensed in the community, i.e. by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England. The PCA system includes not only prescriptions originating from general practices in England but also from nurses, dentists and hospital doctors provided they were dispensed in the community; also included are prescriptions written in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in England. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospitals or private prescriptions.

Patient Consultations

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role the new strategic health authorities will have in ensuring effective patient and public involvement. [1839]

Ms Blears: The detail of the roles and responsibilities of strategic health authorities are still being finalised. It is not possible to say at this stage what the precise arrangements will be for ensuring effective patient and public involvement mechanisms.

We shall be able to be much clearer about the role of strategic health authorities, including how it fits with the new involvement structures, later in the summer.

The new structures being formulated to strengthen patient and public voice and influence are based on the premise that every aspect of the National Health Service, both delivery and management, should respond to what users of the NHS believe is right for the future of the health services they use. Strategic health authorities will, together with all other bodies in the NHS, need to respond to this important consideration.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase investment in NHS chiropody services. [1727]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan forecast investment in all the allied health professions, which includes chiropodists. This year the Department has commissioned 345 training places, and funded local projects on return to practice from education consortia. Chiropodists are an integral part of the Government patient-focused policy programme, particularly in relation to older people and diabetes, which are part of the national service framework programme.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to replace the law relating to claims for medical negligence with a system of no fault compensation involving payment of modest lump sums and pensions payable for fixed periods up to and including for life. [1719]

Ms Blears: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 3 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 144W.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government intend to implement the White Paper on "Reforming the Mental Health Act"; and what plans they have to consult further to ensure that new legislation meets the needs of mental health service users. [2713]

Jacqui Smith: We are committed to the reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 and will introduce new legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. We will continue to take account of the views of mental health service users and other key interests as work is carried out to develop the policies set out in the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" into detailed proposals for new legislation.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the pilot schemes for the availability of digital hearing aids on the NHS; and if he will extend access to digital hearing aids on the NHS. [2541]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has asked the Institute of Hearing Research (IHR) to conduct a research evaluation of the Modernising National Health Service Hearing Aid Services project. The IHR is expected to present its report in February 2002. The evaluation will help determine how changes in hearing aid services might be extended to all NHS audiology departments.

If the project is successful we anticipate that by 2003–04 we will be investing an extra £25 million in NHS hearing aid services.

Pending the outcome of the project, all NHS audiology departments, with the appropriate staff, training, equipment and experience, are able to apply for access to the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency contract for digital hearing aids.

Milford Hospital

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of Milford hospital; and if he will visit Milford hospital. [2833]

Ms Blears: West Surrey health authority is currently considering the responses received during the recent public consultation—The Sustainable NHS—Phase ii.

It would be inappropriate to make any comment on the future of the hospital before the health authority has made a final decision.

Ministerial commitments will not allow a visit to Milford hospital at this time.

Delayed Treatment

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the delay in the treatment given to Christopher Lewis, of Churchdown, Gloucestershire, by the NHS. [2942]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The United Bristol Healthcare National Health Service Trust investigated Mr. Christopher Lewis' complaint about the delays to his treatment under the NHS complaints procedure, and a reply was sent to Mr. Lewis by the chief executive of the trust on 11 June 2001.

Waiting Lists

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future publication of inpatient and outpatient waiting lists in England; and what plans he has to publish further indicators of patient waiting times. [3270]

Mr. Hutton: The inpatient waiting list has been reduced by 255,000 since June 1998, and the number of outpatient over-13-week waiters fell by 94,000 over the same period. Information on waiting lists and times will continue to be collected and published.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his estimate is of the level of *(a)* inpatient and *(b)* outpatient waiting lists and waiting times at (i) East Somerset NHS Trust and (ii) Taunton NHS Trust; what the Government's targets are in each category; and if he will make a statement; [3049]

(2) what targets for *(a)* inpatient waiting times, *(b)* outpatient waiting times, *(c)* inpatient waiting lists and *(d)* outpatient waiting lists, he has set for (i) East Somerset NHS Trust and (ii) Taunton NHS Trust for each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement; [3050]

Ms Blears: Information on hospital waiting times is published quarterly by the Department in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England" and "Waiting Times for First Outpatient Appointments in England: Detailed Statistics". This information is also available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes.

The numbers of patients waiting for inpatient or day case treatment at East Somerset National Health Service Trust and Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust on 31 March 2001 are shown in the table.

Patients waiting for admission by number of months waiting

	East Somerset	*Taunton and Somerset*
0–2 months	1,089	3,400
3–5 months	538	2,039
6–11 months	314	1,371
12–17 months	2	28
18+ months	0	0
Total	1,943	6,838

The number of general practitioner written referral requests seen as a first outpatients in Quarter 4 (1 January to 31 March 2001) at East Somerset NHS Trust and Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust is shown in the table.

Of those GP referral requests seen, the number who waited (in weeks)

	East Somerset	*Taunton and Somerset*
0-[1]4 weeks	2,251	4,609
4-[1]13 weeks	2,267	4,299
13-[1]26 weeks	758	2,305
26+	208	459
Total	5,484	11,672

[1] Less than

As part of the NHS Plan, the NHS is working towards reducing the current maximum inpatient wait of 18 months to 15 months by March 2002 and reducing the outpatient wait of over six months now to a maximum of six months by March 2002. These targets are part of a staged reduction in waiting times, with inpatient waiting times continuing to fall from 18, to 15, to 12, nine then ultimately six months by 2005. The maximum outpatient waiting time will fall to three months by 2005.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the length of the inpatient waiting list at East Somerset NHS Trust for each of the last 10 years; what his estimate is of the number of (i) inpatients and (ii) outpatients waiting for more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* 12 months, *(e)* 15 months, *(f)* 18 months and *(g)* 24 months, for each reporting period over the last 10 years for (A) East Somerset NHS Trust and (B) Taunton NHS Trust; and if he will make a statement. [3048]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the tables. Information on inpatients is not available before June 1991; information on outpatients is only availabie from June 1995.

Inpatient data for East Somerset NHS Trust (RA4) from June 1991 to March 2001

		Number of patients on list who have waited:						
Quarter	*Total*	*Over 3 months*	*Over 6 months*	*Over 9 months*	*Over 12 months*	*Over 15 months*	*Over 18 months*	*Over 24 months*
June 1991	1,605	795	406	209	104	n/a	n/a	13
September 1991	1,558	724	377	167	82	n/a	n/a	7
December 1991	1,604	745	342	177	79	n/a	n/a	4
March 1992	1,485	531	196	47	0	n/a	n/a	0
June 1992	1,499	610	210	85	17	1	1	0
September 1992	1,601	545	245	71	16	1	0	0
December 1992	1,744	637	228	82	11	1	0	0
March 1993	1,670	611	244	72	0	0	0	0
June 1993	1,869	780	280	98	20	0	0	0
September 1993	1,845	815	342	103	26	1	0	0
December 1993	1,999	704	320	105	12	0	0	0
March 1994	1,725	654	252	76	0	0	0	0
June 1994	1,791	642	231	72	11	2	0	0
September 1994	1,721	685	272	77	7	0	0	0
December 1994	1,610	591	244	51	0	0	0	0
March 1995	1,423	381	138	10	0	0	0	0
June 1995	1,490	457	139	23	0	0	0	0
September 1995	1,673	497	127	15	2	0	0	0
December 1995	1,689	494	123	14	1	0	0	0
March 1996	1,634	421	111	2	0	0	0	0
June 1996	1,691	531	112	9	0	0	0	0
September 1996	2,181	682	169	18	0	0	0	0
December 1996	2,599	983	341	81	0	0	0	0
March 1997	2,662	1,025	435	146	6	0	0	0
June 1997	2,614	1,122	487	212	64	4	0	0
September 1997	2,537	1,077	482	185	65	23	0	0
December 1997	2,874	1,189	543	206	45	7	0	0
March 1998	2,845	1,251	521	172	5	1	0	0
June 1998	2,660	1,120	493	182	19	2	0	0
September 1998	2,335	965	431	171	22	0	0	0
December 1998	2,485	941	436	183	42	3	0	0
March 1999	2,489	850	382	143	0	0	0	0
June 1999	2,132	812	338	156	39	0	0	0
September 1999	2,294	843	334	136	41	5	0	0
December 1999	2,412	878	356	126	31	6	0	0
March 2000	2,061	803	377	150	31	4	0	0
June 2000	2,081	877	397	183	47	9	0	0
September 2000	2,209	900	410	183	55	3	0	0
December 2000	2,062	937	384	164	38	0	0	0
March 2001	1,943	854	316	96	2	0	0	0

Note:
Data not available prior to June 1991.
Source:
KH07 quarterly returns

Inpatient data for Somerset and Taunton NHS Trust (RBA) from June 1991 to March 2001

		Number of patients on list who have waited:						
Quarter	*Total*	*Over 3 months*	*Over 6 months*	*Over 9 months*	*Over 12 months*	*Over 15 months*	*Over 18 months*	*Over 24 months*
June 1991	6,506	4,126	2,619	1,713	1,094	n/a	n/a	289
September 1991	5,844	3,733	2,191	1,269	667	n/a	n/a	143
December 1991	5,730	3,103	1,596	792	341	n/a	n/a	66
March 1992	5,441	2,648	1,137	352	3	n/a	n/a	0
June 1992	5,671	3,102	1,459	525	121	20	15	5
September 1992	5,843	3,156	1,564	505	64	22	3	0
December 1992	6,331	3,113	1,593	599	83	13	8	0
March 1993	6,119	2,932	1,359	431	0	0	0	0
June 1993	5,975	3,094	1,440	462	57	3	2	0
September 1993	5,888	2,931	1,434	481	57	2	1	0
December 1993	5,701	2,897	1,335	469	67	7	4	0
March 1994	5,479	2,528	1,022	243	0	0	0	0
June 1994	5,510	2,491	972	229	0	0	0	0
September 1994	5,222	2,200	798	206	0	0	0	0
December 1994	5,212	1,966	701	157	0	0	0	0
March 1995	4,993	1,884	609	157	0	0	0	0
June 1995	4,995	1,974	480	43	0	0	0	0
September 1995	5,088	1,891	510	22	1	1	0	0
December 1995	5,007	1,748	408	29	0	0	0	0

Inpatient data for Somerset and Taunton NHS Trust (RBA) from June 1991 to March 2001

Quarter	Total	Number of patients on list who have waited: Over 3 months	Over 6 months	Over 9 months	Over 12 months	Over 15 months	Over 18 months	Over 24 months
March 1996	4,899	1,507	292	6	0	0	0	0
June 1996	5,152	1,753	329	22	0	0	0	0
September 1996	5,201	1,831	425	8	0	0	0	0
December 1996	5,898	2,324	648	34	0	0	0	0
March 1997	6,282	3,001	1,070	219	0	0	0	0
June 1997	6,759	3,198	1,406	376	18	0	0	0
September 1997	6,710	3,296	1,506	566	52	0	0	0
December 1997	7,513	3,569	1,689	695	113	0	0	0
March 1998	7,523	3,788	1,691	560	22	1	0	0
June 1998	7,596	3,999	1,771	576	32	0	0	0
September 1998	7,385	3,547	1,624	470	44	0	0	0
December 1998	7,606	3,677	1,705	574	114	1	0	0
March 1999	7,440	3,679	1,759	536	137	16	0	0
June 1999	7,451	3,910	1,859	707	137	13	0	0
September 1999	7,630	4,049	1,933	704	180	13	0	0
December 1999	7,690	4,077	2,007	753	211	61	0	0
March 2000	7,027	3,794	1,793	803	271	37	0	0
June 2000	6,920	3,662	1,677	792	297	58	0	0
September 2000	6,753	3,144	1,430	619	197	39	0	0
December 2000	7,094	3,539	1,459	654	203	40	0	0
March 2001	6,838	3,438	1,399	432	28	5	0	0

Note:
Data not available prior to June 1991.
Source:
KH07 quarterly return

Outpatient data for East Somerset NHS Trust (RA4) from June 1995 to March 2001

Quarter	Number of patients waiting for a first outpatient attendance (following general practitioner referral) at quarter end who have waited: Over 13 weeks (three months)	Over 26 weeks (six months)
June 1995	941	277
September 1995	980	228
December 1995	1,000	189
March 1996	930	194
June 1996	325	20
September 1996	423	30
December 1996	451	60
March 1997	559	87
June 1997	657	146
September 1997	869	142
December 1997	988	225
March 1998	843	237
June 1998	863	210
September 1998	925	200
December 1998	1,047	196
March 1999	896	247
June 1999	1,180	258
September 1999	1,132	294
December 1999	1,043	306
March 2000	1,020	257
June 2000	1,266	295
September 2000	769	202
December 2000	633	126
March 2001	466	97

Notes:
1. Data are not available on the total number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment.
2. Data are not available for the number of patients waiting over nine, 12, 15, 18 or 24 months.
3. Data not collected prior to June 1995.
Source:
QM08 quarterly return

Outpatient data for Somerset and Taunton NHS Trust (RBA) from June 1995 to March 2001

Quarter	Number of patients waiting for a first outpatient attendance (following GP referral) at quarter end who have waited: Over 13 weeks (three months)	Over 26 weeks (six months)
June 1995	948	205
September 1995	1,204	271
December 1995	1,138	172
March 1996	929	191
June 1996	1,153	143
September 1996	1,482	142
December 1996	1,471	194
March 1997	1,268	210
June 1997	1,105	173
September 1997	1,628	155
December 1997	1,599	219
March 1998	1,216	199
June 1998	1,536	199
September 1998	2,012	363
December 1998	2,125	527
March 1999	1,978	478
June 1999	2,483	552
September 1999	2,597	577
December 1999	2,561	643
March 2000	2,128	603
June 2000	2,651	483
September 2000	1,543	256
December 2000	1,692	275
March 2001	1,384	225

Notes:
1. Data are not available on the total number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment.
2. Data are not available for the number of patients waiting over nine, 12, 15, 18 or 24 months.
3. Data not collected prior to June 1995.
Source:
QM08 quarterly return

Health Authority Merger

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to merge the Somerset health authority and the Dorset health authority; and if he will make a statement. [3051]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in April 2001 that the existing health authorities would be disestablished and replaced by new strategic health authorities. Public consultation on the boundaries of the new strategic health authorities will take place later this year.

DEFENCE

Army Personnel Centre

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Army Personnel Centre for financial year 2001–02. [3803]

Mr. Ingram: The chief executive of the Army Personnel Centre has been set the following key targets for 2001–02:

To maintain the percentage of posts which are manned (excluding posts gapped for less than 28 days and all posts for private soldiers and subaltern officers) at 94 per cent.

To ensure that the proportion of personnel posted in-year by the APC whose rank and service qualifications meet the specifications of the post is at least 94 per cent.

To ensure that the percentage of in-year postings authorised by the APC where personnel are given at least four months' notification is at least 54 per cent.

Note:

Short-notice operational requirements and postings following initial training and long courses are excluded.

To maintain accurate pay and personal records of service by correctly processing all pay, pension and personal occurrences within seven working days from receipt of valid input.

To enable payment of all terminal benefits within five working days of retirement or receipt of valid documentation (which ever is the later) in no less than 98 per cent of cases.

To remain within +0 per cent. to −1 per cent. of the annual resource control allocation for operating activities.

Suez (Medals)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning a general service medal for those who served in the Suez Canal Zone between 1951 and 1954. [2382]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on 9 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 361W.

Stanoc Centre

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the military units, *(b)* UK police forces, *(c)* UK authorities, agencies and private organisations and *(d)* overseas customers who have been advised by the Stanoc Centre over the past year. [3013]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Night Observation and Counter-surveillance (STANOC) centre has provided assistance to the following organisations since June 2000:

Military Units

A comprehensive list of all military units advised by the STANOC centre is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Assistance has, however, been provided in support of Op AGRICOLA, Op PALATINE and other military training activities.

UK Civil Police Forces

Metropolitan police, Greater Manchester police, Dorset police, Sussex police, Hampshire police, National Crime Squad, Police Scientific and Development Branch, Lancashire police, Wiltshire police, Jersey police, National Criminal Intelligence Service, SO19.

UK Authorities and Agencies

HM Customs and Excise, Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Ministry of Defence Police, Defence Procurement Agency, Cabinet Security Office and other Government agencies.

UK Industry

Arkonia, Ascent Group, Swarowski, THALES, Marconi, Wylam Defence Systems, Avimo, BAE Systems, Barracuda (UK), Accuracy International, GKN, Raytheon, Bridport Aviation, Colebrand, Roctec, Abley Shelters, MFC, Gore UK, Karrimor, CDSS, ATSI, LEICA, Croma Optics and Resurgem.

Overseas Armed Forces

Canadian Army, Royal Canadian Air Force, Dutch Army, Belgian Army, Norwegian Army, German Army, Omani Army, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, US Army, NZ Army, Philippine Armed Forces, Malaysian Armed Forces, Albanian Army, Macedonian Army and NATO.

Overseas Industry

Barracuda, Litton.

NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative since the Washington Summit in 1999. [2531]

Mr. Hoon: NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) aims to give the Alliance the capabilities it needs to be fully effective across the range of its missions. The initiative comprises some 59 Decisions. Of these, 21 are well on track. The UK is pressing for an intensified programme of work on the DCI over the coming months. The UK's own DCI performance has been strong, with some 60 per cent. of DCI-related Force Goals being fully implemented and a further 30 per cent. being partially implemented. This reflects capability enhancements such as the introduction of the C17 strategic transport aircraft, the acquisition of a greater sealift capability and development and procurement of new precision guided munitions.

Japanese Internees (Compensation)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many compensation payments to internees in Japanese wartime prison camps have yet to be paid; how many have been paid; how many are being investigated; and how many of these are on grounds of the need to prove nationality. [2706]

Dr. Moonie: As at 6 July a total of 21,552 ex-gratia payments had been made to former internees and surviving spouses. A further 186 payments had been authorised but not yet paid. 3,364 applications are being investigated to confirm eligibility, of which 411 are on the grounds of proving nationality.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes there have been to the definition of "British" when applied to civilians eligible for Her Majesty's Government's ex-gratia payments to former prisoners of war and internees of the Japanese from 1941 to 1945 since 7 November 2000; and if he will make a statement. [2672]

Dr. Moonie: The ex-gratia payment announced on 7 November 2000 is being made to the various British groups who had been held prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War. The eligibility criterion for civilian claimants has recently been clarified, but there has been no change in the intended scope of the scheme. British subjects whom the Japanese interned and who were born in the United Kingdom, or had a parent or grandparent born here, are eligible for the payment.

Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent disturbance in the sovereign base areas in Cyprus. [R] [2978]

Mr. Ingram: The Government deplore absolutely the violence and vandalism that took place in the sovereign base areas in Cyprus on Tuesday evening. We have made, and will continue to make, every effort to demonstrate to the Government of Cyprus and the villagers of Akrotiri that the current and proposed antennae on the Salt Lake pose no threat to health and have a minimal impact on the environment.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the status of the border between the Republic of Cyprus and sovereign base areas after Cyprus's accession to the EU. [R] [2977]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are considering carefully all the implications for the sovereign base areas of the accession by Cyprus to the EU. Our consideration of these matters has not yet reached its conclusion.

Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* equipment and *(b)* personnel his Department has provided to the Government of Macedonia since 1 January. [2823]

Mr. Hoon: We have given the Macedonian Government 500 pieces of body armour, 15 mine detectors and 100 handheld Global Positioning Systems. In addition, we will be providing one remote control bomb disposal vehicle and 1,000 parachute flares.

In March this year at the start of the crisis we sent out a small team of eight military officers for five days to assess how we might assist the Macedonian Government. Two of these officers remained for a limited period to provide support to the UK Defence Adviser to the Macedonian Government (Brigadier James Short); their role was to provide assistance with planning. At present, a military officer is working alongside Brigadier Short providing operational advice.

Pensions (Politically Sensitive Cases)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 132W, on pensions, if he will place in the Library a copy of the wording of the guidance both before and after the amendment was made. [3214]

Dr. Moonie: It is not current practice to place individual items from the guidance manuals in the Library. However, arrangements are being made to place a copy of the current War Pensions Medical Advisers Instructions and Procedures Guide in the Library, together with a copy of the amendment.

Junior Officers

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the into productive service requirement is for junior officers this year; and if the requirement will be achieved. [2697]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The into productive service target for junior officer multi-engined pilots in the RAF for the financial year 2001–02 is 55. Unfortunately, problems with the Tucano training fleet at the end of last year meant that the number of fast jet students restreamed to multi-engined aircraft training was fewer than expected and this is the main contributing factor to the target not being met. The current forecast is for 44 multi-engined aircraft pilots to join front line squadrons from Operational Conversion Units in 2001–02. The position is expected to recover in subsequent years.

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what materials were deposited in the sea off the North Cornish coast when CDE Nancekuke was decommissioned. [2664]

Dr. Moonie: There is no comprehensive record of materials which were deposited into the sea off the north Cornish coast when Chemical Defence Establishment (CDE) Nancekuke was decommissioned.

All plant used in toxic or hazardous operations at Nancekuke was thoroughly decontaminated. All decontaminant was neutralised, diluted and tested on representative local marine species, namely prawns and gobies, before disposal into the sea.

Chemical warfare agents and their precursors were generally destroyed by incineration or transferred to CDE Porton Down. Some precursors and other materials were however treated and disposed of as above. These included approximately 1 tonne of pralidoxime mesylate (treated with sodium hypochlorite before disposal), arsenic chloride (31 litres were hydrolysed then oxidised with sodium hypochlorite before disposal) and 7 kg of a mixture of ethylphosphonyl dichloride and ethylphosphonyl difluoride (hydrolysed and neutralised before disposal).

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a statement on the environmental assessment being undertaken at RAF Portreath. [2666]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 522W. Work on the further land quality assessment has been completed. The expert consultant's report has been received and my officials are considering its recommendations and options for remediation work. The next stage will entail discussions on the way ahead with the Environment Agency and Kerrier district council.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sea monitoring has been undertaken since CDE Nancekuke was decommissioned. [2665]

Dr. Moonie: Sea monitoring is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, and its forerunner the National Rivers Authority. No monitoring other than the routine monitoring of South West Water's sewage outfall pipes has been undertaken.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the comprehensive survey of the service volunteer programme at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, announced on 1 May, will gather evidence and recollections from staff who organised the experiments. [3404]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 415–16W.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 133W, on Porton Down, what plans he has to assign more officials to carry out the comprehensive survey of the service volunteer programme. [3406]

Dr. Moonie: We plan to take on a further member of staff, probably a higher executive officer (Grade C2).

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 133W, on Porton Down, if he will arrange for service volunteers to give their recollections of the Porton Down volunteer programme in a public forum. [3407]

Dr. Moonie: No. Service volunteers are free to give us their recollections in any way they wish.

War in Space

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce the threat of war in space. [3165]

Mr. Hoon: The UK and its assets are not considered to be under threat from war in space. The UK was a Depository State of the Outer Space Treaty, which places important limitations on the military use of space, and the UK supports further consideration of issues relating to the prevention of an arms race in outer space at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Army Absentees

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what units of the British Army use *(a)* the legbrace and *(b)* orange shirts printed "Prisoner" in respect of absentees. [2496]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Bermuda Regiment

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Bermuda Regiment is part of the British Army. [3044]

Mr. Ingram: No. The Bermuda Regiment is an internal security force whose role is to help the Bermuda Police Service maintain law and order. Although there are strong links between the Regiment and the British Army, it is not part of it.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Bermuda

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what plans he has to consult Parliament about proposed amendments to the Bermuda constitution; and if he will make a statement; [3043]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that no Order in Council to amend the Bermuda constitution is enacted without hon. Members being given a reasonable period of time to consider the proposed amendments; and if he will make a statement. [3034]

Mr. Bradshaw: Orders in Council to amend the Bermuda constitution are made under Section 1 of the Bermuda Constitution Act 1967, which provides that any such Order shall be laid before Parliament after being made.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it a requirement that there is general agreement by all relevant parties in Bermuda about the membership and terms of reference and functions of the proposed boundary commission to be set up consequent on amendments sought to the Bermuda constitution by the Bermuda Government. [3035]

Mr. Bradshaw: The composition and terms of reference of the Bermuda Constituency Boundaries Commission are laid down in the Bermuda constitution. There is no intention to change the composition of the commission. Consultations have been undertaken with the political parties in Bermuda about the terms of reference and functions of the commission, with a view to that body making recommendations regarding possible single-member constituencies.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the *(a)* Governor and *(b)* Deputy Governor of Bermuda is paid; by whom; and what other allowances and emoluments accrue to each office. [3039]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government of Bermuda make provision in their budget for salary and other allowances of the Governor, and for the Governor's office. The Governor is paid in accordance with Bermuda civil service pay scales; the Deputy Governor, who is a member of HM diplomatic service, is paid in accordance with FCO pay scales.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the use of conscription in Bermuda; and if he will make a statement. [2492]

Mr. Bradshaw: Conscription is regulated by the Bermuda Defence Act 1965. Amendment to this Act requires legislation in the House of Assembly in Bermuda.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the new Governor of Bermuda will be appointed. [2854]

Mr. Bradshaw: An announcement will be made in the usual way at the appropriate time.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the process of consultation followed by his Department in respect of the appointment of the Governor of Bermuda. [2855]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Governor of Bermuda is appointed following consultation with the Premier of Bermuda.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set up a constitutional conference prior to amending the Bermuda constitution by Order in Council. [3036]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no requirement to call a constitutional conference before amendment of the Bermuda constitution. But consideration of the most appropriate way forward is given on a case-by-case basis.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates *(a)* the Governor and *(b)* Foreign Office Ministers met (i) Bermuda Government Ministers and (ii) members of the Bermuda parliamentary Opposition to discuss proposals to amend the Bermuda constitution by Order in Council in the last two years. [3038]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information is as follows:

(a) The Governor frequently meets Government of Bermuda Ministers and Opposition members. Meetings specifically to discuss proposals to amend Bermuda's constitution were hosted by the Governor at Government House in April 2001. Several Government Ministers and members of the opposition attended these talks.

(b) FCO Ministers met Government of Bermuda Ministers to discuss proposals to amend the Bermuda constitution in October 2000 and December 2000. They met members of the Bermuda parliamentary Opposition in December 2000 and January 2001.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions a constitutional conference has been held prior to amendments being approved by Order in Council to the Bermuda constitution since 1971. [3037]

Mr. Bradshaw: Once, in 1979.

Bermuda Regiment

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many women serve in the Bermuda Regiment; and how many were conscripted. [2504]

Mr. Bradshaw: Eighteen women are currently serving in the Bermuda Regiment. There is no conscription for women in Bermuda.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of conscripts to the Bermuda Regiment have not responded to their conscription call-up for each of the past five years. [2491]

Mr. Bradshaw: The proportions for the years in question are as follows:

1996—27 per cent.

1997—29 per cent.

1998—38 per cent.

1999—24 per cent.

2000—16 per cent.

The percentage represents the proportion who are unaccounted for and for whom no reasonable excuse has been offered.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Governor Masefield's role is in respect of discipline and appeals in the Bermuda Regiment; and if he will make a statement. [2497]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Bermuda Defence Act 1965 established the policy and procedure to be observed in the command and administration of the Bermuda Regiment including military offences and the respective powers of the commander.

Appeals are heard by the Defence Board, which forwards its recommendations to the Governor, who then acts at his discretion.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many conscripts from the Bermuda Regiment have served outside Bermuda in the past two years. [2493]

Mr. Bradshaw: No conscripts have been deployed on operations outside Bermuda in the past two years.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what punishments have been made in respect of each conscript to the Bermuda Regiment who has failed to respond to his call-up in each of the past two years. [2500]

Mr. Bradshaw: Failure to respond to call-up is dealt with in civil court. There were no prosecutions in 1999. In 2000 nine men were prosecuted and were bound over for one year by the magistrate. Of the nine, six have now commenced military service, one was found unfit, one qualified for deferment and one will commence service in January 2002.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have served custodial sentences in the past two years consequent on their failure to accept conscription in the Bermuda Regiment. [2498]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the establishment strength of the Bermuda Regiment is, broken

down by *(a)* full-time officers and soldiers, indicating those seconded from other regiments and units, *(b)* part-time officers and soldiers and *(c)* conscripts. [2494]

Mr. Bradshaw: The establishment strength of the Bermuda Regiment is:

(a) Full-time officers six, other ranks 22. Two are on secondment from the Royal Anglian Regiment.

(b) Part-time officers 24, other ranks 514.

(c) There is no breakdown available for conscripts. They are included in the part-time numbers.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the past year a leg brace has been used in respect of a Bermuda Regiment conscript; and for what purpose. [2501]

Mr. Bradshaw: In the past year a leg brace has been used three times as a restraint.

Bermuda Police

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Governor's responsibility for the command and control of the Bermuda Police. [3046]

Mr. Bradshaw: In 1977 the Governor's responsibility for the Police Service for matters relating to recruitment, training, equipment, general organisation, finance and community relations was delegated to the Minister of Labour, Home Affairs and Public Safety.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions and in what circumstances the leg-brace is used by Bermuda Police. [3047]

Mr. Bradshaw: Leg braces are not used by the Bermuda Police Force.

Falkland Islands

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proposed changes to the constitution of the Falkland Islands. [3045]

Mr. MacShane: We have invited all the Overseas Territories to review their constitutions and to submit their proposals for modernisation. HMG will consider carefully any suggestions for which there is evidence of extensive local consultation and support. A Select Committee has been appointed in the Falkland Islands to review the constitution and it is currently undertaking wide public consultation. The Select Committee has yet to submit its proposals formally to HMG.

Overseas Territories

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to bring forward legislation relating to overseas territories. [3040]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Overseas Territories Bill, which will grant British citizenship to all British Dependent Territories Citizens in qualifying territories, was given a first reading in the House of Lords on 21 June and published on 22 June. A second reading was given on 10 July and the committee stage is scheduled for 24 July. Copies of the Bill, with explanatory notes, are available from the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Orders in Council relating to the law of overseas territories he plans to bring forward during 2001; and if he will specify the purpose and overseas territory concerned in each case. [3042]

Mr. Bradshaw: Orders in Council are used to give effect to various treaties, convention, UN sanctions and other similar matters where the capacity to pass local legislation is inadequate. A list of anticipated Orders in Council relating to the laws of the Overseas Territories is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Other Orders in Council may arise during the course of the year.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if all overseas territories are compliant with *(a)* the European Convention on Human Rights and *(b)* other human rights standards to which the United Kingdom is committed to by (i) treaty or convention and (ii) policy. [3041]

Mr. Bradshaw: HMG's policy is that those territories which choose to remain British should abide by the same standards of human rights that British people expect of their own Government. These are enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the six core UN human rights instruments. The ECHR and most of the UN Conventions have been extended to all the territories. We are working with the territories to complete the process of extending the outstanding UN Conventions. The territories to which these conventions have already been extended are in large measure compliant.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Cycle-tracks

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to increase the mileage of dedicated cycle-tracks by 2005. [2381]

Mr. Spellar: The Government have encouraged local traffic authorities in England to include plans for increasing cycling in their local transport plans and all have done so. As a result we expect up to 4,300 km of new cycle routes in England by 2005, as well as a range of facilities for cyclists such as advanced stop lines, toucan crossings and junction treatments. Each authority must decide what mix of additional facilities is needed to reach its local cycling targets.

We will also be continuing to help Sustrans in the development of the National Cycle Network, which it is hoped will be 10,000 miles long by 2005.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the proposed stakeholders meeting of London Underground

and the Health and Safety Executive's review of the Public Private Partnership will take place, and in which location. [2730]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground informs me that its stakeholders' safety meeting, originally scheduled for 26 June, was postponed at the request of Mr. Robert Kiley, while he conducted negotiations with the bidders for the PPP contracts. Mr. Kiley has now reported that he has been unable to reach agreement with the bidders which meets his objectives, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked London Underground to proceed with plans for the modernisation of the Tube. A rescheduled stakeholders' meeting can be expected later in the summer as part of the renewed drive to provide the investment and renewal programme needed to create a 21st century Tube.

Safety will continue to be the first priority of London Underground. The Health and Safety Executive is currently undertaking a review of London Underground's safety arrangements as part of the rigorous acceptance process for revisions to London Underground's safety case.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many people used the London Underground in each of the years 1971 to 2000; [2506]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people who will use the London Underground in the next 10 years. [2507]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground which has provided me with the figures in the tables, which represent the total number of fare-paying passengers who use the Underground network each year.

million

	Passenger journeys
1971	654
1972	655
1973	644
1974	636
1975	601
1976	546
1977	546
1978	569
1979	594
1980	559
1981	541
1982	498
1983	563
1984–85	672
1985–86	732
1986–87	769
1987–88	798
1988–89	815
1989–90	765
1990–91	775
1991–92	751
1992–93	728
1993–94	735
1994–95	764
1995–96	784
1996–97	772
1997–98	832
1998–99	866
1999–2000	927
2000–01	970

London Underground future projections over the next 10 years

million

	Passenger journeys
2001–02	977
2002–03	993
2003–04	1,012
2004–05	1,025
2005–06	1,039
2006–07	1,050
2007–08	1,060
2008–09	1,079
2009–10	1,098
2010–11	1,117

Uninsured Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the number of vehicles on British roads *(a)* without insurance and *(b)* which have not passed their MOT; how many vehicles without insurance were involved in accidents in the last 12-month period for which figures are available; and what estimate he has of the number of vehicles without insurance on UK roads over the next five years. [2787]

Mr. Jamieson: It is estimated that between 4 per cent. and 6 per cent. of motorists drive while uninsured, an offence for which 300,140 people were convicted during 1999. Estimates of MOT evasion are similar. The Motor Insurance Database will go live later this month and while it is too early to make exact estimates, we expect a considerable reduction in insurance evasion as offenders realise that the chances of being caught will be much higher.

Figures for 2000 show that over 35,000 claims in respect of accidents involving uninsured drivers were made to the Motor Insurers Bureau.

Concessionary Travel

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the cost of reimbursing local authorities for their concessionary travel schemes in *(a)* London, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales if the age requirement for men and women is equalised at 60. [2802]

Mr. Byers: In Scotland and Wales concessionary travel is devolved, as are the resources to cover for the additional costs. In England it is estimated that equalising entitlement to concessionary travel at age 60 for men and women will cost up to £50 million per year. That figure is broken down as follows:

(a) London—£15 million,

(b) rest of England—£35 million.

Voter Turnout

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to initiate research into voter turnout at the 2001 general election; and if he will make a statement on the efforts to improve voter turnout in local, general and European elections. [2801]

Dr. Whitehead: The Electoral Commission's report on the general election, to be published at the end of July, is expected to include consideration of the reasons for reduced turnout. The Commission also has a duty to educate and inform the public about the electoral process and the importance of participating in it. We will shortly be inviting local authorities to submit pilot schemes to encourage turnout for next year's local elections.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the eventual sale proceeds of the Dome site will be attributable to Lattice Properties plc. [2692]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* When English Partnerships acquired land on the Greenwich Peninsula from British Gas in 1997, the sale and purchase agreement provided for British Gas (Lattice Properties plc) to receive a proportion of any onward sale proceeds. This is set at 7.5 per cent. of sale proceeds or open market value.

SPADs

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many signals were passed at danger on railways in the last three years and for this year; what the figures were for Connex South Eastern; and if he will make a statement on the SPAD on Connex Services north of St. Mary Cray on 26 June. [2927]

Mr. Jamieson: The following information on signals passed at danger (SPADs) has been provided by the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate:

(a) There were a total of 1,741 SPADs over the last three financial years: 662 in 1998–1999, 594 in 1999–2000 and 475 in 2000–2001.

(b) There have been 92 SPADs so far this year, April to May 2001

(c) There were 66 SPADs in the same period last year, April to May 2000.

(d) There were a total of 104 SPADs by Connex South Eastern trains over the last three financial years: 41 in 1998–1999, 35 in 1999–2000, and 28 in 2000–2001. So far this year, April to May 2001, Connex South Eastern have had 3 SPADs.

(e) The Connex South Eastern SPAD incident on 26 June at Bickley Junction near St. Mary Cray, is currently under investigation by the HSE's Railway Inspectorate. The results of this investigation will be published in HSE's June monthly SPAD report, which will be placed in the House Library at the end of this month.

Waterloo-Exeter Main Line

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the accident on 2 July on the Waterloo to Exeter main line west of Tisbury involving a passenger train and a heavy goods vehicle on an unmanned level crossing; and what steps he is taking to improve safety on such crossings. [2508]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The incident is under investigation by the Health and Safety Executive's HM Railway Inspectorate with the assistance of the Health and Safety Laboratories. A meeting will take place on the 20 August between HM Railway Inspectorate and Railtrack's Southern Zone Level Crossings Manager to assess the incident and any further actions that are necessary. HM Railway Inspectorate will shortly be asking Railtrack to include this type of level crossing in their system wide review of level crossings

After the road accident that caused a rail collision at Great Heck, Selby, the Deputy Prime Minister asked the Health and Safety Commission to convene and lead a working group that will look at the circumstances of incidents where vehicles have blocked rail lines and whether there are features in common that might have been preventable. Its report will be published in the autumn.

M6

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 117W, on the M6 motorway, if he will convene an early meeting of right hon. and hon. Members whose constituencies are affected by the MIDMAN study to discuss the recommendations that he receives. [2998]

Mr. Jamieson: The early outcomes of the MIDMAN study will be available by the end of August and a further joint presentation to the MPs affected by the outcomes of both studies will therefore be arranged for early autumn. The Government Office for the West Midlands invited Members to a presentation of this study and the West Midlands Area Study on 18 April 2000 and I have asked them to make the necessary arrangements again.

Cullen Report

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the second Cullen report to be published. [3252]

Mr. Jamieson: The report of Part 2 of Lord Cullen's Inquiry into the Ladbroke Grove train crash, which is looking into the culture, management and regulation of safety on the railways, is expected to be published by the Health and Safety Commission later this year.

Small Business Rate Relief

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the number of businesses in England and Wales that would benefit from the proposed rate relief for small businesses with a rateable value of less than £8,000 as outlined in the Green Paper, 'Modernising Local Government Finance'. [2591]

Dr. Whitehead: The Green Paper 'Modernising Local Government Finance' (September 2000) applied to England only. The National Assembly for Wales set out its proposals in 'Simplifying the System: Local Government Finance in Wales' (September 2000).

The Green Paper proposal was that in England there should be relief of 50 per cent. for properties with rateable values up to £3,000, with the relief then tapering off, so that properties with rateable values of £6,000 would get 20 per cent. relief, and those with rateable values above £8,000 would get no relief.

There are 977,000 properties in England with rateable values of £8,000 and less. Of these 474,000 have rateable values of £3,000 or less. However the Green Paper also suggested that small properties owned by large businesses might be excluded from the relief scheme, if this could be done without excessive administrative complexity.

In the light of the responses to the Green Paper, and further discussions we have been holding with business organisations, we will be setting out our decisions on the relief scheme in a White Paper later this year.

Private Hire Vehicles

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the consultation paper on private hire vehicle drivers was issued; and by what date responses are required. [3391]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for the regulation of private hire vehicles in London has been passed to the Mayor. Transport for London issued a consultation paper on proposals for the regulation of private hire vehicle drivers on 13 June, with a closing date for responses of 8 August.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many private hire vehicle operators in London had registered for licensing on 1 July with the Public Carriage Office; [3393]

(2) how many private hire operators were licensed under the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 on 1 July. [3394]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for the regulation of private hire vehicles in London has been passed to the Mayor. The Public Carriage Office undertakes the licensing function as part of Transport for London.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the consultation paper on private hire vehicles under the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998. [3392]

Mr. Jamieson: It will be for Transport for London to publish a consultation paper on proposals for licensing private hire vehicles in London.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mine Clearance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was spent by the UK Government on *(a)* humanitarian mine clearance, *(b)* commercial mine clearance, *(c)* military initiative mine clearance, *(d)* mine awareness, *(e)* victim assistance and *(f)* research and development for mine clearance in 2000–01. [3389]

Clare Short: Disbursements are as follows:

2000–01

	£
(a) Humanitarian Mine Clearance	[1]14,500,000
(c) Mine Awareness	500,000
(d) Research and Development	1,000,000

[1] Includes integrated mine awareness activities. As programmes are often integrated separate costs of awareness are not available.

Notes:

1. All expenditure by Department of International Development (DFID)
2. Military mine clearance has taken place in the Balkans since 1992. Military advisers have been attached to UN Mine Action Centres assisting in the development of mine action programmes. They have also supervised the mine clearance carried out by the Entity Armed Forces and provided mine awareness to local populations. The Mine Information Training Centre (MITC) at Minley has provided mine awareness training to over 30,000 people. The MOD has also continued to monitor minefields in the Falkland Islands. This work is part of the wider responsibilities of those involved and is impossible to cost accurately.
3. DFID has not funded commercial mine clearance. There are no records of UK commercial demining activities currently available in Department of Trade and Industry.
4. Assistance to land mine victims is additional to our mine action programme. Mine victims benefit from our mainstream health and population and social development programmes, as well as specific programmes assisting the disabled. It is not possible to disaggregate expenditure figures for land mine victims.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list Government expenditure on humanitarian mine clearance in 2000–01, broken down by country. [3388]

Clare Short: Government expenditure on mine action programmes is indicated in the table.

	£
Albania	369,648
Cambodia	1,430,571
Chad	270,000
Croatia	150,000
Eritrea/Ethiopia	544,151
Georgia	456,259
Guinea-Bissau	120,000
Iraq	616,100
Jordan	270,000
Laos	616,889
Lebanon	387,297
Nicaragua	283,000
Thailand	300,000
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo)	7,899,020
Global/Regional	4,000,000

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the organisations to which the Government have given money for the purpose of mine clearance in 2000–01 specifying the amount given in each case. [3390]

Clare Short: The table gives the figures requested.

2000–01

	£
The HALO Trust	1,863,304
Mines Advisory Group (MAG)	1,164,015
Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) (via UNDPP	214,285
Croatian Mine Advisory Centre	150,000
Government of Jordan	270,000
Organisation of American States—Nicaragua demining	283,000
United Nations Mine Action Service—Kosovo	390,364
Battle Area Clearance Training Equipment Consultants (BACTEC)—Kosovo	1,100,616
Defence Systems Ltd. (DSL)—Kosovo	3,118,404
European Landmine Solutions ELS—Kosovo	2,550,632
United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)—Global	600,000
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	500,000

2000–01

	£
Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)	790,000
Cranfield Mine Action	162,182
Landmine Monitor	157,000
Defence Evaluation and Research Establishment (DERA)	306,060
Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)	23,105
Aardvark	52,613
MineLifta	45,952
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	600,000

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 41W, concerning the KPMG report on Belize, for what reason the report will not be placed in the public domain. [2930]

Clare Short: The Government of Belize requested at the outset that the information contained in the consultants' report should be regarded as confidential between our two Governments.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 41W, concerning the KPMG report on Belize, when the report was submitted; for what reasons it failed to fulfil the terms of reference; and if she will place in the Library the original terms of reference. [2931]

Clare Short: A draft report was submitted by KPMG on 18 September 2000 which did not incorporate an assessment of the benefits and costs of public investment companies in Belize. A copy of the terms of reference will be placed in the Library.

Chechnya

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will make a statement on Russia's response to the World Bank's request for information about the budgetary impact upon it of the Chechnya war; and if she will make it her policy to use the World Bank to encourage that country to apply for redevelopment support for the Chechnya area; [2726]

(2) what representations she has made to Russia to seek funding from the World Bank for redevelopment in Chechnya; and if she will make a statement. [2725]

Clare Short: Responsibility for the redevelopment of Chechnya lies with the Russian Government, and it will be for Russia to decide whether to seek assistance from the international community. However, while fighting continues and the security situation remains poor, the redevelopment of Chechnya on any significant scale is unlikely to be possible.

Britain is contributing to international appeals to provide help for those displaced by the conflict. So far this year we have directly contributed £1.75 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross and £1.6 million to the United Nations Interagency Appeal. We also contribute through the European Commission Humanitarian Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms (Police)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police operations there were per police force in which firearms were issued; how many authorised firearms officers were involved; how many operations involved armed response vehicles between *(a)* April 1999 to March 2000 and *(b)* April 2000 to March 2001; and if he will make a statement. [3253]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The latest available statistics for the police use of firearms in England and Wales were published on 12 April 2000, *Official Report*, column 223W, in an answer from the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope), and covered the period 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999. The statistics for April 1999 to March 2000 will be announced shortly.

Prisoners (Conditions)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours were spent on purposeful activity in *(a)* male local prisons, *(b)* male open prisons, *(c)* male closed training prisons, *(d)* male young offender institutions, *(e)* female prisons and *(f)* female young offender institutions in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [2479]

Beverley Hughes: The average hours per week spent in purposeful activity in 1996–97, 1999–2000 and 2000–01, by establishment function, are given in the table.

Function name	*1996–97*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Category B	21.6	23.4	24.5
Category C	27.4	26.8	26.6
Dispersal	19.4	19.2	19.4
Female closed	28.6	23.8	25.4
Female local	22.2	19.8	23.0
Female open	37.9	39.3	39.3
Male closed YOI	22.2	20.8	22.3
Male juvenile	38.7	37.9	37.0
Male local	19.2	19.5	20.2
Male open	42.4	42.7	42.3
Male open YOI	46.0	43.7	40.4
Male remand centre	16.3	17.6	18.8

Prison Service (Assaults)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults on *(a)* prisoners, *(b)* prison staff and *(c)* other people in Prison Service establishments there were in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [2477]

Beverley Hughes: The number of proven adjudications for assaults on prisoners, staff and others for the years 1996–97, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are listed in the table. The Prison Service does not record data on assaults on staff and others separately. Data on assaults and all Prison Service key performance indicators are published annually in Her Majesty's Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts and Her Majesty's Prison Service Corporate and Business Plan.

The number of proven adjudications for assault at any time will in part reflect the total number or prisoners and the extent to which victims are enabled to come forward with complaints.

	Assaults on prisoners	*Assaults on staff/others*	*Total assaults*
1996–97	2,747	2,531	5,278
1999–2000	3,457	3,010	6,467
2000–01	3,282	3,107	6,389

Drugs Misuse (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales to initiate policies to combat drugs misuse in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [1878]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has an overarching role in monitoring progress against the United Kingdom drugs strategy, taking account of the distinctive substance misuse strategies in the other countries of the United Kingdom. However, it is the National Assembly for Wales which is responsible for setting and the strategic direction of the strategy in Wales and monitoring its progress.

The Assembly's Community Regeneration and Social Inclusion Unit maintains regular contact with officials of the United Kingdom Anti Drugs Co-ordination Unit and relevant Whitehall officials in other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Shiblu Rahman

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the police's role was in the provision of emergency treatment for Mr. Shiblu Rahman on 1 April in Bow; if his murder is being regarded as a racial incident; what representations his family have made to the Metropolitan police and how they have responded; and if he will make a statement. [2719]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the police's role in providing emergency treatment to Mr. Shiblu Rahman on 1 April in Bow was immediately to administer first aid on arrival at the scene, until a paramedic arrived.

The murder of Mr. Rahman has always been treated as a racist incident. Mr. Rahman's family have made representations to senior officers from Tower Hamlets borough, to the Serious Crime Group and to Commander Smith who is the Association of Chief Police Officers officer with geographical responsibility for East London. The family have expressed concerns as to the initial actions taken by the emergency services and these are being considered by senior officers within the Metropolitan police service.

Four people have been arrested and charged with the murder of Mr. Rahman, while a fifth person has been charged with aiding the principals.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide extra financial resources for HMP Wandsworth for improvements. [2530]

Beverley Hughes: In the current financial year, Wandsworth has received an additional £511,565 from the Spending Review 2000 (SR 2000) settlement for a range of measures against drugs, and other additional budget allocations for specific purposes. However, as part of the SR2000 settlement, the Prison Service has to make cashable efficiency savings of 1 per cent per year in its baselines, and Wandsworth's baseline has been reduced to contribute to this. The net effect of these changes is to increase Wandsworth's funding by £362,538 in 2001–02 compared to 2000–01. In addition, the establishment has been selected as a pilot site for national health service-funded mental health in-reach work to an estimated value of £252,000.

In the light of these changes Wandsworth is expected to contribute to efficiency savings while at the same time using the additional resources allocated to deliver more effective and targeted services. There is no prospect of further changes in Wandsworths' financial allocation in this financial year.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been electronically tagged in England and Wales. [2524]

Beverley Hughes: 47,462 people were electronically tagged in England and Wales between the start of the current electronic monitoring contracts on 28 January 1999 and 30 June 2001. At midnight on 30 June 2001, a total of 3,162 people were still being monitored.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will divert resources from the provision of further prison establishments towards the care of mentally ill prisoners in secure specialist premises outside normal prisons. [2532]

Beverley Hughes: In England, the provision of secure, specialist premises outside prisons for the treatment of mental illness is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The National Health Service (NHS) plan, which he published in July 2000, contains a commitment to develop new NHS in-reach services for prisoners with serious mental illnesses. These services are being piloted in 12 sites in England, including Wandsworth prison, during 2000–01 before being implemented more widely. Alongside this development, the National Assembly for Wales is funding similar in-reach services in the four Prison Service establishments in Wales.

Commonwealth Visitors

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* Jamaican, *(b)* Barbadian, *(c)* Guyanese, *(d)* Canadian and *(e)* Australian nationals were admitted as visitors during each month in (i) 2000 and

(ii) 2001 to the latest available date; and how many of these, from each country, were admitted with leave for less than six months. [2520]

Angela Eagle: The available information is given in the table.

Visitors are only admitted to the United Kingdom for a maximum period of six months. The table shows visitors and business visitors for the requested nationalities up to April 2001, the latest available month.

Passengers admitted to the United Kingdom, by selected nationality and category, January 2000 to April 2001[1]

Number of journeys[2]

	Jamaica	*Barbados*	*Guyana*	*Canada*	*Australia*
Visitors					
2000					
January	1,340	140	60	15,100	22,900
February	1,630	210	50	19,000	14,500
March	1,930	350	120	32,600	20,200
April	1,870	460	160	42,800	35,800
May	2,500	430	160	60,500	48,700
June	2,990	890	180	60,000	48,600
July	5,160	1,420	610	69,400	58,100
August	3,440	1,050	430	71,600	51,100
September	2,380	740	200	52,500	57,600
October	1,880	440	150	40,700	41,000
November	1,990	410	170	25,100	23,300
December	2,980	590	230	25,700	33,600
Total	30,100	7,130	2,530	515,000	455,000
2001[1]					
January	1,700	200	80	16,300	23,300
February	1,920	200	100	23,700	13,500
March	2,340	290	240	20,100	19,200
April	2,260	310	250	36,300	32,900
Business visitors					
2000					
January	50	20	10	6,610	3,470
February	90	40	10	6,960	3,990
March	170	70	[3]—	7,210	4,560
April	70	30	20	6,560	4,180
May	100	60	20	7,970	5,660
June	130	80	20	7,550	5,540
July	150	50	70	7,020	4,830
August	100	20	10	4,840	3,640
September	110	80	20	8,070	4,880
October	90	60	30	8,710	5,590
November	120	120	40	8,520	5,040
December	70	10	10	4,340	2,640
Total	1,250	640	280	83,900	54,400
2001[1]					
January	100	40	40	6,770	3,950
February	140	60	10	8,080	4,280
March	140	60	30	7,580	5,170
April	100	60	20	7,720	4,610
Total visitors					
2000					
January	1,390	170	70	21,300	26,400
February	1,720	260	60	25,900	18,500
March	2,100	420	130	39,900	24,800
April	1,940	490	180	49,300	40,000
May	2,600	480	190	68,500	54,400
June	3,120	960	210	67,500	54,100
July	5,320	1,460	680	76,500	62,900
August	3,540	1,070	440	76,400	54,700
September	2,500	810	230	60,600	62,500
October	1,970	500	180	49,400	46,900
November	2,110	530	200	33,600	28,300
December	3,050	610	240	30,100	36,300
Total	31,400	7,770	2,800	599,000	510,000

Passengers admitted to the United Kingdom, by selected nationality and category, January 2000 to April 2001[1]

Number of journeys[2]

	Jamaica	*Barbados*	*Guyana*	*Canada*	*Australia*
2001[1]					
January	1,800	240	110	23,100	27,200
February	2,060	260	100	31,800	17,800
March	2,480	350	270	37,600	24,300
April	2,360	370	270	44,000	37,500

[1] 2001 data are provisional

[2] Totals may not sum due to rounding. This is because all calculations are based on unrounded figures to ensure accuracy

[3] Five or fewer

Note:

Data rounded to three significant digits or to the nearest 10 if less than 1,000

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for extensions of stay were received in each month in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 to the latest available date by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate from (i) Jamaican, (b) Barbadian, (iii) Guyanese, (iv) Canadian and (v) Australian nationals admitted for less than six months as visitors; and how many were (A) granted and (B) refused. [2519]

Angela Eagle: The available information is given in the table and relates to people who enter the United Kingdom as visitors and subsequently apply for an extension of stay in another category.

The information relates to decisions on applications for an extension of leave to remain. The latest available data are for the period January to September 2000.

Grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain[1] *in the United Kingdom to persons having entered the country as a visitor*[2]*, by selected nationality, January to September 2000*[3]

Number of decisions[4]

	Jamaica	*Barbados*	*Guyana*	*Canada*	*Australia*
Grants of extension					
January	560	10	10	20	40
February	480	10	10	30	40
March	580	10	10	30	60
April	380	10	10	20	50
May	470	10	10	20	60
June	630	10	10	40	60
July	500	10	10	30	60
August	460	*	*	20	70
September	400	*	10	20	60
Total January–September	4,460	70	70	240	500
Refusals of extension					
January	50	*	*	*	*
February	60	—	*	*	10
March	60	—	*	10	*
April	80	—	*	*	10
May	100	—	*	10	10
June	180	*	10	*	*
July	230	—	*	*	*
August	160	—	*	*	*
September	130	*	*	*	10
Total January–September	1,060	*	20	40	50
Total Decisions					
January	600	10	10	30	50
February	550	10	10	40	50
March	640	10	10	40	60
April	460	10	10	30	60
May	570	10	10	30	60

Grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain[1] in the United Kingdom to persons having entered the country as a visitor[2], by selected nationality, January to September 2000[3]

Number of decisions[4]

	Jamaica	*Barbados*	*Guyana*	*Canada*	*Australia*
June	820	10	10	40	60
July	740	10	10	30	70
August	610	*	10	20	70
September	530	10	10	20	60
Total January–September	5,520	80	90	270	550

[1] Excludes dependants of principal applicants, the outcome of appeals, and withdrawn applications

[2] Includes students admitted for less than six months

[3] Provisional

[4] Totals may not add up due to rounding. This is because all calculations are based on unrounded numbers to ensure accuracy

Note:

Data rounded to the nearest 10 with * = 5 or fewer

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* granted in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) Stoke-on-Trent. [2668]

Mr. Denham: The number of antisocial behaviour orders being applied for and issued is collected centrally by magistrates courts committee (MCC) area only. Between April 1999 and March 2001, two antisocial behaviour orders, both of which were granted, were applied for in the Staffordshire MCC.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders in the Shrewsbury division of West Mercia Constabulary. [2536]

Mr. Denham: Since my predecessor, the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), answered my hon. Friend's earlier question on this subject on 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 214W, the Shrewsbury division of West Mercia constabulary has obtained a further 18 antisocial behaviour orders bringing the total for the division to some 24 orders. These orders have helped to curb intimidatory begging in the town centre and antisocial behaviour by groups of young people in other parts of the division. I applaud the efforts of the local police, and congratulate them on their success.

Charities (Audit)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what he calculates to be the threshold level of turnover of charities needed to trigger full annual audits if the current provision had been indexed in line with that applied to company audits since its introduction; [2786]

(2) what plans he has to uprate the threshold level of annual turnover for charities triggering full annual audits. [2785]

Angela Eagle: There are no plans at present to uprate the threshold level triggering full annual audits for charity accounts although the matter is kept under review.

Part VI of the Charities Act 1993 and the associated Regulations and Statements of Recommended Practice provide the accounting framework for charities. The accounting requirements are graduated and vary with the size of the charity. Charities with gross income or total expenditure of over £250,000 (in the current or two previous financial years) are required to produce audited accounts.

Charities that are registered as companies are subject to the Companies Acts and must file their accounts with Companies House. They are also subject to charity law. The audit threshold for a charitable company is £250,000 gross income, as provided for in the Companies Act 1985 (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations 1997.

The auditing threshold for non-charitable companies was raised last year from £350,000 to £1 million, an increase of approximately 280 per cent., but the decision was taken at that time to retain the existing threshold for charitable companies. A similar increase for charities would raise the threshold to the order of £700,000.

Good charity accounts which show how the charity is using its resources and which are reliable, consistent and available to the public are important in demonstrating openness and public accountability. The particular public interest in charities and charitable companies calls for an accounting system for them which is different from that which is appropriate for non-charitable organisations.

Prison Staff (Salaries)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will increase the salaries of prison staff in discipline and administration grades. [2849]

Beverley Hughes: Prison officers and related support grades received a two per cent. increase in pay from 1 January 2001. Also, locality payments for those working in and around London were increased by between £517 and £873 a year. This year's pay changes for administrative grades are still subject to the outcome of negotiations. The pay of most of these Prison Service staff will be handled differently from next year.

On 9 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 747W, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Home Office announced plans to set up a Prison Service Pay Review Body to make independent recommendations to the Government on the pay of prison officers and related support grades employed in public sector prisons in England and Wales, and the Northern Ireland Prison Service. This came into effect on 17 April 2001. It is due to make its first recommendations with effect from 1 January 2002. The pay of prison administrative staff, who are outside the Review Body remit, will remain subject to direct annual negotiation between the Prison Service and the Prison Service Trade Union Side.

Mental Health Care

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement *(a)* Part I and *(b)* Part II of the White Paper "Reform of the Mental Health Act". [2952]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are committed to reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 and will introduce the legislation needed to give effect to both parts of the

White Paper as soon as parliamentary time allows. This will include proposals—set out in Part 2—to deal with the small minority of those mentally disordered people who present a high risk to others, including those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered.

Good progress is being made on all aspects of the service development required for the creation of new services for those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered and for the modernisation of mental health services generally.

Feltham Young Offenders Prison

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates there were at Feltham Young Offenders Prison in each of the last five years. [3129]

Beverley Hughes: The average population at Feltham Young Offenders Institution in each of the last five years is given in the table.

Financial year	*Average population HMYOI Feltham*
2000–01	698
1999–2000	798
1998–99	878
1997–98	894
1996–97	865

Ministerial Visits

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his predecessor *(a)* first visited and *(b)* last visited (i) Indonesia, (ii) Turkey, (iii) Saudi Arabia, (iv) South Africa, (v) Chile, (vi) Argentina, (vii) Sudan, (viii) Taiwan, (ix) the UAE and (x) Cuba. [1824]

Mr. Blunkett: As far as records show, my predecessor did not visit Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, Sudan, Taiwan, the United Arab Emirates and Cuba in his capacity as Home Secretary.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his predecessor *(a)* first visited and *(b)* last visited (i) Canada, (ii) Australia and (iii) New Zealand. [1837]

Mr. Blunkett: As far as records show, my predecessor did not visit Canada, Australia or New Zealand in his capacity as Home Secretary.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his predecessor *(a)* first visited and *(b)* last visited, (i) Brazil, (ii) Bolivia, (iii) Mexico, (iv) Guatemala and (v) Peru. [1932]

Mr. Blunkett: As far as records show, my predecessor did not visit Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala or Peru in his capacity as Home Secretary.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his predecessor *(a)* first visited and *(b)* last visited (i) Rwanda, (ii) Democratic Republic of Congo, (iii) Central African Republic, (iv) Mozambique and (v) Nigeria. [1954]

Mr. Blunkett: As far as records show, my predecessor did not visit Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Mozambique and Nigeria in his capacity as Home Secretary.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his predecessor *(a)* first visited and *(b)* last visited (i) South Korea and (ii) Malaysia. [1947]

Mr. Blunkett: As far as records show, my predecessor did not visit South Korea or Malaysia in his capacity as Home Secretary.

Prostitution

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish a summary of the responses to the consultation "Setting the Boundaries"; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of the current legal framework governing prostitution. [3227]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We received in excess of 650 responses to "Setting the Boundaries". Officials are now assessing these responses and we will be considering the best way to make a summary available to hon. Members once this analysis has been completed.

We have no plans to change the law relating to prostitution at present. However, one of the 62 recommendations made to Ministers in "Setting the Boundaries" is that there should be a further review of the law on prostitution. We will be carefully considering the responses to this recommendation before reaching a decision on it.

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was in asylum cases where an appeal was received by his Department but not subsequently sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority for each month of *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999. [172]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* Information on the outcome of asylum cases where appeals were lodged with the Home Office, but not sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA), is not available. Some cases in this category are withdrawn or abandoned, and a proportion is reconsidered for a variety of reasons after the appeal has been lodged with Immigration and Nationality Directory (IND). The reconsideration may result in the case not being sent to the IAA if it leads to a change in the appellant's immigration status. If in due course we find that there are a significant number of such cases, we shall consider what is the best way to publish this information once we are satisfied that it is reliable.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A-Level Reforms

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she proposes to take following the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's initial report on the implementation of the A-level reforms. [3533]

Estelle Morris: Today I issued a response to the QCA's report on Curriculum 2000. That response has been placed in the Library, together with a copy of the report. The response notes that there is strong and continuing support in schools and colleges for the principles of Curriculum 2000, but also an urgent need to resolve issues in the delivery of parts of the programme, particularly the advanced subsidiary qualification. I am therefore asking the QCA to develop a combined examination paper of up to three hours for each AS where possible by summer 2002, as an alternative to the large number of individual unit papers currently offered. Where this is not possible, I am asking the QCA and the awarding bodies to look urgently at restructuring the timetable so that units of the same subject can be taken at a single sitting. Single, flexible units will remain available for those that want them. I am also asking the QCA to review specifications of subjects which are considered too heavy, to issue guidance to schools and colleges to highlight the existing flexibilities within the assessment regime, and to encourage the majority of students to take AS examinations either at the end of the first year of study or together with the examinations they take at the end of the second year. I am also asking the QCA to work with the awarding bodies to avoid as far as possible subject clashes in the examination timetable.

The Government remain convinced of the need for all young people, whether in employment or training post-16, to be given a solid basis in the key skills of communication, application of number and IT. To ensure they are practicable for the majority of students, I am asking the QCA to take steps to reduce the volume of assessment, ensure that a greater range of proxy qualifications are accepted, and issue guidance to schools and colleges to support effective use of key skills. I am also asking the Learning and Skills Council to review urgently the funding arrangements for key skills.

Lecturers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking in conjunction with higher education institutions to improve the recruitment and retention of lecturers. [3186]

Margaret Hodge: The recruitment and retention of staff is a matter for higher education institutions. However, the Government are providing £50 million in 2001–02, rising to £110 million in 2002–03 and £170 million in 2003–04, to support increases in academic and non-academic pay. This will give higher education employers more flexibility to address recruitment and retention difficulties and modernise their reward systems.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements will be put in place for maintaining the value of the teaching pay initiative to further education lecturers after its expiry. [3191]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for future spending reviews. We have no plans to suspend the teaching pay initiative after 2003–04.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average starting pay for college lecturers was in each of the last 10 years. [2991]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Figures available are derived from the FE lecturer pension scheme. The last available figures are for 1999. Details have been given for the period 1991–99.

Average starting salary of full-time FE lecturers 1991–99, England and Wales

Year	*£*
1999	17,996
1998	17,440
1997	16,959
1996	16,898
1995	16,482
1994[1]	15,985
1994[2]	16,213
1993	16,579
1992	15,692
1991	14,994

[1] Including sixth-form colleges.

[2] Excluding sixth-form colleges.

Note:

Sixth-form colleges excluded before 1993 because they were not part of the FE sector. Included as part of the FE sector from 1994 onwards.

Competitiveness Indicators

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the indicators of the competitiveness of British higher education institutions which she uses to compare them with their overseas counterparts. [3187]

Margaret Hodge: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes international educational comparisons each year in "Education at a Glance". The 2001 edition, recently published, shows that UK higher education is characterised by high graduation rates and low non-completion rates, indicating the high quality of teaching and research and the efficiency and effectiveness of courses. This is reflected in the relative popularity of UK higher education courses among overseas students.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations she has received on the proposed withdrawal of funding for *(a)* education and *(b)* training programmes by local learning and skills councils. [3185]

Margaret Hodge: We have received very few representations about withdrawal of funding for programmes by the Learning and Skills Council. We have received a number of representations about the LSC's new funding arrangements for work-based learning for young people. On the whole, these changes have been well received, but inevitably there will be some concerns when funding rates change. To help meet these concerns the Learning and Skills Council has put in place effective transitional arrangements that cushion the reductions in income levels of providers compared with 1999–2000.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements she has made to transfer teaching pay initiative moneys direct from local learning and skills councils through colleges to individual teachers. [3189]

Margaret Hodge: All colleges received provisional allocations of funding in April 2001 from the Learning and Skills Council for the teaching pay initiative in 2001–02. Indicative amounts for 2002–03 and 2003–04 were issued to general FE colleges on 10 July 2001. While discussions on implementation are continuing with sixth-form colleges, the onus has been on all other colleges to come forward with a brief summary of their pay initiative implementation. LSCs cannot release the money without this and so far less than 10 per cent. of colleges have responded. Detailed arrangements for making payments to individual teachers will be implemented locally by individual colleges.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for learner representation on learning and skills councils. [3367]

Margaret Hodge: We recognise that to be successful, the Learning and Skills Council must be fully responsive to the needs of learners and potential learners. The LSC's national council and each of the 47 local LSCs include, for example, trade unionists and local authority elected members, who can represent the views and needs of learners.

In addition, learning partnerships are already charged with ensuring that consultative mechanisms are in place to capture and articulate the views and opinions of young and adult learners, and feed these back to the LSC.

The LSC itself is also considering what further mechanisms it needs to put in place at national and local levels to ensure that learners are effectively engaged in the new arrangements, and to advise on people's learning needs and expectations.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for greater integration between the Learning and Skills Council and the higher education funding councils; and if she will make a statement. [3366]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England are already building close co-operation to widen access to higher education and to meet employers' skill needs. The two chief executives meet regularly and attend each other's council meetings as observers. The local arms of the LSC are partners with HEFCE in delivering the excellence challenge which helps able young people in deprived areas enter higher education. In addition, we welcome the contribution of representatives from the higher education sector on the LSC's national council and on 35 of its 47 local councils. The Government will encourage further joint working between the LSC and HEFCE to achieve their shared objectives.

Graduates

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of graduates for each of the last five years receiving *(a)* first class honours, *(b)* ordinary and *(c)* third class honours degrees in subjects related to *(a)* physical sciences, *(b)* mathematical sciences and informatics, *(c)* biological sciences and *(d)* engineering and technology were (i) home students, (ii) EU students and (iii) overseas students. [3318]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The available data are shown in the tables.

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1999–2000, higher education institutions in the UK

Numbers

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	1,553	9,061	998	687	12,299
EU	111	435	71	53	670
Overseas	36	144	22	13	215
Total	1,700	9,640	1,091	753	13,184
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	823	2,302	442	234	3,801
EU	21	88	21	14	144
Overseas	34	83	22	10	149
Total	878	2,473	485	258	4,094
Biological sciences					
Home	1,476	14,228	801	615	17,120
EU	100	768	78	34	980
Overseas	28	290	25	6	349
Total	1,604	15,286	904	655	18,449
Engineering and technology					
Home	1,929	9,688	1,148	1,804	14,569
EU	200	1,579	467	499	2,745
Overseas	632	2,128	280	197	3,237
Total	2,761	13,395	1,895	2,500	20,551

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:

HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1999–2000, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	91.4	94.0	91.5	91.2	93.3
EU	6.5	4.5	6.5	7.0	5.1
Overseas	2.1	1.5	2.0	1.7	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	93.7	93.1	91.1	90.7	92.8
EU	2.4	3.6	4.3	5.4	3.5
Overseas	3.9	3.4	4.5	3.9	3.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Biological sciences					
Home	92.0	93.1	88.6	93.9	92.8
EU	6.2	5.0	8.6	5.2	5.3
Overseas	1.7	1.9	2.8	0.9	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Engineering and technology					
Home	69.9	72.3	60.6	72.2	70.9
EU	7.2	11.8	24.6	20.0	13.4
Overseas	22.9	15.9	14.8	7.9	15.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:
HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1998–99, higher education institutions in the UK

Numbers

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	1,435	8,979	1,086	697	12,197
EU	113	436	71	48	668
Overseas	37	122	21	11	191
Total	1,585	9,537	1,178	756	13,056
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	783	2,332	484	308	3,907
EU	34	102	23	16	176
Overseas	40	102	12	13	167
Total	858	2,536	519	337	4,250
Biological sciences					
Home	1,356	13,425	727	602	16,110
EU	75	724	50	24	873
Overseas	41	284	22	29	376
Total	1,472	14,433	799	655	17,359
Engineering and technology					
Home	1,864	10,351	1,293	1,933	15,441
EU	198	1,566	349	405	2,518
Overseas	814	2,630	354	255	4,053
Total	2,876	14,547	1,996	2,593	22,012

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:
HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1998–99, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	90.5	94.1	92.2	92.2	93.4
EU	7.1	4.6	6.0	6.3	5.1
Overseas	2.3	1.3	1.8	1.5	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1998–99, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	First class honours	Second class honours	Third class honours	Pass[1]	Total
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	91.3	92.0	93.3	91.4	91.9
EU	4.1	4.0	4.4	4.7	4.1
Overseas	4.7	4.0	2.3	3.9	3.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Biological sciences					
Home	92.1	93.0	91.0	91.9	92.8
EU	5.1	5.0	6.3	3.7	5.0
Overseas	2.8	2.0	2.8	4.4	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Engineering and technology					
Home	64.8	71.2	64.8	74.5	70.1
EU	6.9	10.8	17.5	15.6	11.4
Overseas	28.3	18.1	17.7	9.8	18.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:
HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1997–98, higher education institutions in the UK

Numbers

Subject/domicile	First class honours	Second class honours	Third class honours	Pass[1]	Total
Physical sciences					
Home	1,489	9,101	1,143	689	12,422
EU	97	439	64	57	657
Overseas	40	141	20	16	217
Total	1,626	9,681	1,227	762	13,296
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	779	2,131	454	294	3,658
EU	18	61	27	14	120
Overseas	34	96	14	17	161
Total	831	2,288	495	325	3,939
Biological sciences					
Home	1,383	12,957	690	583	15,613
EU	72	656	71	30	829
Overseas	31	309	22	81	443
Total	1,486	13,922	783	694	16,885
Engineering and technology					
Home	1,805	10,910	1,459	2,156	16,330
EU	140	1,306	346	399	2,191
Overseas	721	2,655	394	280	4,050
Total	2,666	14,871	2,199	2,835	22,571

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:
HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1997–98, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	First class honours	Second class honours	Third class honours	Pass[1]	Total
Physical sciences					
Home	91.6	94.0	93.2	90.4	93.4
EU	6.0	4.5	5.2	7.5	4.9
Overseas	2.5	1.5	1.6	2.1	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	93.7	93.1	91.7	90.5	92.9
EU	2.2	2.7	5.5	4.3	3.0
Overseas4.1	4.1	4.2	2.8	5.2	4.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1997–98, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Biological sciences					
Home	93.1	93.1	88.1	84.0	92.5
EU	4.8	4.7	9.1	4.3	4.9
Overseas	2.1	2.2	2.8	11.7	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Engineering and technology					
Home	67.7	73.4	66.3	76.0	72.3
EU	5.3	8.8	15.7	14.1	9.7
Overseas	27.0	17.9	17.9	9.9	17.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:

HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1996–97, higher education institutions in the UK

Numbers

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	1,376	9,945	1,272	806	13,399
EU	73	344	50	54	521
Overseas	30	100	15	7	152
Total	1,479	10,389	1,337	867	14,072
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	660	2,080	473	296	3,509
EU	19	45	10	8	82
Overseas	22	59	23	10	114
Total	701	2,184	506	314	3,705
Biological sciences					
Home	1,180	12,044	631	644	14,499
EU	39	434	40	16	529
Overseas	31	244	22	39	336
Total	1,250	12,722	693	699	15,364
Engineering and technology					
Home	1,778	11,553	1,641	2,029	17,001
EU	144	1,186	282	357	1,969
Overseas	713	2,602	462	270	4,047
Total	2,635	15,341	2,385	2,656	23,017

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:

HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1996–97, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	93.0	95.7	95.1	93.0	95.2
EU	4.9	3.3	3.7	6.2	3.7
Overseas	2.0	1.0	1.1	0.8	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	94.2	95.2	93.5	94.3	94.7
EU	2.7	2.1	2.0	2.5	2.2
Overseas	3.1	2.7	4.5	3.2	3.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Biological sciences					
Home	94.4	94.7	91.1	92.1	94.4
EU	3.1	3.4	5.8	2.3	3.4
Overseas	2.5	1.9	3.2	5.6	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1996–97, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Engineering and technology					
Home	67.5	75.3	68.8	76.4	73.9
EU	5.5	7.7	11.8	13.4	8.6
Overseas	27.1	17.0	19.4	10.2	17.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:

HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1995–96, higher education institutions in the UK

Numbers

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	1,318	9,617	1,286	893	13,114
EU	89	322	50	45	506
Overseas	20	119	18	7	164
Total	1,427	10,058	1,354	945	13,784
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	696	2,278	529	306	3,809
EU	18	42	14	8	82
Overseas	27	99	29	22	177
Total	741	2,419	572	336	4,068
Biological sciences					
Home	1,065	10,840	575	551	13,031
EU	38	391	27	17	473
Overseas	12	192	20	73	297
Total	1,115	11,423	622	641	13,801
Engineering and technology					
Home	1,879	12,394	1,741	2,424	18,438
EU	143	990	183	276	1,592
Overseas	543	2,074	404	259	3,280
Total	2,565	15,458	2,328	2,959	23,310

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:

HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

First degree graduates in specified subjects by class of degree and domicile, 1995–96, higher education institutions in the UK

Percentage

Subject/domicile	*First class honours*	*Second class honours*	*Third class honours*	*Pass*[1]	*Total*
Physical sciences					
Home	92.4	95.6	95.0	94.5	95.1
EU	6.2	3.2	3.7	4.8	3.7
Overseas	1.4	1.2	1.3	0.7	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mathematical sciences and informatics					
Home	93.9	94.2	92.5	91.1	93.6
EU	2.4	1.7	2.4	2.4	2.0
Overseas	3.6	4.1	5.1	6.5	4.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Biological sciences					
Home	95.5	94.9	92.4	86.0	94.4
EU	3.4	3.4	4.3	2.7	3.4
Overseas	1.1	1.7	3.2	11.4	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Engineering and technology					
Home	73.3	80.2	74.8	81.9	79.1
EU	5.6	6.4	7.9	9.3	6.8
Overseas	21.2	13.4	17.4	8.8	14.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Pass grades include Ordinary degrees

Source:

HESA July Student Records 1996 to 2000

Trainee Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many trainee teachers *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be trained through the employment-based training route in each year from 2000–01 to 2004–05. [3368]

Mr. Timms: During 2000–01, 1,507 people entered the graduate teacher programme; 91 entered the registered teacher programme and 281 entered the overseas trained teachers scheme.

The Government do not set targets for the number of people entering the graduate teacher programme, the registered teacher programme or the overseas trained teachers scheme. However, my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced on 12 March this year an extra 570 places on the graduate teacher programme that will bring the total, in due course, to 2,250 a year.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the trainee teachers undertaking the employment-based training route are from *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* European Union countries and *(c)* other countries, indicating in each case where appropriate which subjects they are training to teach; and if she will make a statement. [3369]

Mr. Timms: Information on the nationality of trainee teachers undertaking the employment-based training routes is not collected centrally.

University Grants

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the level of funding required if university grants had been maintained at their final level in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* actual terms for each of the years (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02. [3317]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* If undergraduates normally resident in England and Wales currently funded under the new student support regulations had been offered a package of grants plus loans for maintenance similar to that available in 1997–98 we estimate the additional cost to the Department over the four years 1998–99 to 2001–02 to be as given in the following table.

Additional funding required if maintenance grants had been maintained at their 1997–98 level

£ million

	In cash	*On a resource basis*
In real terms		
1998–99	50	100
1999–2000	150	380
2000–01	230	630
2001–02	280	790
In cash terms		
1998–99	50	100
1999–2000	140	360
2000–01	210	590
2001–02	250	710

Note:
These figures assume that contributions towards fees would be unaffected.

Departmental Title Change Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the total cost of *(a)* design, *(b)* stationery, *(c)* new name plaques and *(d)* other costs of the naming of her Department; and if she will make a statement. [3033]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* Estimates for the cost of design, stationery, new name plaques and other costs of the naming of the Department for Education and Skills are as follows:

	£
Design of marque	14,705
Stationery	[1]12,632
New name plaques	[2]5,300
Other costs including Branding guidelines, web development and registration	23,420

[1] Production and initial stock
[2] 18 signs on five HQ sites

This has been carried out as economically and efficiently as possible. I believe that the connection with our customers via the identity is very important. Therefore we have chosen a clear, simple expression of what we do to help the public understand how our work affects them.

University Staff

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many academic staff, by university, left positions between 1 January and 30 March, who would have been included in the research assessment exercise submission had they been in post on 31 March; and if she will make a statement. [3316]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* These figures are not available. However, the Higher Education Funding Council for England are analysing the research assessment exercise returns and expect to be able to provide this information by the end of August.

Student Support

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support is available for intercalating students; and if she will make a statement. [3319]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* Under the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2001, full-time students who are absent from their course because of illness are entitled to continue to receive student support for the first 60 days of absence. Before academic year 1998–99 this was only 28 days. Local education authorities have the discretion to decide whether such students should continue to receive support after the first 60 days absence.

Students who remain ill for more than a period of 28 weeks may become eligible at that stage to receive income support and housing benefit. Local education authorities have the discretion to continue support to sick students waiting to receive income support.

LEAs also have a discretion under the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2001 to continue paying student support to students who temporarily suspend their courses for reasons other than illness.

We have made it clear in our guidance that local education authorities should exercise their discretion sympathetically in considering the cases of intercalation which come to them. Among the factors they must consider in coming to a decision is the possibility of financial hardship.

Students who temporarily suspend their courses may also receive assistance from the hardship fund at their institution's discretion. The hardship fund allows universities and colleges to provide discretionary support for students in particular need; and a total of £87 million has been made available in England for the 2000–01 academic year.

Modern Languages

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 81W, on modern languages, how many GCSE and A-level passes, in each of the language categories and years, were obtained by students at *(a)* independent and *(b)* state schools. [2836]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of GCSE and A-level passes, in each of the language categories and years, obtained by students in *(a)* independent and *(b)* state schools are shown in the following table.

	GCSE					GCE A-level				
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
(a) Independent schools										
Urdu	380	435	439	508	728	56	105	23	85	113
Bengali	35	36	38	37	36	—	1	2	—	2
Gujarati	87	111	97	93	136	—	—	—	—	—
Hindi	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	4	1	—
Chinese	1,243	1,283	1,203	1,112	1,277	750	677	825	888	961
Any modern language	46,211	44,501	42,202	41,538	41,876	9,505	9,510	9,310	9,240	8,711
(b) State schools										
Urdu	5,617	5,661	5,525	5,732	5,722	231	240	182	205	226
Bengali	1,939	2,061	2,011	2,056	1,967	30	26	36	9	15
Gujarati	1,015	1,043	832	1,009	1,017	—	—	—	—	—
Hindi	—	—	—	—	—	14	3	3	3	—
Chinese	493	574	546	596	593	59	72*	87	107	133
Any modern language	391,440	388,408	408,264	421,523	425,546	13,890	13,687	13,499	13,048	11,825

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students obtained GCSE and A-level examinations in *(a)* Urdu, *(b)* Bengali, *(c)* Gujerati, *(d)* Hindi, *(e)* Mandarin, *(f)* Cantonese and *(g)* modern languages in each of the last five years. [1299]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[pursuant to his reply, 3 July 2001, c. 81W]:* The table contained an error. The corrected table is given as follows.

The number of students of all ages who obtained GCSE and GCE A-level passes in the various languages over the last five years are shown in the table. Figures for Mandarin and Cantonese are not available, data for Chinese as a whole have been provided instead.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
GCSE					
(a) Urdu	6,658	6,660	6,370	6,497	6,677
(b) Bengali	2,116	2,220	2,146	2,152	2,041
(c) Gujerati	1,313	1,309	1,026	1,189	1,200
(d) Hindi	—	—	—	—	—
(e) (f) Chinese	1,956	2,048	1,937	1,917	2,028
(g) All modern languages	450,244	444,639	460,186	472,010	476,050
GCE A-level					
(a) Urdu	833	837	591	746	725
(b) Bengali	99	98	108	37	53
(c) Gujerati	—	—	—	—	—
(d) Hindi	31	19	13	8	—
(e) (f) Chinese	972	887	1,074	1,165	1,225
(g) All modern languages	32,937	32,340	31,298	30,224	27,455

Pay Bands

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the pay bands are for *(a)* school teachers and *(b)* further education college lecturers. [2994]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* Main scale classroom teachers are paid on a scale from £17,001 to £24,843. We do not collect information on pay bands for further education college lecturers, however, a national review of staffing and pay in further education, undertaken by ORC International, indicates that the mean salary for full-time teachers in FE is £22,769.

Fosters Field, Sherborne

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she plans to announce a decision on Fosters Field in Sherborne. [3195]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to announce a decision within the next few weeks.

Secondary Schools (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in the London borough of Hillingdon have not had an offer of a secondary school place for September. [2827]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not collect this information. However, my officials have been in touch with Hillingdon local education authority, which has a

duty to secure that sufficient primary and secondary schools are available for the children in its area. At present, the authority is in the process of establishing whether parents who have not accepted a place in any of the borough's own schools have accepted a place in a school in a neighbouring borough. The LEA has said that, overall, there are sufficient school places available in the borough for any local child who needs one.

AS-levels

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many universities have indicated that they will admit students on the basis of AS qualifications alone; and if she will list these universities. [3107]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The requested information is not currently held centrally by the Department.

Higher education institutions establish their own admissions criteria and supply summary details relating to full-time undergraduate courses to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The data that UCAS hold about institutions and courses requiring AS qualifications alone are still subject to verification by the institutions but should be available for release in approximately four weeks time, when they will be placed in the Library.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what monitoring has taken place of the pilot areas on EMAs, including the travel EMAs; and what plans she has to extend them to enable more people to continue in further education. [3193]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The impact of the EMA transport pilots is being thoroughly evaluated as a discrete part of the overall evaluation of the EMA scheme. We will also draw on a mapping study of current LEA transport provision for people in learning, which will be completed in the autumn.

The evaluation of the EMA scheme is designed to cover a three year period in order to assess the impact on achievement as well as on participation and retention in further education. Initial findings from the first stage of the EMA evaluation are encouraging. We will consider the case for further expansion of the scheme in light of further evaluation and as part of the spending review.

Medical Degree Courses

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to review the ethnic composition of entrants to medical degree courses. [1733]

Margaret Hodge: I shall ask my officials to review with the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Council of Heads of Medical Schools, the number of applications and acceptances for ethnic minority students in medical schools in England.

The number of medical school places was increased by 1,100 in 2000 and by a further 1,000 earlier this year. In both cases, when medical schools bid for extra places they were asked to demonstrate an active commitment to the recruitment of students from a broad range of social and ethnic backgrounds, to reflect the patterns of the population that they serve.

Although higher education institutions are responsible for their own recruitment and admissions procedures, we have said that these should be transparent and based on published criteria so that selection is on the basis of an applicant's ability and potential. I understand that the universities are discussing progress on this issue with the Commission for Racial Equality.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cheque Shops

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the Office of Fair Trading about the operating methods of cheque shops; and if she will make a statement. [3062]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many cheque shops *(a)* are and *(b)* were in each of the past 10 years licensed in the United Kingdom; [3053]

(2) how many cheque shop licenses have been withdrawn in each of the past 10 years. [3058]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Director General of Fair Trading does not hold records in the form specified and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cheques Act

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact the Cheques Act 1992 has had upon those who do not have a bank account in terms of the price of credit. [3059]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have not made any assessment.

"Extortionate Irresponsible Lending"

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the definition of the phrase "extortionate and irresponsible lending" as used by the Office of Fair Trading. [3054]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Consumer Credit Act 1974 contains provisions on extortionate credit bargains in sections 137–141. There is no equivalent statutory definition of irresponsible lending. However, the Office of Fair Trading issued guidelines earlier this year containing information about the type of practices which might cause it to take regulatory action against consumer credit licence holders.

Inward Investment

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on levels of inward investment into the UK. [3667]

Ms Hewitt: With my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, I am pleased to inform the House that Invest·UK announced in its annual review, published today, that the UK has delivered another year of outstanding inward investment performance.

For the period between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, the number of direct investment projects by foreign owned companies into the UK reported to Invest·UK by its partner agencies in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regional development agencies totalled 869. Based on information provided by the companies at the time of the announcement, it is estimated that these projects will create 71,488 new jobs.

This performance is proof of global confidence in the UK's economic and business environment. More overseas companies choose to invest here than anywhere else in Europe because the UK is the best place to do business.

I am arranging for a copy of Invest·UK's Annual Review to be placed in the Library of the House.

Telecommunications Report

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has received the report by the Director General of Telecommunications for the year 2000, as required under section 55 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. [3704]

Mr. Alexander: Yes. The 17th report by the Director General of Telecommunications is being published today. It covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2000. This includes initiatives to encourage the widespread provision of unmetered internet access and other initiatives to promote the interests of consumers and promote a competitive telecoms market. Copies of the report have been laid before each House of Parliament.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Digital Divide

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what policies she is pursuing to bridge the urban-rural digital divide; and if she will make a statement. [1809]

Alun Michael: As set out in the rural White Paper (Chapter 7.5.2–3) it is the Government's policy to stimulate and promote industry investment in higher band width services so that as many people as possible can get faster access to the internet and other information services. Policy on the costs of access and competition in the internet access market are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. My concern is to ensure that rural areas do not lose out and we have asked the Countryside Agency to monitor the rollout of broadband in rural areas. My colleagues and I will take their assessment into account in developing policy, including consideration of the case for requiring the communications industry to make higher band-width available as part of a universal service obligation.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will extend the farm business advisory scheme to form D farms; and if she will make a statement. [2944]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The farm business advice service is available to all farm businesses in England, including those subject to form D restrictions. However, in many parts of the country the 2001–02 budget is almost fully committed. Additional funding has been made available to fund delivery of an enhanced form of the farm business advice service to all farmers in England who have had their livestock compulsorily slaughtered under the foot and mouth disease control measures.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* the numbers of vets and *(b)* the country from which they came who have been assisting with the foot and mouth crisis from February to date. [2745]

Mr. Morley: Foreign veterinary assistance has been provided in two ways. Governments have loaned state veterinarians to the Department. Other foreign veterinary surgeons have also been appointed as temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs).

As of 9 July, 492 state veterinarians from the following countries have provided assistance during the foot and mouth disease outbreak:

Country	*Number*
Australia	76
Bulgaria	10
Canada	52
Cuba	2
Denmark	8
Finland	3
France	21
Germany	2
Hungary	19
Iceland	1
Ireland	18
Israel	1
Italy	1
Netherlands	2
New Zealand	25
Norway	1
South Africa	5
Sweden	15
Switzerland	5
USA	225

As of 9 July, 386 foreign veterinary surgeons have been appointed as TVIs from abroad and they come from the following countries:

Country	*Number*
Australia	109
Austria	7
Belgium	4
Canada	16
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	4
Egypt	1
France	7
Germany	15

Country	Number
Greece	3
Ireland	35
Israel	1
Italy	10
Namibia	1
Netherlands	7
New Zealand	50
Norway	1
Portugal	1
South Africa	57
Spain	38
Sweden	1
Zimbabwe	11
USA	6

These figures do not include those foreign veterinary surgeons supplied by veterinary practices in Great Britain.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the tourist industry has made to the Government over its handling of the foot and mouth outbreak. [2572]

Alun Michael: The tourist industry is represented on the rural task force by the British Hospitality Association, the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourism Council; ministerial colleagues from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport also attend. Under my chairmanship and, formerly, under that of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment (Mr. Meacher), the task force has frequently discussed the impact of foot and mouth disease on tourism and how Government policies might help mitigate that impact. I and colleagues have also received extensive correspondence and held numerous meetings with representatives of tourism and other industries from the worst-hit areas.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many jobs have been lost as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak in *(a)* the agricultural industry and *(b)* rural businesses. [2570]

Alun Michael: It is too early to make a full assessment of the number of jobs lost as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak, and for many businesses the worst impacts are likely to occur over the autumn and winter period. Evidence on labour market impact suggests that broadly foot and mouth disease has slowed the rate at which unemployment is falling, through an effect on both job losses and recruitment. Local survey evidence suggests that the tourism industry in the worst affected areas has suffered a large loss of trade in the past four months, which is likely to have resulted in a fall in the number of seasonal employees in these areas, besides any business failures and permanent jobs lost.

The Government have introduced a range of measures to help businesses cope with the impact of foot and mouth disease and will continue to assess the scope for further action through the rural task force, chaired by myself.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to protect *(a)* pedigree and *(b)* hefted sheep against infection by foot and mouth disease. [2557]

Mr. Morley: The Government are taking every possible action to eradicate the disease and so protect flocks in the future. Also owners of rare breeds of sheep and goats and hefted sheep may apply for exemptions from the cull of contiguous premises, provided they meet certain conditions including meeting high standards of biosecurity and their animals passing serological tests. The industry itself, and all those who work among it, also have a role to play in ensuring maximum biosecurity to stop the spread of the disease.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* country of origin of vets who returned home from MAFF/DEFRA service and had not been paid before their departure from the United Kingdom. [2746]

Mr. Morley: Foreign veterinary assistance has been provided in two ways. Governments have loaned state veterinarians to the Department. Terms and conditions were agreed with the relevant authorities in each country prior to the vets travelling to GB. Their salaries continue to be paid by the authorities in their own country.

Other foreign vets have also been appointed as temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs). TVIs are paid a daily rate which is claimed retrospectively. The necessary details to allow payment of moneys due is requested at the time of appointment. Information concerning the timing of payments to individuals in relation to their date of departure from GB is not recorded.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of the foot and mouth outbreak has been to date. [1076]

Mr. Morley: Our current estimate (as at 9 July) of the direct cost of the outbreak to the Exchequer is around £2.2 billion. Among other things, this includes cost of disinfection and cleansing as well as compensation for compulsory slaughter of affected livestock.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) of the contiguous culls in Worcestershire, how many have occurred around premises believed to be infected with foot and mouth disease, but which subsequently were shown to be negative in laboratory tests; [42]

(2) how many contiguous culls occurred in Worcestershire after negative laboratory tests for foot and mouth disease relating to the premises believed to be infected. [43]

Mr. Morley: Information is available only for Hereford and Worcester. Of 66 infected premises, 43 were tested, of which 30 returned negative laboratory results. These 30 cases remain designated as infected premises and are associated with 119 contiguous premises.

An infected premises is one where foot and mouth disease has either been diagnosed by a vet on the farm, supported by convincing clinical evidence, or where disease is found after testing. However, a negative laboratory result does not necessarily mean that the disease was not present and does not change the status of infected premises confirmed on clinical diagnosis.

When figures are available for Worcestershire, they will be forwarded to the hon. Gentleman.

Cleaning Services Group

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will make a decision on the holding of a public inquiry into the explosion at the Cleaning Services Group Ltd., Sandhurst, Gloucester; and if she will make a statement. [2950]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* I fully understand the concerns of local residents about the incident and their calls for a public inquiry. We are considering this issue in the light of the latest progress report into the Environment Agency and Health and Safety Executive's joint investigation of the incidents. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Tigers (Thailand)

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the risk to tigers in Thailand and the performance of the authorities in that country in enforcing agreements for the survival of the species; what representations Her Majesty's Government have made on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [2724]

Mr. Meacher: A copy of the Environment Investigation Agency's (EIA) report "Thailand's Tiger Economy" was sent to my Department in June. Since then we have received no representations on the risk to tigers in Thailand and the performance of the authorities in that country; nor have we made representations on this matter.

The UK is committed to supporting tiger conservation worldwide but we cannot intervene directly in the protection afforded to them in other countries. However, we do work closely with other countries to promote tiger conservation through our membership of such organisations as the Global Tiger Forum (an Indian-based consortium of tiger range states and others dedicated to promoting the conservation of tigers in the wild) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). We have contributed over £150,000 to a number of tiger initiatives over the last three years, including £40,000 to help CITES establish a tiger enforcement task force to combat illicit trade in tigers worldwide.

The UK participated as an observer at a recent meeting in Paris of the CITES standing committee where the EIA's report on Thailand's tigers was made available to the committee.

Energy Crops

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to encourage energy crops. [409]

Mr. Meacher: Our energy crops scheme provides grants to encourage planting of short-rotation coppice (SRC) and miscanthus, and setting up SRC producer groups. Early uptake in the scheme depends on the markets created by projects funded under the non-fossil fuels obligation and six projects utilising energy crops have potential to make progress. Just over 230 hectares of energy crops have been planted under the scheme this year and we have two applications for producer group funding. We are working closely with industry and others to develop electricity and heat markets and promote uptake. A good example of this is the community renewables initiative announced by the Countryside Agency on 9 July which will stimulate community based partnerships to develop renewable energy, including energy crops, in their localities.

The Soil Association

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions her Department has had with the Soil Association. [1673]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Officials met the director of the Soil Association and senior colleagues on 21 June. The meeting was primarily an opportunity for the Soil Association to brief the Department on recent initiatives and activities. We warmly welcome continuing contacts of this sort.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the impact of investment in *(a)* insulation and other energy efficiency measures in the home and *(b)* expansion of the gas network on (i) reducing greenhouse gas emissions, (ii) alleviating fuel poverty, (iii) upgrading housing stock and (iv) the creation of jobs. [2300]

Mr. Meacher: Government investment in domestic energy efficiency in this year will be around £190 million. In addition this year, local authorities plan to spend about £1.7 billion on capital works to their housing stock, some of which will contribute to improving energy efficiency.

The Government's climate change programme, published last November, estimated domestic energy savings of between 3.9 and 5.2 million tonnes of carbon per year in 2010.

It is estimated that the new home energy efficiency scheme, the Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in England, will save 0.2 million tonnes of carbon per year and treat a target of 800,000 homes over the period from 2000–04.

It is also proposed that 50 per cent. of the benefit of the energy efficiency commitment for 2002–05 should be concentrated on a priority group, including the fuel poor.

A recent report by the Energy Saving Trust, which looked at seven schemes, estimated that for every £1 million of expenditure in energy efficiency, including private investment, between 10 and 58 jobs are directly created.

The Government are very aware of the potentially valuable contribution which the extension of the gas network could make to tackling all of these issues. It has set up a working group with representatives from Government, Ofgem, the gas industry and consumer bodies to look at the feasibility of extending the gas network where it is viable to do so. This group is not due to report until October and no decisions have yet been taken on investment.

PRIME MINISTER

Constituency Visits

Q18. **Andrew George:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit the communities of west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly in the St. Ives constituency. [1916]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to do so.

Rough Sleepers Unit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister who has ministerial responsibility for the rough sleepers unit. [3267]

The Prime Minister: Lord Falconer of Thornton, Minister of State in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, has responsibility for the rough sleepers unit. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the same Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), answers on the subject in this House.

Champions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 31W, on champions, if he will list the champions. [3268]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Voting Systems

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 93W, on voting systems, if it is his policy to hold a formal review of the voting systems for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the European Parliament, and the London Assembly within the lifetime of this Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [3063]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Working Peers

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what his definition is of a working peer. [3145]

The Prime Minister: The overriding criterion I apply in recommending Labour working peers is that the individual concerned should be able to make a significant contribution to the work of the House of Lords.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions Education Campaign

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what date the report of the quantitative tracking research on the pensions education campaign will be published. [2274]

Mr. McCartney: A summary of quantitative tracking research on the pensions education marketing campaign will be placed in the Library later in the summer.

Hospital Downrating

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 5 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 269W, on hospital downrating, how many people would benefit in each case. [3269]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

The estimated number of people who would benefit from the abolition of hospital downrating

	Retirement pension	*Incapacity benefit*	*Severe disablement allowance*
Estimated numbers benefiting from abolition of 6–52 weeks downrating	21,000	7,000	14,000
Estimated numbers benefiting from abolition of over 52 weeks downrating	11,000	3,000	10,000
Total number of beneficiaries	31,000	11,000	25,000

Notes:
1. Caseload estimates source: 5 per cent. from the relevant computer systems in 2000.
2. Numbers rounded to the nearest 1,000.
3. Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) on what criteria persons will be *(a)* selected for triennial screening for Incapacity Benefit, *(b)* passed for continued receipt and *(c)* rejected for future claims; [3083]

(2) what opportunities will be offered for *(a)* access to work, *(b)* additional rehabilitation and *(c)* additional training for those rejected for Incapacity Benefit in triennial screening; [3085]

(3) what the proposed timetable and arrangements are for *(a)* consultation and *(b)* implementation of changes in Incapacity Benefit; [3084]

(4) what consultations took place, and on what dates, with disability organisations before the announcement of Government plans for Incapacity Benefit on 4 July; [3089]

(5) what categories of disabled persons will be exempt from the requirement for triennial screening for Incapacity Benefit; [3086]

(6) what the cost of triennial screening for Incapacity Benefit will be *(a)* per individual case and *(b)* in total annual expenditure. [3087]

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consultation he had with groups representing disabled people prior to his announcement of his plans to reform Incapacity Benefit. [3156]

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Incapacity Benefit reviews were undertaken in each of the last five years; and what is his estimate of the annual additional number of reviews that will be undertaken once his plans for reviews every three years are fully implemented. [3619]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 9 and 10 July 2001]:* The Government are committed to ensuring there is full employment and opportunity for all. This means we must extend the necessary help and support to all people of working age who are out of the labour market.

In the past, many people were moved onto Incapacity Benefit with limited help to make sure that they got the right level of support. There was no help to get people into work, nor any support or rehabilitation. Yet as the Disability Rights Commission has said, one million disabled people say they would like to work. We have a duty to help them to do so.

From October, the first pathfinder offices of jobcentre plus will open to strengthen the services available to help people back to work. It will be a condition of benefit in these offices that all new IB claimants attend a work focused interview to discuss what options people have around work and inform them of the help available. I can announce today that regulations under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 will be laid before both Houses in the autumn. These will include a provision that no one should go more than three years without a review of their circumstances and an interview unless there are good reasons, such as the state of their health. The regulation will set out how these reviews will be implemented. Each case will be looked at on an individual basis: a further work focused interview and/or personal capability assessment will be carried out where appropriate. All new IB claimants will be affected by these changes and will be told they are subject to the regular review, initially in the 50 pathfinder sites but then rolled out nationally.

At present, cases are looked at again if their medical condition is expected to improve. But some categories of case are exempt from medical testing. The changes I am announcing today do not change these exemptions. However, they will ensure that there is a review at least every three years to make sure people are getting all the help they need.

I will publish an explanatory memorandum when the regulations are laid which will be placed in the Library of both Houses. We will also discuss with groups representing disabled people the precise administrative arrangements that will underpin the regulations. Operational information will become available when the pathfinder offices open.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to implement EU Council directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 on age discrimination; and if he will make a statement. [184]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government intend, in line with the European employment directive (2000/78/EC), to introduce legislation to outlaw age discrimination in employment and training and will start public consultations later this year.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

7. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the budget for special advisers' salaries was in Government Departments in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2001–02. [1876]

Mr. Leslie: The estimated pay bill for special advisers for 2001–02 is £4.4 million. The pay bill for special advisers in 1996–97 was £1.8 million.

Online Services

9. **Mr. McWalter:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the contribution of the e-envoy to the delivery of Government services online. [1879]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are committed to getting services online by 2005 to ensure that the country, its citizens and its businesses derive maximum benefit from the knowledge economy. The e-envoy makes a valuable contribution towards this commitment, among others, through ensuring that the momentum in meeting it is maintained by working with Departments on developing their e-business plans.

24. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what targets he has set for the delivery of Government services online. [1894]

Mrs. Roche: The Prime Minister has set a target that 100 per cent. of Government services to the citizen and business should be available electronically, and in a customer-focused form, by 2005.

Major achievements have been made towards the overall aim of delivering 100 per cent. of Government services electronically by 2005.

These include:

42 per cent. of Government services are e-enabled now (73 per cent. by 2002 and 100 per cent. by 2005);

the creation of the ukonline citizen portal and the Government Gateway.

26. **Brian White:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made on reaching the targets for electronic delivery of Government services. [1896]

Mrs. Roche: Major progress has been made towards the overall aim of delivering 100 per cent. of Government services electronically by 2005.

These include:

42 per cent. of Government services are e-enabled now (moving to 73 per cent. by 2002 and 100 per cent. by 2005);

the creation of the ukonline citizen portal and the Government Gateway.

Social Exclusion (Brent)

10. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact of Government policies in combating social exclusion in Brent. [1880]

Mrs. Roche: Brent is benefiting from a variety of Government initiatives to tackle social exclusion including New Deal for Communities funding of £50 million over 10 years, a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund allocation of more than £5 million over the next three years, a Sure Start programme in central Brent since 2000, and another shortly in south Kilburn.

Information and Communication Service

11. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the work of the Government Information and Communication Service. [1881]

Mr. Leslie: The Government Information and Communication Service is a network of communication specialists working in Departments and agencies. Their role, as outlined in the guidance on the work of the GIS, is to ensure that the policies and actions of the Government of the day are fully explained and presented.

Rough Sleepers

12. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of progress on the rough sleepers strategy following the social exclusion unit report on this issue. [1882]

Mrs. Roche: In 1998, there were approximately 1,850 people rough sleeping in England. In June 2000, published figures indicated that approximately 1,180 people were sleeping rough. This represents a 36 per cent. reduction. The Rough Sleepers Unit will publish updated figures in due course in relation to counts carried out this year.

UK Online

13. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the progress of the UK Online project. [1883]

Mr. Leslie: UK Online strategy is the Government's comprehensive programme for success in the information age, delivered in partnership with other central Government Departments, local government, agencies, and the private and voluntary sectors.

The strategy was published as part of the e-Minister and e-envoy's first Annual Report. It set out a range of recommendations for action across the e-agenda.

The e-envoy and the e-Minister report monthly to the Prime Minister on progress towards meeting the UK Online strategy.

Important elements of the UK Online strategy include the ukonline.gov.uk, the Citizen's Portal, the Government Gateway, which deliver round the clock, customer-focused government services, and UK online for business, which offers expert advice to SMEs on how best to take advantage of the benefits of e-commerce.

Cabinet Office Delivery Unit

14. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the studies being carried out by the Cabinet Office delivery unit. [1884]

Mr. Leslie: The unit has been set up to help ensure the Government achieve our key objectives in the areas of health, education, law and order and transport. It is currently establishing its future work programme.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Minister is responsible for the Policy Delivery Unit based in the Cabinet Office; and if he will make a statement. [1631]

Mr. Leslie: The Delivery Unit, led by Michael Barber, reports to the Prime Minister under the day-to-day supervision of Lord Macdonald. It will help ensure that the Government achieves key objectives in the areas of health, education, law and order and transport, so that their ambitious programme of public service reform is translated into real improvements on the ground.

Business Regulation

15. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for reviewing the impact of regulation on business and employees. [1885]

Mr. Leslie: Since 1997, the Better Regulation Task Force has reviewed the impact of regulations in a number of areas ranging from farming to e-commerce, and will continue to do so.

In addition, our manifesto for business contains a commitment to require Departments and agencies to review the impact and working of major pieces of regulation within three years of implementation. We are currently considering the best way to take this commitment forward.

Government Departments (Regions)

16. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to move Government Departments out of London to the regions. [1886]

Mrs. Roche: There are no such plans.

Individual Departments and agencies are free to make their own decisions about location and facilities on the basis of operational requirements and value for money.

Regional Government

17. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish a White Paper on regional government in England. [1887]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W.

Best Value

18. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to improve Best Value criteria in respect of public services that have a cross-departmental impact. [1888]

Mrs. Roche: The Government have been consistent in promoting a cross-departmental approach to improving public services across the whole of the public sector. Increasingly, Government Departments are working together to improve services with overall needs of citizens at the forefront of their thinking. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 25 June 2001 a new series of

cross-cutting reviews, building on the initiatives addressed in the previous spending round, and local service delivery has received particular attention. Best Value performance plans will set out how local authorities will approach joined-up community planning. Local strategic partnerships continue to be a key contribution to cross-cutting delivery. The extension of Local Public Service Agreements will provide further opportunities for improving services.

Public Service Delivery

19. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the roles of the Cabinet Office in ensuring that public expenditure delivers effective public services complement that of the Treasury. [1889]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has no separate rules which govern our involvement in monitoring delivery of public services. The Chancellor of the Exchequer chairs the Committee on Public Services and Public Expenditure (PSX) which has overall responsibility for monitoring delivery. The Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office are members of that Committee and my officials work closely with Treasury officials to support and inform the Committee's considerations.

Public-Private Sector Exchanges

20. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the scheme for interchange between civil servants and private sector workers will operate in the next four years. [1890]

Mr. Leslie: The Interchange Steering Council met on 18 January 2001. The Council endorsed the Interchange Unit's strategy: to promote interchange with the private sector as well as the wider public sector and the voluntary sector; to further develop the Departmental Interchange Managers Network; to address barriers to Interchange, and to monitor and evaluate the impact on both individuals and organisations. It was also suggested that the Unit do more to develop Interchange regionally and sectorally. It is intended that this approach will be followed over the next four years.

Regulatory Reform

21. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what further regulatory reform he plans to introduce following the implementation of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. [1891]

Mr. Leslie: A proposal for relaxing licensing laws for this coming New Year's Eve was laid before Parliament for scrutiny on 28 June.

During the passage of the Regulatory Reform Bill through Parliament, the Government placed in the Library of the House a list of 51 proposals that could be implemented using the power contained in the Act. I expect to see many of these brought forward over the coming months and to see more proposals being added to the list.

Consultation on all of these proposals under section 5 of the 2001 Act has recently ended, with the exception of that for Voluntary Aided (VA) schools in England which ends in August.

A further five proposals from the list of 51 are currently being prepared for consultation.

Further information on potential Orders made under the Act can be found on the Cabinet Office website at: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/act/examples.htm.

Devolution

22. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his responsibilities with respect to regional devolution. [1892]

Mrs. Roche: The Prime Minister has asked my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to be responsible for a White Paper on Regional Governance, in close liaison with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and in co-operation with other Cabinet colleagues. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is also responsible for the Regional Co-ordination Unit and has overall responsibility for the Government Office network.

Programme Delivery

23. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to review the co-ordination and delivery of Government and EU programmes in areas of high social and economic disadvantage. [1893]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the final paragraph of my answer of 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 314W.

Climate Change

25. **David Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he next expects to discuss further development on climate change negotiations with the US Administration. [1895]

Mrs. Roche: Ministers keep in close touch with the US and will be discussing further developments on climate change again at the sixth meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change (COP6).

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what responsibility he has for developing the UK's climate change strategy; [820]

(2) what plans he has to visit international conferences relating to climate change in the next 12 months; [803]

(3) when he next intends to meet the French Environment Minister for discussions on climate change. [821]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will continue to play a role in international climate change discussions and negotiations on behalf of the Prime Minster.

Websites

27. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action is being taken to ensure Government Departments better utilise websites. [1897]

Mrs. Roche: The Office of the e-Envoy has taken a number of steps to improve the use of departmental websites:

We have established an infrastructure:

The UK online portal (ukonline.gov.uk) provides the public with in-depth access to UK Government information and services on-line

The Government Gateway will enable users to make secure electronic transactions.

We have published a range of supporting guidance, including:

The Government Interoperability Framework, which reflects best practice and adopts Internet and World Wide Web standards

The Government Metadata Framework, to help citizens find our services and information without having to know which Department is directly responsible for it; and

Guidelines for UK Government websites, which advise best practice in order to achieve government's aims for online services.

Women's Unit

28. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his responsibilities for overseeing the work of the Cabinet Office women's unit. [1898]

Mr. Leslie: The Deputy Prime Minister does not oversee the work of the Women's Unit. The work of the Women's Unit is overseen by Baroness Morgan and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who reports directly to the Prime Minster on women's and equality issues.

Ministerial Replies

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what mechanism exists for ensuring that replies are sent to members of the public who write to Ministers. [1877]

Mr. Leslie: All Departments have standards in place setting the maximum time it should take to answer correspondence from the public. Performance against these standards is monitored and the results published.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will list the Government agencies and units for which he is responsible; and if he will make a statement; [768]

(2) if he will list the responsibilities of each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [767]

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will set out his Department's responsibilities; [1933]

(2) what plans he has to increase the number of units run from within his Department. [1940]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I head a new office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the Cabinet Office. I am supported by a Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), by a Parliamentary Secretary, my hon Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) and by Lord Macdonald of Tradeston CBE and Baroness Morgan of Huyton for business in the House of Lords. As First Secretary of State I will continue to deputise for the Prime Minister as required, drawing on the resources of other parts of the Cabinet Office as necessary. I will oversee the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, which reports to the Prime Minister through me. I am also responsible for the Regional Co-ordination Unit and the nine Government offices of the Regions.

On international matters I will support the Prime Minister by seeing visiting dignitaries; undertaking overseas visits; and overseeing the work of the International Public Service Unit. I also carry ministerial responsibility for the British-Irish Council and will deputise as necessary for the Prime Minister at meetings of the Council. I will continue to play a role in international climate change discussions and negotiations on behalf of the Prime Minister. In addition, I will chair new Cabinet Committees on Domestic Affairs and on Nations and the Regions; and new sub-Committees on Social Exclusion and Regeneration and on Energy Policy. I will continue to chair the Committee on the Environment.

The Minister of State in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office supports me across the full range of my duties. She will, in particular, oversee the work of the Regional Co-ordination Unit and the Government Offices in the Regions, reporting to me on the development of their role and on the work of the regional network of the COI. She will lead on projects arising out of the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, be responsible for the work of the Business Co-ordination Unit, and will be sponsor Minister for a number of PIU projects. She will also be a member of a number of Cabinet Committees, including those on the regions and social exclusion.

The Parliamentary Secretary will support the Minister of State and me across the range of our duties. He will also support Lord Macdonald and will be the Minister answerable in the Commons for day-to-day decisions on the Civil Service under the Prime Minister as Minister for the Civil Service.

Baroness Morgan of Huyton, Deputy Minister for Women, will report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the Cabinet Minister for Women on: the day-to-day oversight of the Women and Equality Unit and sponsorship of the Women's National Commission. She will co-ordinate equality issues across Whitehall as Chair of a new Cabinet Sub-Committee on Equality. She will also have responsibility for implementation of Article 13 (reporting to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry) and cross-cutting equality issues (on behalf of the three lead equality Ministers).

The right hon. Lord Macdonald of Tradeston CBE, as Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster reports direct to the Prime Minister. He has day-to-day responsibility for the work of the Delivery Unit, which supports the Prime Minister on matters to do with the delivery of public services. He will work closely with me as appropriate on related cross-cutting issues covered by the Cabinet Committees under my chairmanship. He is also responsible for the work of the Regulatory Impact Unit; and the e-envoy's unit's work on e-government. He will chair the Panel on Regulatory Accountability and will jointly chair a new

Ministerial Group on the Manchester Commonwealth Games with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

The Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service, Sir Richard Wilson, will continue to report direct to the Prime Minister on the work of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Secretariats; the Joint Intelligence Committee and the Single Intelligence Vote for which he is the Accounting Officer; and the corporate management of the Civil Service (including the Government Information and Communication Service); the honours system; the Performance and Innovation Unit, which reports through him to the Prime Minister and which will provide support to the new Forward Strategy Unit in Number 10; and the new Office of Public Services Reform which will similarly report through him to the Prime Minister.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's responsibilities are in relation to *(a)* setting and monitoring the public service agreements of Government Departments and *(b)* holding each Department to account; and if he will make a statement. [1630]

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his Department's responsibilities in respect of the monitoring of the performance of Departments against targets set out in public service agreements. [1937]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 95W.

Performance and Innovation Unit

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those seconded to the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit to work on the current study of renewable energy, indicating in each case their qualifications. [1768]

Mr. Leslie: There are seven secondees and two external advisers working in the Performance and Innovation Unit on the current study of resource productivity and renewable energy.

The Performance and Innovation Unit undertakes a wide search to select the most suitably qualified secondees for its projects and while it is current government practice not to disclose information on individual qualifications, details of those seconded to this particular project are on the Performance and Innovation Unit website.

They are:

Civil Service Secondees

Catriona Laing—Department for International Development

Ian Coates—Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Private and Voluntary Sector or Academic Secondees

Samantha Armstrong—Environmental Resources Management (ERM)

Nick Eyre—Energy Saving Trust

Robert Gross—Imperial College Centre for Energy Policy and Technology

Dr. Catherine Mitchell—Warwick Business School

William Nickerson—Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge

External Advisers

Professor Jake Chapman—Professor of Energy Systems at the Open University

Ian Christie—Associate Director with the consultancy Local Futures Group.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his assessment is of the impact to date of the Social Exclusion Unit; and if he will make a statement. [2131]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Social Exclusion Unit was set up by the Prime Minister to provide solutions to specific social exclusion problems. It has completed reports on reducing truancy and school exclusions, cutting teenage pregnancy rates, reducing numbers of rough sleepers and of 16 to 18-year-olds not in training, work or education, as well as co-ordinating the work of 18 Policy Action Teams and developing the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

The initial review of the unit in 1999 found the quality of its reports to be exceptional and its working practices to be a strength. There is now concrete evidence that the implementation of the unit's policies is making a significant impact on the ground.

Examples include falling rates of permanent exclusion from school (down by nearly a third in 1999–2000 compared with 1996–97) and reduced numbers sleeping rough (down by more than a third since 1998). 1999 teenage pregnancy rates for under-16s and under-18s dropped on the previous year (down 7 per cent. and 4 per cent. respectively). Fewer teenage parents were out of training, learning or work last year compared with the previous four. And the 10 to 20 year strategy for England's poorest neighbourhoods is now being implemented by the new Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

The unit is currently working on four projects—on reducing rates of reoffending among ex-prisoners, on young runaways, on improving the educational attainment of children in care, and on transport and social exclusion.

Regional Co-ordination Unit

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the purpose of the Regional Co-ordination Unit. [1433]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Regional Co-ordination Unit's Action Plan published in October 2000 identified four key areas where the Government needed to take a new approach to developing and implementing regional policy: better co-ordination of area-based initiatives; involvement of Government offices more directly in policy-making; making the Government

offices the key representatives of Government in the regions; and establishing the Regional Co-ordination Unit as the unified head office for the Government offices.

The Regional Co-ordination Unit is taking forward action in these four areas in liaison with the Government offices and Government Departments.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Services Ombudsman

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will publish the annual report of the Legal Services Ombudsman for 2000–01. [3805]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Ombudsman has today published her 10th annual report and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the Houses.

1911 Decennial Census

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many hon. Members have made representations to the Lord Chancellor this year to use his powers to open the 1911 Decennial Census records in 2002; and what the Lord Chancellor's response has been. [2826]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This year, the Lord Chancellor has received no letters from hon. Members concerning the 1911 Decennial Census records.

TREASURY

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 169W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), on the private finance initiative, if he will place a copy of the National Audit Office study concerning the private finance initiative in the Library. [3419]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am sorry that my written answer of 4 July to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) contained an inadvertent error. I mistakenly referred to a NAO report on PFI and value for money, when the information concerned was in fact set out in references to NAO value-for-money studies in the Arthur Andersen report that looked at value for money drivers in the private finance initiative. This report was published in January 2000.

The Arthur Andersen report referred to all 11 reports on specific UK PFI projects that the NAO had produced by the end of 1999. Seven of these NAO reports judged the projects value for money against a public sector comparator (PSC). Three of the 11 projects did not have a PSC: in two cases, they pre-dated the relevant Treasury guidance on the preparation of PSCs; in the third case, the inception of the project pre-dated the Treasury guidance, and no formal PSC was prepared but an internal value for money appraisal was undertaken. One report was not a NAO value-for-money study, so did not examine the PSC. Analysis of the seven NAO reports that did compare costs against a PSC showed an average PFI cost saving of 20 per cent.

Crown Estate Commissioners

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assistance the Crown Estate Commissioners have afforded to Ipswich borough council in their appeal to the High Court in respect of their right to levy mooring charges. [1867]

Mr. Andrew Smith: While the Crown Estate has, at the council's request, provided some historic information about its own mooring charges, it has afforded no assistance, financial or otherwise, to the council in the preparation of its case to the Court of Appeal. The Crown Estate has, however, sought leave to intervene in the hearing in its own right, given its legitimate interest in the matters of principle raised by the case.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expenditure the Crown Estate Commissioners have incurred in each of the last 10 years in maintenance of the Lymington river bed and foreshore. [1868]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Crown Estate owns the foreshore and bed of the tidal stretch of the river, but has no statutory duty to maintain it and no expenditure has been committed. Maintenance of the river bed and foreshore is the responsibility of the Lymington harbour commissioners, who manage the river as a small trust port in accordance with the Lymington Pier and Harbour Order 1951. The Crown has assisted the harbour commissioners in fulfilling their duties, by granting the commissioners a lease of the foreshore and bed of the river.

Child Poverty

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact on the numbers of children in poverty in *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* couples with children, resulting from an increase in the threshold level of income at which Working Families Tax Credit starts to be withdrawn to (i) £120, (ii) £150 and (iii) £200. [1563]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to measure accurately the impact on child poverty of individual changes to the tax and benefit system. The margins of error surrounding these estimates are too large. Taken as a whole, the personal tax and benefit measures introduced over the last Parliament will have lifted over 1.2 million children out of relative poverty.

Working Families Tax Credit (Threshold)

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of increasing the threshold level of income at which Working Families Tax Credit starts to be withdrawn to *(a)* £120, *(b)* £150 and *(c)* £200. [1561]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated annual costs are *(a)* £0.7 billion, *(b)* £1.3 billion and *(c)* £2.5 billion.

Household Income

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact on the incomes of *(a)* lone parent families and *(b)* couples with children in each income decile, resulting from an increase in the threshold

level of income at which Working Families Tax Credit starts to be withdrawn to *(a)* £120, *(b)* £150 and *(c)* £200. [1562]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated percentage increases in income are shown in the following table. Each row of the table covers families in households in the decile group defined by the ranking of all households by equivalised net income before housing costs. The percentage increases shown are of the total net income of all families of that type and in that decile group.

Percentage

Equivalised income decile group of households	*Lone parents Income threshold raised to:*			*Couples with children Income threshold raised to:*		
	(a) £120	*(b) £150*	*(c) £200*	*(a) £120*	*(b) £150*	*(c) £200*
Bottom	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	0	0	0	2	4	6
3	1	1	1	3	7	13
4	2	3	4	2	5	11
5	3	6	9	0	1	4
6	3	6	11	0	0	1
7	2	4	8	0	0	0
8	1	2	4	0	0	0
9 and top	0	1	1	0	0	0

Notes:
The estimates are based on the 1999–2000 Family Resources Survey with incomes projected forward to 2001–02. The decile groups are of all households ranked by net income before housing costs (including WFTC with the current threshold of £92.90) equivalised using the McClements scale. The percentage increases are of net family incomes (not equivalised). The sample sizes are too small to yield reliable separate estimates for lone parents in the top two decile groups.

EU Budget

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the oral statement of the Economic Secretary of 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 229, regarding the net contributions of the UK, France and Italy to the EU Budget, if he will make a statement on the net contributions of *(a)* the UK, *(b)* France and *(c)* Italy to the EU Budget in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001 and the projected net contributions in each case to 2006. [2961]

Ruth Kelly: The United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC Budget in 1999 was 5.3 billion euro. The net contributions of France and Italy in 1999 were 1.2 billion euro and 1.8 billion euro respectively. Equivalent figures in respect of 2000 are not yet available. These will be available in November this year, when the European Court of Auditors publishes its annual report.

As the level of EC spending in any particular year is dependent on the annual budget-setting process, the Government do not forecast the contribution of other member states on an annual basis and comparable estimates are not therefore available for each of the years 2001–06. However, based on 1999 prices, the spending ceilings and the new system of own resources agreed at the Berlin European Council in March 1999 and the Berlin assumption of an enlargement taking in six new member states, it is estimated that the net contribution of France in 2006 will be around 5 per cent. of the EC Budget and that of Italy around 4 per cent. Based on the same assumptions, the United Kingdom's net contribution in 2006 would be around 5 per cent. of the EC Budget. In 1999, the United Kingdom's share was 6.41 per cent. compared with France (1.41 per cent.) and Italy (2.12 per cent.).

Windfall Levy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income his Department has received from the windfall levy. [3212]

Mr. Boateng: The windfall tax on the privatised utility companies raised £5.2 billion.

VAT

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the VAT threshold for small businesses. [3205]

Mr. Boateng: Representations are made regularly about the level of the VAT registration threshold. In 1998, Customs carried out a consultation exercise to seek the views of business and their representative bodies on the effects and level of the VAT registration threshold.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 July 2001

DEFENCE

Defence Export Services Organisation

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will amend the means by which charges for services provided by the Defence Export Services Organisation are calculated to ensure that the full cost is recovered. [2709]

Dr. Moonie: The policy of the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) is to raise charges against industry for activities undertaken on its behalf where Government independence from industry is not essential and when costs can be directly identified, calculated and recovered from individual companies. On this basis charges are raised for a proportion of the costs of demonstrations of defence equipment; market research and publications; DESO symposia and seminars; and inward visits.

In addition, the full costs of operating project offices in support of Government-to-Government sales are offset by receipts from customer Governments. In 2000–01 DESO's costs were as follows:

	£ million
Expenditure	56.01
Receipts	41.68
Net Operating Costs	12.36

These net operating costs are more than offset by benefits to the Defence budget, estimated at over £400 million a year, arising from DESO's activities. These benefits include reductions in overhead costs for UK Procurement as a result of longer production runs, receipts from Commercial Exploitation Levy and disposal of surplus MOD equipment. Against this background, there are no plans to amend the charging policy for services provided by DESO.

ITAR Exemptions

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which issues in the negotiations on ITAR exemptions *(a)* have been agreed and *(b)* remain unresolved; and if he will make a statement. [2718]

Dr. Moonie: The Government warmly welcome the decision of the US Administration to continue to pursue the Defence Trade Security Initiative, including a limited International Traffic in Army Regulation Waiver for unclassified US exports to the UK, announced in May 2000. These measures, if put fully into effect, would be significant steps towards achieving the objective agreed between the Prime Minister and President Bush at Camp David in February 2001 of

> "... increased co-operation in transatlantic defence trade and to the removal of unnecessary barriers and impediments to such trade."

Negotiations resumed with the new Administration in May.

Progress has been made in establishing that US and UK export control systems are comparably effective and that there is a high level of commonality between the US Munition List and the UK Military List. The proposals for the introduction, under the Export Control Bill, of UK export controls over electronic transfers of military technology will further increase convergence between the two systems. Key issues remain to be resolved concerning detailed terms for implementation of an agreement. Given their complexity early progress is not to be expected but discussions are continuing, constructively and amicably.

Defence Estates

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence estates have been sold since 1997; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of training areas and accommodation space for British forces. [3008]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* Since 1997 the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has conducted in excess of 500 disposals. These range in size from airfields and barracks to small areas of land and individual houses.

Following the publication of "In Trust and On Trust: A Strategy for the Defence Estate" in June 2000, the MOD has embarked on a major "core sites" review covering all our 4,000 or more sites. This will determine how the estate can best be used to satisfy our long-term military needs and also guide future investment. Associated with this work, we are also considering the supply and demand for training as part of a Strategic Planning Study for the Army Training Estate (SPATE), which is largely concerned with the rural training estate. This should not be confused with the Defence Training Review, which is an advanced element of the "core sites" review and relates largely to the built estate.

While the MOD has no current plans to acquire significant additional areas of land, we do from time to time purchase land adjacent to existing training areas where this allows more efficient or effective use of the land we already own.

We recognise that some single living accommodation is below modern standards and the Secretary of State recently announced a huge programme of new investment in this kind of property, amounting to £1 billion over 10 years.

Sonar 2087

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what particular mitigation measures have been implemented to take account of marine life, human divers and swimmers in the operational procedures relating to Sonar 2087; and if he will make a statement; [3296]

(2) when the Environmental Impact Assessment relating to Sonar 2087 will be completed; what evidence from outside bodies will be taken with regard to this assessment; what assessments have been made of the United States Navy's studies into the environmental impact of low frequency active sonar; and if he will make a statement; [3295]

(3) what frequencies Sonar 2087 and Sonar 2193 will operate at; and if he will make a statement; [3293]

(4) what independent studies his Department has commissioned or intends to commission into the effect on marine life of Sonar 2087 and Sonar 2193; at what cost; and if he will make a statement; [3292]

(5) which areas have been identified for the use and testing of Sonar 2087 in the United Kingdom and surrounding waters; what exclusion zones have been implemented; and if he will make a statement. [3291]

Dr. Moonie: Sonar 2087 is designed to detect submarines at distances greater than those from which potentially hostile submarines could engage our forces. Sonar 2193 is a mine-hunting sonar and will operate at short ranges. The exact frequencies the sonars will use are classified. I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to defence, security and international relations. I can tell you, however, that in order to achieve detection at long distances, Sonar 2087 will operate at frequencies lower than systems currently employed by the Royal Navy, whereas Sonar 2193 will operate at high frequencies to achieve fine discrimination between objects.

As underwater noise can adversely affect the marine environment, the MOD is committed to using both Sonar 2087 and Sonar 2193 in an environmentally responsible manner.

The draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for Sonar 2087 was conducted for the Department by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency at the Southampton Oceanography Centre (SOC). The EIA was informed by a number of other studies of the possible effects of sonar noise on humans, mammals and fish. The total cost was in excess of £2 million. The EIA will continue to be developed during the demonstration and manufacture phases of the project, taking account of trials information. It will continue to be informed by evidence from leading experts both in the UK and US; this includes exchange of information on studies conducted by the US Navy. We also monitor relevant scientific and environmental research around the globe. The final EIA will be completed by the planned 2006 entry into service and will be subject to independent review. An EIA for Sonar 2193 has been commissioned, to be undertaken by QinetiQ at the SOC, at a cost of £143,000.

Sonar 2087 is designed to be used world-wide. To date, the EIA indicates that, for initial trials, the vicinity of the North-West Approaches would be a suitable area. All our trials will be preceded by EIAs specific to the area concerned and they will be conducted using mitigation measures to take account of marine animal life and human divers/swimmers. These measures will be integral to our operating procedures and will include monitoring of the area which will begin before active transmissions are started and continue while the activity is under way and also for a period after transmissions have finished. Exclusion zones will be operated around known sensitive sites such as breeding grounds and sanctuaries; and we will begin transmissions at low output levels to give marine life the opportunity to move away. Similarly, a minimum range will be established from known diving sites.

These measures will provide a sustainable balance between the requirement for essential trials and training and the equally important need to avoid causing significant adverse impact on the marine environment.

Kenya

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the lot numbers of the munitions used by the British Army at Archer's Post and Dol Dol in Kenya. [2781]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding information regarding the lot numbers of the munitions used by the British Army at Archer's Post and Dol Dol in Kenya, in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Missile Defence

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the threat of attack on the Menwith Hill radomes that would result from UK participation in the proposed US Missile Defence system; [3380]

(2) what assessment he has made of the threat of attack on upgraded X-band radar sites at Fylingdales that would result from UK participation in the proposed US Missile Defence system. [3381]

Mr. Hoon: The US has stated that it has not yet decided how it will seek to proceed with deployment of a missile defence system and has made no request for the use of either RAF Menwith Hill or RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes. We have made clear we would consider any such request carefully in light of the circumstances at the time and taking into account all relevant factors, including security implications.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, in 1989 entitled, "The effect of Sarin (GB) on Contrast Sensitivity". [3400]

Dr. Moonie: No. The report to which the hon. Member refers was drafted but not completed. It is therefore unsuitable for publication.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if service personnel who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, are entitled to receive a copy of films recorded by the establishment of the experiment in which they participated. [3403]

Dr. Moonie: Not all trials undertaken as part of the service volunteer programme were filmed, nor are the films catalogued in a manner which would assist the identification of volunteers. Porton Down volunteers are

entitled to receive a copy of any film footage in which they alone are clearly identifiable. However, under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 footage which identified other volunteers could not be released. Requests for film footage will be dealt with on an individual basis.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 2W, on Porton Down, what the purpose was of the study involving RAF service volunteers at RAF Honington in 2000; what the conclusion of the study was; on what dates it was conducted; and for what reason it was conducted at RAF Honington. [3409]

Dr. Moonie: During August 2000 a study involving RAF volunteers took place on the Rapier Detachment Engagement Trainer at RAF Honington. The aim of the study was to assess the possible effects of miosis and ciliary spasm of the eye, from simulated exposure to low dose nerve agent, on the ability to operate the Ground Based Air Defence System Rapier.

The study concluded that both miosis and ciliary spasm of the eye has profound effects on any military task involving target detection and/or identification under low illumination conditions.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer on 28 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 133W, on Porton Down, if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes, agenda and papers of the meeting between his Department's staff and the Medical Research Council staff on 30 May. [3402]

Dr. Moonie: No. No agenda or formal notes of the meeting were produced.

Bermuda Regiment

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what amendments to the Queen's regulations and rules relating to disciplinary matters apply to members of the Bermuda Regiment. [2499]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* The Bermuda Regiment is not part of the British Army, therefore The Queen's Regulations for the Army do not have any authority over this Regiment.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which units of the armed forces are largely recruited from an overseas territory, and whose funding and command and control structure are comparable to that of the Bermuda Regiment. [2505]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* None. The Bermuda Regiment is not part of the British Army.

HMS Daedalus

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of HMS Daedalus. [3636]

Dr. Moonie: It is expected that a decision on the future of HMS Daedalus will be made within the next few weeks. At that stage I will write to the hon. Member and all other MPs and stakeholders to inform them of the way forward.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from outside bodies about the future of HMS Daedalus. [3635]

Dr. Moonie: Many representations have been received from a wide range of statutory and commercial outside bodies and local interest groups, including those tenants currently residing on the airfield. Much of the commercial interest was generated through our agent's marketing campaign and subsequent referrals.

Defence Estate, through the Daedalus Working Group, has always endeavoured to keep Gosport borough council, Fareham borough council and Hampshire county council informed of developments.

MOD Sites

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are used to determine which MOD sites not used by the armed forces should be sold. [3637]

Dr. Moonie: It is our policy that the Defence Estate should be no larger than necessary to meet the operational and training needs of the armed forces. To this end, the overall size of the estate is kept under continual review, and rationalisation of our landholdings and the early sale of surplus property remains a key priority. Normally, surplus sites are identified through estate rationalisation studies, as a result of changing operational requirements or from changes in policy. Before a site is offered for sale steps are taken to ensure there is no alternative defence use.

In the future, the rationalisation of the estate will be shaped by the emerging 'core sites' approach which is currently being developed as part of our Estate Strategy ("In Trust and On Trust: A strategy for the Defence Estate") which was launched on 7 June 2000. It is the intention that 'core sites' will become the focus for future development and investment.

Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the applicability of *(a)* the European Court of Human Rights and *(b)* the Human Rights Act 1998 to sovereign base areas in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [R] [2976]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Palestine

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the UK Government have contributed to the food aid provided by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to Palestinians in and around the Israeli-occupied parts of the West Bank and Gaza. [3235]

Clare Short: We have contributed £10 million to UNRWA's Emergency Appeals in response to the growing social and economic hardship in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the current conflict. Our funds are not

specifically earmarked for food; UNRWA's emergency operations also include employment generation, and other urgent social welfare provisions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Car Licences

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the diplomatic car licence plate numbers allocated to embassies and high commissions in the United Kingdom used to identify the country. [1683]

Mr. Straw: I am unable to release the information requested into the public domain as this could compromise the security of diplomatic missions and their personnel in the United Kingdom.

United Nations Security Council

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions in the last five years in which the United Kingdom's veto power in the United Nations Security Council has been *(a)* used and *(b)* threatened publicly to be used; and what the subject matter was on each occasion. [2708]

Peter Hain: This Government have not used the veto since coming to power in May 1997. However the United Kingdom has used the veto 30 times since 1946, with regard to the following issues:

October 1956 (twice) The Palestine question (Suez)

September 1963 Syrian-Israel Dispute: Palestine

March 1970 Rhodesia

November 1970 Rhodesia

December 1971 Rhodesia

February 1972 Rhodesia

September 1972 Rhodesia

May 1973 Rhodesia

October 1974 Relationship between UN and South Africa

June 1975 Situation in Namibia

October 1976 Situation in Namibia

October 1977 (three times) Question of South Africa

April 1981 (four times) Question of Namibia

June 1982 Question of the Falklands

July 1985 Question of South Africa

November 1985 Question of Namibia

April 1986 US raid on Libya

May 1986 South African raids into Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe

June 1986 South African attacks on Angola

February 1987 South Africa

April 1987 Question of Namibia

March 1988 Sanctions against South Africa

January 1989 Shooting down of Libyan aircraft

December 1989 The invasion of Panama.

It is not Government practice publicly to threaten the use of the veto.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for imports to Iraq have been blocked in the United Nations Sanctions Committee for *(a)* less than three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to nine months, *(d)* nine to 12 months and *(e)* more than one year. [2712]

Peter Hain: Most applications to export goods to Iraq are made under the 'oil for food' programme established by United Nations Security Council resolution 986 (1996). The vast majority of applications are approved by the United Nations Sanctions Committee. As at 6 July 2001 around 19,700 applications worth over $28.7 billion had been received by the UN since the programme began in 1996. Only 1,350 were on hold by the Committee (see table for breakdown). The majority of Committee holds are imposed because applications are submitted with insufficient information for the Committee to be able to assess whether the goods could be used in Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes. Where there are serious concerns in this regard, assurances of end-use or in-country monitoring are often sufficient to lift the hold.

Months on hold	*Number of holds*	*Value of holds (US$ billion)*
0–3 months	301	1.24
3–6 months	197	0.62
6–9 months	220	0.62
9–12 months	170	0.32
Over 12 months	461	0.59
Total	1,349	3.39

Embargoes

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the arms embargoes implemented by the United Kingdom prohibit the temporary export to embargoed destinations of protective clothing by UN personnel, representatives of the media and humanitarian workers for their personal use. [4271]

Peter Hain: The Government do not interpret those arms embargoes implemented by the UK as prohibiting the temporary export for personal use by United Nations personnel, representatives of the media or humanitarian workers of protective clothing on the UK Military List, which forms Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended. The Government will therefore consider, on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing criteria, all applications for licences for the temporary export of military helmets, body armour, bullet-proof or bullet-resistant clothing, flak suits and specially designed components for any of these goods.

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government will take at the 24th Session of the Ad Hoc Group on the draft protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention to enable a legally binding

compliance regime to be agreed at the fifth Review Conference; what changes to the chairman's text the Government will be proposing at the 24th Session of the Ad Hoc Group; and if he will make a statement. [3297]

Mr. Bradshaw: At the next session of the Ad Hoc Group in Geneva, the UK will continue to press for completion of the BWC protocol and resolution of the outstanding issues identified by the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Group, Ambassador Toth. There are a limited number of specific items in his "composite text" where further work is required. These are to be found in the sections on Definitions, Declarations, Visits, Measures to strengthen the implementation of Article III of the Convention, Investigations and Legal issues. The UK will continue to work closely with the Chairman and other Delegations to attempt to find solutions to these issues which are acceptable to all.

HEALTH

Strategic Health Authorities

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his timescale for the introduction of the new strategic health authorities. [1840]

Mr. Hutton: Strategic health authorities are to be in place by April 2002, with all related changes to the intermediate tier of National Health Service management completed by April 2003.

Long-term Care

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the interim report on the supply of residential and nursing home care in England will be published. [2673]

Jacqui Smith: The study of the supply of residential and nursing home care that we are undertaking involves a number of research projects commissioned from the Personal Social Services Research Unit. We are currently considering an interim report on the rate, causes and consequences of home closures. A final report on this issue is expected later this year.

Health Inequalities

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health authority the rate on the Years of Life Lost index used for the interim health inequalities adjustment in 2001–02 allocations, indicating which health authorities received an allocation under the health inequalities adjustment. [2956]

Mr. Hutton: The table ranks health authorities by the Years of Life Lost index used for the health inequalities adjustment and shows the adjustment received with 2001–02 allocations.

£70 million was shared between the 47 health authorities with rates at or above 137 on the Years of Life Lost index. This supplemented the £60 million health inequalities funding for health authorities with Health Action Zones.

Health authority[1]	*Composite Years of Life Lost index*[2]	*Health inequalities for health authorities at or above 137 on Years of Life Lost index £000*	*Health inequalities funding for health authorities with Health Action Zones £000*	*Total health inequalities adjustment £000*
Manchester	181.30	2,013	2,428	4,441
Liverpool	178.57	1,997	2,350	4,347
Gateshead and South Tyneside	174.07	1,476	1,678	3,154
East Lancashire	167.76	2,069	0	2,069
West Pennine	167.63	1,827	0	1,827
County Durham	166.41	2,424	0	2,424
St. Helen's and Knowsley	165.35	1,374	1,602	2,976
Barnsley	164.33	925	1,061	1,985
Bury and Rochdale	163.45	1,528	1,705	3,233
Wirral	163.15	1,246	1,398	2,644
Tees	162.92	2,166	2,547	4,713
Sandwell	162.02	1,180	1,364	2,544
Sunderland	162.01	1,112	1,376	2,488
North West Lancashire	161.36	1,748	0	1,748
Salford and Trafford	160.90	1,723	2,009	3,732
North Cumbria	160.73	1,226	1,256	2,482
South Humber	160.67	1,188	0	1,188
Newcastle and North Tyneside	159.24	1,778	2,201	3,979
Northumberland	159.00	1,175	1,249	2,424
Doncaster	156.99	1,106	1,307	2,412
North Staffordshire	156.40	1,752	1,608	3,360
Wigan and Bolton	156.18	2,158	0	2,158
Sefton	155.00	998	1,161	2,159
North Cheshire	153.17	1,151	0	1,151
Wolverhampton	151.42	872	1,081	1,953
North Nottinghamshire	150.63	1,376	0	1,376
Wakefield	150.46	1,190	1,414	2,604
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	150.29	1,744	1,842	3,585
Lincolnshire	149.82	2,301	0	2,301
Morecambe Bay	149.79	1,101	0	1,101
North Derbyshire	149.60	1,308	0	1,308
Isle of Wight	149.30	436	0	436
East Riding	148.75	2,054	2,350	4,404
Walsall	148.42	900	1,102	2,003

Health authority[1]	Composite Years of Life Lost index[2]	Health inequalities for health authorities at or above 137 on Years of Life Lost index £000	Health inequalities funding for health authorities with Health Action Zones £000	Total health inequalities adjustment £000
Rotherham	147.16	854	1,065	1,919
Camden and Islington	144.22	1,358	1,841	3,199
South Lancashire	143.79	1,081	0	1,081
Bradford	143.52	1,686	2,165	3,851
Calderdale and Kirklees	141.51	1,967	0	1,967
Herefordshire	140.53	560	0	560
Shropshire	140.36	1,450	0	1,450
Coventry	139.82	1,067	0	1,067
Sheffield	139.72	1,787	2,377	4,164
East Kent	139.69	1,962	0	1,962
Leeds	139.38	2,471	3,142	5,614
Nottingham	138.29	2,124	2,668	4,792
Dudley	137.32	1,010	0	1,010
East London and the City	136.92	0	3,217	3,217
South Cheshire	136.81	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	136.79	0	0	0
Warwickshire	136.57	0	0	0
Birmingham	136.51	0	0	0
South and West Devon	135.63	0	994	994
Stockport	134.85	0	0	0
South Staffordshire	134.83	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	133.99	0	3,607	3,607
Barking and Havering	133.71	0	0	0
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	133.66	0	0	0
Norfolk	133.11	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	131.38	0	0	0
South Derbyshire	131.26	0	0	0
Dorset	130.58	0	0	0
Hillingdon	130.45	0	0	0
Worcestershire	130.18	0	0	0
Somerset	130.18	0	0	0
Bexley and Greenwich	129.67	0	0	0
North and East Devon	129.42	0	0	0
Leicestershire	128.60	0	1,149	1,149
West Kent	127.65	0	0	0
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	126.48	0	0	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	125.71	0	0	0
Solihull	125.39	0	0	0
Suffolk	125.38	0	0	0
South Essex	124.75	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	124.39	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	122.80	0	682	682
West Sussex	122.52	0	0	0
Wiltshire	122.42	0	0	0
Avon	121.96	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	121.10	0	0	0
North Essex	121.07	0	0	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire	120.88	0	0	0
North and Mid Hampshire	118.96	0	0	0
Bromley	118.18	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	117.88	0	0	0
East and North Hertfordshire	117.82	0	0	0
West Surrey	117.75	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	117.56	0	0	0
Croydon	116.24	0	0	0
East Surrey	115.76	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire	115.54	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	115.01	0	1,002	1,002
West Hertfordshire	114.44	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	113.10	0	0	0
Berkshire	112.96	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	109.71	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	108.58	0	0	0
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	105.57	0	0	0
Barnet	100.00	0	0	0
England total	—	70,000	60,000	130,000

[1] April 1999 boundaries

[2] The Years of Life Lost index is a composite of the three-year average (1996–98) of rates of years of life lost under 75 for circulatory diseases, all cancers, accidents, suicides and undetermined injury.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank all health authorities in England and Wales on the basis of an age-standardised Years of Life Lost index, indicating which health authorities received an allocation under the health inequalities adjustment. [2957]

Mr. Hutton: The table ranks health authorities in England on the basis of an age-standardised Years of Life Lost index and shows the health inequalities adjustment received with 2001–02 allocations.

Questions about health authorities in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Health authority[1]	*Age standardised Years of Life Lost index*[2]	*Health inequalities adjustment for health authorities at or above 137 on Years of Life Lost index £000*	*Health inequalities funding for health authorities with Health Action Zones £000*	*Total health inequalities adjustment £000*
Manchester	195.4	2,013	2,428	4,441
Liverpool	173.6	1,997	2,350	4,347
East Lancashire	159.2	2,069	0	2,069
West Pennine	159.1	1,827	0	1,827
Bury and Rochdale	155.8	1,528	1,705	3,233
Gateshead and South Tyneside	154.5	1,476	1,678	3,154
East London and the City	153.1	0	3,217	3,217
St. Helens and Knowsley	152.4	1,374	1,602	2,976
Sandwell	151.8	1,180	1,364	2,544
Tees	151.5	2,166	2,547	4,713
Barnsley	150.2	925	1,061	1,985
Newcastle and North Tyneside	148.6	1,778	2,201	3,979
Salford and Trafford	148.4	1,723	2,009	3,732
Sunderland	147.9	1,112	1,376	2,488
County Durham	147.9	2,424	0	2,424
South Humber	146.3	1,188	0	1,188
Wirral	145.1	1,246	1,398	2,644
Camden and Islington	144.6	1,358	1,841	3,199
Wigan and Bolton	144.4	2,158	0	2,158
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	144.2	0	3,607	3,607
North Cheshire	143.8	1,151	0	1,151
Doncaster	142.8	1,106	1,307	2,412
Bradford	142.7	1,686	2,165	3,851
North West Lancashire	141.1	1,748	0	1,748
North Staffordshire	140.4	1,752	1,608	3,360
North Cumbria	140.4	1,226	1,256	2,482
Wolverhampton	140.4	872	1,081	1,953
Birmingham	137.9	0	0	0
Wakefield	137.7	1,190	1,414	2,604
Northumberland	136.7	1,175	1,249	2,424
Coventry	135.9	1,067	0	1,067
East Riding	135.1	2,054	2,350	4,404
Rotherham	134.7	854	1,065	1,919
North Nottinghamshire	134.6	1,376	0	1,376
Calderdale and Kirklees	133.3	1,967	0	1,967
Walsall	132.8	900	1,102	2,003
Morecambe Bay	132.4	1,101	0	1,101
Sefton	132.0	998	1,161	2,159
Leeds	131.6	2,471	3,142	5,614
South Lancashire	130.1	1,081	0	1,081
Sheffield	129.5	1,787	2,377	4,164
North Derbyshire	129.3	1,308	0	1,308
Nottingham	129.3	2,124	2,668	4,792
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	129.2	0	0	0
Hillingdon	128.6	0	0	0
Lincolnshire	128.3	2,301	0	2,301
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	128.0	1,744	1,842	3,585
Bexley and Greenwich	126.1	0	0	0
Shropshire	125.6	1,450	0	1,450
Isle of Wight	125.0	436	0	436
Northamptonshire	124.5	0	0	0
East Kent	123.4	1,962	0	1,962
Barking and Havering	123.0	0	0	0
Enfield and Haringey	121.9	0	0	0
Herefordshire	121.1	560	0	560
Leicestershire	120.8	0	1,149	1,149
Warwickshire	120.8	0	0	0
Dudley	120.5	1,010	0	1,010
South Derbyshire	120.4	0	0	0
South Staffordshire	120.0	0	0	0
South Cheshire	119.9	0	0	0

Health authority[1]	Age standardised Years of Life Lost index[2]	Health inequalities adjustment for health authorities at or above 137 on Years of Life Lost index £000	Health inequalities funding for health authorities with Health Action Zones £000	Total health inequalities adjustment £000
North Yorkshire	119.8	0	0	0
Stockport	118.7	0	0	0
South and West Devon	118.7	0	994	994
Bedfordshire	118.5	0	682	682
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	117.9	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	117.7	0	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	117.3	0	0	0
West Kent	117.2	0	0	0
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	116.8	0	0	0
Worcestershire	115.6	0	0	0
Norfolk	114.4	0	0	0
South Essex	113.7	0	0	0
Croydon	113.3	0	0	0
Wiltshire	113.3	0	0	0
Somerset	113.2	0	0	0
Suffolk	113.0	0	0	0
Dorset	113.0	0	0	0
Brent and Harrow	112.8	0	1,002	1,002
Cambridgeshire	112.3	0	0	0
Avon	112.1	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	111.7	0	0	0
North and Mid Hampshire	111.3	0	0	0
Solihull	110.6	0	0	0
Berkshire	110.6	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire	110.4	0	0	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire	110.3	0	0	0
North and East Devon	109.6	0	0	0
East and North Hertfordshire	108.5	0	0	0
North Essex	107.8	0	0	0
West Sussex	107.5	0	0	0
West Hertfordshire	107.2	0	0	0
West Surrey	106.9	0	0	0
Bromley	105.3	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	104.5	0	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	104.3	0	0	0
Kingston and Richmond	103.7	0	0	0
East Surrey	102.4	0	0	0
Barnet	100.0	0	0	0
England total		70,000	60,000	130,000

[1] April 1999 boundaries
[2] The Years of Life Lost index is a composite of the three-year average (1996–98) of rates of years of life lost under 75 for circulatory diseases, all cancers, accidents, suicides and undetermined injury.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list health authorities in order of their distance from target in 2001–02, showing *(a)* the cash amount and *(b)* the percentage increase on their baselines directed towards moving under-target authorities closer to their weighted capitation targets for *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [2958]

Mr. Hutton: The table lists health authorities in order of their distance from target in 2001–02 and shows, in cash and percentage terms, the increase on their baselines directed towards moving under target health authorities closer to their weighted capitation targets for 1999–00 and 2000–01.

For 2001–02, the distribution of extra resources was on the following basis:

(a) every health authority received a general increase to meet the pressures they all face calculated pro rata to their baselines;

(b) funding for implementing the NHS Plan was issued pro rata to their weighted capitation targets.

(No funding was specifically directed towards moving under target HAs to target.)

Health authority[1]	Distances from targets 2001–02 Percentage	Increase directed towards moving under target health authorities closer to target 1999–2000 £000	2000–01 £000	1999–2000 Percentage	2000–01 Percentage
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	−10.90	7,919	6,605	3.01	2.28
East London and the City	−7.15	8,868	6,051	1.95	1.22
Bedfordshire	−4.40	5,071	3,968	1.74	1.26
Berkshire	−3.36	6,696	4,834	1.67	1.09
Oxfordshire	−3.14	4,635	2,901	1.52	0.87

Health authority[1]	Distances from targets 2001–02 Percentage	Increase directed towards moving under target health authorities closer to target 1999–2000 £000	2000–01 £000	1999–2000 Percentage	2000–01 Percentage
Cambridgeshire[2]	–3.10	NA	3,673	NA	0.91
Barnsley	–2.95	2,252	1,664	1.55	1.07
Wigan and Bolton	–2.84	5,511	3,883	1.58	1.04
Buckinghamshire	–2.83	4,926	3,805	1.43	1.02
Barnet	–2.82	0	0	0.00	0.00
Leicestershire	–2.44	6,988	5,224	1.45	1.00
Walsall	–2.35	1,778	1,193	1.17	0.73
South Derbyshire	–1.91	4,247	2,509	1.33	0.73
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	–1.77	4,533	2,012	1.02	0.42
West Pennine	–1.73	3,453	2,260	1.24	0.76
Nottingham	–1.55	5,273	3,533	1.45	0.90
Shropshire	–1.39	2,247	1,676	0.97	0.67
Croydon	–1.33	2,198	1,290	1.16	0.63
South Essex	–1.26	6,426	3,073	1.65	0.72
Avon	–1.25	6,233	3,733	1.14	0.63
South Staffordshire	–1.24	0	1,358	0.00	0.42
County Durham	–1.20	5,363	3,326	1.40	0.80
North Staffordshire	–1.10	4,152	2,329	1.46	0.76
North Essex	–1.04	4,894	2,133	1.04	0.42
Enfield and Haringey	–1.03	0	0	0.00	0.00
East and North Hertfordshire	–0.98	2,842	1,933	1.04	0.66
Bradford	–0.96	3,770	1,981	1.29	0.63
Hillingdon	–0.88	0	794	0.00	0.51
Wolverhampton	–0.82	1,803	1,275	1.20	0.79
Coventry	–0.79	3,101	2,001	1.66	0.99
North Yorkshire	–0.74	3,975	2,178	0.97	0.50
North Nottinghamshire	–0.65	2,540	2,059	1.15	0.86
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	–0.58	5,471	0	1.02	0.00
Tees	–0.57	3,813	2,349	1.10	0.63
Dudley	–0.53	1,893	1,312	1.10	0.71
St. Helen's and Knowsley	–0.49	2,175	1,345	0.98	0.57
Bury and Rochdale	–0.49	2,717	1,191	1.17	0.47
Rotherham	–0.47	1,543	1,006	1.04	0.63
Norfolk[2]	–0.46	NA	0	NA	0.00
Stockport	–0.43	0	0	0.00	0.00
Sunderland	–0.34	1,978	1,223	1.05	0.61
West Sussex	–0.34	4,603	2,345	1.05	0.50
Lincolnshire	–0.33	0	2,266	0.00	0.57
North and Mid Hampshire	–0.18	0	0	0.00	0.00
West Hertfordshire	–0.11	0	0	0.00	0.00
Sandwell	–0.09	2,267	1,202	1.18	0.59
North Cumbria	–0.07	0	0	0.00	0.00
Brent and Harrow	–0.06	0	0	0.00	0.00
Wakefield	0.04	0	0	0.00	0.00
Worcestershire	0.20	0	0	0.00	0.00
Camden and Islington	0.21	0	0	0.00	0.00
Herefordshire	0.23	0	450	0.00	0.45
East Lancashire	0.29	3,393	1,925	1.03	0.55
Northamptonshire	0.30	0	0	0.00	0.00
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.32	2,514	1,557	1.05	0.61
Southampton and South West Hampshire	0.35	0	0	0.00	0.00
Wiltshire	0.46	0	0	0.00	0.00
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	0.49	2,939	0	0.95	0.00
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.51	0	1,571	0.00	0.42
North Derbyshire	0.58	2,021	1,104	0.94	0.48
Kingston and Richmond	0.68	0	0	0.00	0.00
Northumberland	0.75	1,701	896	0.92	0.45
West Kent	0.76	0	0	0.00	0.00
Somerset	0.85	0	0	0.00	0.00
South Lancashire	0.92	0	0	0.00	0.00
Solihull	0.92	0	0	0.00	0.00
Suffolk	1.06	0	0	0.00	0.00
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1.12	0	0	0.00	0.00
Doncaster	1.14	1,706	856	0.92	0.43
Warwickshire	1.14	0	0	0.00	0.00
Birmingham	1.18	0	0	0.00	0.00
Leeds	1.27	0	0	0.00	0.00
North and East Devon	1.27	0	0	0.00	0.00
Barking and Havering	1.45	2,525	0	1.05	0.00
East Riding	1.46	3,473	1,512	1.03	0.42

Health authority[1]	Distances from targets 2001–02 Percentage	Increase directed towards moving under target health authorities closer to target 1999–2000 £000	2000–01 £000	1999–2000 Percentage	2000–01 Percentage
North West Lancashire	1.52	2,952	0	0.98	0.00
South Cheshire	1.58	0	0	0.00	0.00
Bromley	1.63	1,631	0	0.95	0.00
West Surrey	1.74	0	0	0.00	0.00
East Surrey	2.15	0	0	0.00	0.00
North Cheshire	2.22	0	0	0.00	0.00
Newcastle and North Tyneside	2.25	0	0	0.00	0.00
Salford and Trafford	2.48	0	0	0.00	0.00
South Humber	2.52	0	0	0.00	0.00
East Kent	2.69	0	0	0.00	0.00
South and West Devon	2.80	0	0	0.00	0.00
Sheffield	2.81	0	0	0.00	0.00
Dorset	2.86	0	0	0.00	0.00
Manchester	2.89	0	0	0.00	0.00
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	3.01	0	0	0.00	0.00
Liverpool	3.13	0	0	0.00	0.00
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	3.39	0	0	0.00	0.00
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	3.60	0	0	0.00	0.00
Wirral	3.65	0	0	0.00	0.00
Gloucestershire	3.71	0	0	0.00	0.00
Sefton	4.18	0	0	0.00	0.00
Morecambe Bay	4.37	0	0	0.00	0.00
Bexley and Greenwich	7.27	0	0	0.00	0.00
Isle of Wight	7.70	0	0	0.00	0.00

[1] April 1999 boundaries
[2] New health authorities established 1 April 1999.

Drug Addicts

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the treatment protocol is for long-term injecting drug addicts over the age of 40. [2819]

Ms Blears: Treatment is provided on the basis of clinical need. Hence, treatment of adult drug misusers should not vary according to age. Guidance on the standard to which treatment should be provided is contained within the Department of Health publication "Drug Misuse and Dependence—Guidelines on Clinical Management", which is available in the Library.

Ambitious targets have been set under our 10-year anti-drugs strategy to prevent drug misuse, and to help those with drug problems overcome them. A key target is to increase the participation of drug misusers in drug treatment programmes that have a positive effect on health and crime by 66 per cent. by 2005 and 100 per cent. by 2008.

Car Parking

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision of car parking for *(a)* staff, *(b)* patients and *(c)* visitors as part of new hospital building schemes. [3223]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's policy is to require a transport plan that incorporates car parking arrangements for staff, patients and visitors as part of the business case approval process for new hospital building schemes. This will take into account local circumstances and the need to maximise accessibility by public transport to minimise the need for car parking, particularly for staff, while at the same time providing good access arrangements for emergency vehicles and those who need to use cars.

It is also important that those considering new health facility developments have early discussions with the local authority on car park requirements and transport planning as a key part of the planning approval process.

Herceptin

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to direct NICE to issue guidance on the use of Herceptin in combination with taxanes for the treatment of women with breast cancer who are over-expressing the HER 2 marker; and if he will make a statement; [3264]

(2) if he will list the health authorities in England and Wales that are awaiting a decision from NICE on Herceptin before they will fund the drug for the treatment of women with breast cancer who are over-expressing the HER 2 marker; [3265]

(3) if NICE has completed its appraisal of the use of Herceptin in combination with taxanes for the treatment of women with breast cancer who are over-expressing the HER 2 marker; [3263]

(4) when he expects NICE to issue guidance on the use of Herceptin in the treatment of women with breast cancer who are over-expressing the HER 2 marker. [3290]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 11 July 2001]:* We understand that the publication date for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's guidance in the use of trastuzumab (Herceptin) and vinorelbine for breast cancer has yet to be confirmed but is unlikely to be before the end of the year. Once the date is confirmed, details will be published on the Institute's website. We would expect NICE guidance to relate to the current licensed uses of trastuzumab.

We do not hold a central list of the authorities which are awaiting a decision from the National Institute before they will fund trastuzumab. However, we expect that health authorities will continue arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies in line with Health Service Circular 1999/176 issued in August 1999, copies of which are available in the Library.

Colorectal Cancer

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the health authorities in England and Wales that are awaiting a decision from NICE on Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed before they will fund these drugs in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer; [3287]

(2) what plans he has to direct NICE to issue guidance on the use of Irinotecan as second-line treatment of advanced colorectal cancer; and if he will make a statement; [3285]

(3) what assessment he has made of the length of time between the decision to uphold the appeal against the appraisal by NICE on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer and the next review of draft guidance by the Appraisal Committee of NICE; and if he will make a statement; [3281]

(4) when NICE will issue guidance on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer; [3282]

(5) when the appeal against the appraisal by NICE on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer will be heard; when the Appeal Board decided to uphold the appeal; and when this decision was announced; [3279]

(6) what guidance he intends to give to health authorities following the appeal being upheld against the appraisal by NICE on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer, and prior to formal guidance being issued by NICE; [3283]

(7) if NICE has completed its appraisal on the use of Irinotecan as second-line treatment of advanced colorectal cancer; [3284]

(8) when the appraisal committee of NICE will meet to review the draft guidance on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer. [3280]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 11 July 2001]:* We referred the appraisal of Irinotecan to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) on 12 July 2000.

Details of the process for a particular treatment are a matter for NICE. However, we understand that an appeal panel heard appeals against the final appraisal Determination on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer on 23 May 2001 and that the panel's decision was forwarded to the Institute on 27 June 2001. The panel's decision was distributed to consultees on 28 June and was published on the Institute's website on 2 July.

The appraisal committee will review its final appraisal determination on the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the light of the appeal panel's decision and recommendations. It was asked to do so on 27 June when the Institute received the appeal panel's final decision. The date on which it will meet to review its final appraisal determination is to be confirmed, as is the proposed date the Institute will issue its guidance. We understand that when these dates are agreed they will, in line with the Institute's usual practice, be published on the NICE website.

The length of time between the decision to uphold the appeal and the next review of draft guidance is a matter for NICE. It is aware that the final guidance should be issued as soon as possible but that due process should be followed.

We do not hold a central list of the authorities who are awaiting a decision from NICE before they will make these drugs available. However, we expect that health authorities will continue arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies, in line with Health Service Circular 1999/176 issued in August 1999, copies of which are available in the Library.

Follicular Lymphoma

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the health authorities in England and Wales that are awaiting a decision from NICE on rituximab before they will make this drug available for the treatment of eligible patients with follicular lymphoma; [3277]

(2) when the next Appraisal Committee of NICE to review draft guidance on the use of rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma will meet; [3272]

(3) when the appeal against the appraisal by NICE on the use of rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma was heard; when the appeal board decided to uphold the appeal; and when this decision was announced; [3271]

(4) when NICE will issue guidance on the use of rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma; [3274]

(5) what assessment he has made of the length of time between the decision to uphold the appeal against the appraisal by NICE on the use of rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma and the next review of draft guidance by the Appraisal Committee of NICE: and if he will make a statement. [3273]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 11 July 2001]:* Appeals are a part of the process used by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence for developing robust and reliable guidance. Details of the process for a particular treatment are a matter for the Institute. However, we understand that an appeal panel heard appeals against the final appraisal determination on the use of rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma on 21 May 2001 and that the panel's decision was forwarded to the Institute on 27 June 2001. The panel's decision was distributed to consultees on 28 June and was published on the Institute's website on 2 July.

The appraisal committee will review its final appraisal determination on rituximab for follicular lymphoma in the light of the appeal panel's decision and recommendations.

It was asked to do so on 27 June when the Institute received the appeal panel's final decision. The date on which it will meet to review its final appraisal determination is to be confirmed, as is the proposed date the Institute will issue its guidance. We understand that when these dates are agreed they will be published on the Institute's website in line with normal practice.

The length of time between the decision to uphold the appeal and the next review of draft guidance is a matter for the National Institute. It is aware that the final guidance should be issued as soon as possible but that due process should be followed.

We do not hold a central list of the authorities who are awaiting a decision from the Institute on rituximab before they will make this drug available. However, we expect that health authorities will continue arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies, in line with Health Service Circular 1999/176 issued in August 1999, copies of which are available in the Library.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he intends to give to health authorities following the appeal upheld against the appraisal by NICE on the use of rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma and prior to formal guidance being issued by NICE. [3275]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* None. We issued Health Service Circular 1999/176 in August 1999. It asks National Health Service bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is not available at the time the technology first becomes available. It also advises that these arrangements should involve an assessment of all the available evidence.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank health authorities in England in order of the highest waiting times for hospital operations, using as the measures *(a)* those waiting over six months for inpatient treatments and *(b)* those waiting over 12 months for inpatient treatments. [3052]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* Patients awaiting operations are not identifiable separately. The table shows, for all patients awaiting admission to hospital, numbers of patients waiting more than six months and more than 12 months in each health authority in England as at 31 May 2001.

As part of the NHS Plan, the National Health Service is working towards reducing the current maximum inpatient wait of 18 months to 15 months by March 2002, 12 months by March 2003, nine months by March 2004 and then ultimately six months by the end of 2005.

Patients waiting more than six months for admission to hospital as on 31 May 2001

Health authority	*Number*
West Kent	7,796
West Sussex	7,141
Avon	6,603
North Essex	6,537
Hertfordshire	6,167
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	5,910
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	5,806
West Surrey	5,484
East Kent	5,348
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	5,101
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	4,628
South Essex	4,571
Norfolk	4,481
Suffolk	4,406
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	4,380
Lincolnshire	—
Southampton and South West Hampshire	4,028
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4,019
South and West Devon	3,961
Leeds	3,929
South Cheshire	3,908
Buckinghamshire	3,896
South Staffordshire	3,808
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	3,792
Berkshire	3,758
Salford and Trafford	3,667
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	3,587
Northamptonshire	3,579
Wiltshire	3,507
Cambridgeshire	3,491
North and East Devon	3,472
North Yorkshire	3,448
East Riding and Hull	3,434
Barking and Havering	3,400
East London and City	3,191
Leicestershire	3,171
East Surrey	3,143
Wigan and Bolton	3,102
Bedfordshire	3,077
South Derbyshire	3,049
North Cheshire	2,977
East Lancashire	2,973
Somerset	2,962
Manchester	2,954
Oxfordshire	2,947
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	2,901
Liverpool	2,778
North and Mid Hampshire	2,702
Worcestershire	2,689
Sheffield	2,664
Nottingham	2,496
Birmingham	2,465
Tees	2,419
Brent and Harrow	2,398
County Durham and Darlington	2,360
Bradford	2,325
Croydon	2,262
West Pennine	2,196
Kingston and Richmond	2,175
South Lancashire	2,105
Warwickshire	2,019
Wakefield	2,019
North West Lancashire	2,005
St. Helens and Knowsley	2,003
North Cumbria	1,995
Bury and Rochdale	1,976
South Humber	1,894
North Derbyshire	1,877
North Nottinghamshire	1,808
Sefton	1,779
Stockport	1,769
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1,726
Shropshire	1,690
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,657
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1,618
Morecambe Bay	1,477
Camden and Islington	1,412
	1,367

Patients waiting more than six months for admission to hospital as on 31 May 2001

Health authority	*Number*
North Staffordshire	1,333
Gloucestershire	1,316
Sunderland	1,256
Hillingdon	1,096
Wirral	983
Northumberland	972
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	961
Dudley	875
Coventry	869
Wolverhampton	709
Herefordshire	693
Barnsley	588
Solihull	578
Sandwell	565
Doncaster	507
Rotherham	475
Walsall	399
Dorset	106

Patients waiting more than 12 months for admission to hospital as on 31 May 2001

Health authority	*Number*
West Sussex	1,816
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,603
West Kent	1,551
West Surrey	1,522
Avon	1,436
Hertfordshire	1,353
North Essex	1,331
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	1,160
East Kent	1,122
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	1,040
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	—
Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,040
Norfolk	1,011
Salford and Trafford	994
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	849
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	839
South and West Devon	811
Buckinghamshire	783
East Surrey	777
Wiltshire	754
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	745
Bedfordshire	726
South Staffordshire	725
North Cheshire	721
Manchester	717
North and East Devon	697
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	689
Northamptonshire	685
South Cheshire	623
Suffolk	622
Croydon	617
Cambridgeshire	606
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	603
Lincolnshire	594
East London and City	561
North and Mid Hampshire	536
Barking and Havering	530
Berkshire	521
Liverpool	516
South Essex	504
Oxfordshire	493
Wigan and Bolton	487
Kingston and Richmond	484
Brent and Harrow	448
	439

Patients waiting more than 12 months for admission to hospital as on 31 May 2001

Health authority	*Number*
Worcestershire	414
Leeds	367
Leicestershire	364
Somerset	357
East Riding and Hull	321
St. Helens and Knowsley	319
Sefton	287
West Pennine	285
Shropshire	280
Camden and Islington	263
South Lancashire	258
Bury and Rochdale	258
Hillingdon	250
Stockport	248
Birmingham	238
North Staffordshire	225
South Derbyshire	212
Nottingham	195
North Cumbria	188
Morecame Bay	183
Wakefield	173
North West Lancashire	171
North Yorkshire	168
East Lancashire	154
Calderdale and Kirklees	148
Gloucestershire	131
Wirral	128
Newcastle and North Tyneside	112
Herefordshire	107
Tees	104
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	99
County Durham and Darlington	94
Bradford	88
Dudley	80
Coventry	77
Warwickshire	73
North Nottinghamshire	60
Sheffield	60
Northumberland	56
North Derbyshire	55
Gateshead and South Tyneside	43
Wolverhampton	43
Sunderland	38
South Humber	37
Sandwell	28
Walsall	27
Solihull	21
Barnsley	18
Dorset	12
Doncaster	9
Rotherham	8

Source:
QFO1 quarterly returns

NHS Complaints Procedure

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 290W, on NHS complaints procedure, on what date his Department received the report from York Health Economics Consortium. [3562]

Ms Blears: The final report of the national evaluation of the National Health Service complaints procedure by the York Health Economics Consortium and NFO System Three Social Research (formerly Public Attitude Surveys) was received by the Department on 28 February 2001.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were on 31 March *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1999, in each county of England and Wales. [2595]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The available information, showing vacancies at January each year, has been published in table 42 of the DfES publication "Statistics of Education: Teachers, England and Wales, 2000 edition". A copy is held in the House of Commons Library, and is also available on the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/VOL/v0220/index.html.

Assessment

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the recent statement by the chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on the current assessment system. [3119]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) made a wide ranging speech at the QCA Annual Conference on 26 June in which he made a number of observations about the possible future direction of the assessment system.

QCA conducted a review of statutory assessment (ie at Key Stage 1, 2 and 3) last year at the request of Ministers. This review covered three areas: strengthening and improving the current tests; enhancing the role of ICT in the tests; and improving teachers' own skills in assessment. Ministers welcomed the range and scope of the recommendations which officials in QCA and the Department for Education and Skills are now taking forward.

Head Teachers' Forums

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the remit of the new head teachers' forums within local education authorities will be; what guidance her Department has issued to local education authorities on setting up these forums; and if she will make a statement. [3024]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* My Department has no plans to establish head teachers' forums.

Free School Meals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children are entitled to free school meals in *(a)* Church of England schools, *(b)* Roman Catholic schools, *(c)* schools of other Christian denominations *(d)* other religious schools, *(e)* non religious foundation schools and *(f)* other maintained schools. [3164]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools: percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals by religious character, January 2000

Religious character	*Maintained primary schools*	*Maintained secondary schools*
Church of England	12.2	11.8
Roman Catholic	17.2	16.5
Other religious schools[1]	10.2	7.1
Non-religious schools	20.2	16.8

[1] Includes Methodist, schools of mixed denomination or other Christian belief, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and other religions.

Connexions Service

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many advisers have been recruited to date, and how many more will be recruited by 2005, to operate the Connexions Service; and if she will make a statement. [3365]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The 12 Partnerships that went live on 1 April 2001 are in a transition stage, building up their personal adviser staff from partner organisations, including the Careers Service and Youth Service and by recruitment of new staff. It is very early days, but preliminary figures reported by Partnerships at the end of May 2001 indicate that 991 full-time equivalent personal advisers were in post.

The Connexions Service will be rolled out nationally during 2002–03, but it has always been recognised that the service, including the number of personal advisers, would build up gradually over time. Significant additional funding—£177 million above the Careers Service baseline in 2000–01—has been announced for 2002–03. How this will translate into additional personal advisers will depend on a range of factors including locally determined rates of pay and the additional resources that Partnerships are able to secure from partner organisations. Funding for future years will be determined by the outcome of the CSR2002 exercise.

Further Education

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the contribution of the further education sector in raising the skills base in the United Kingdom. [2988]

John Healey *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The further education sector makes an essential contribution to delivering the skilled work force our nation requires. We are working to ensure that it is flexible and responsive to employers' changing skills needs. The sector plays a particularly important role in delivering the skills we need for craft, technician and equivalent level jobs—skills that are vital to raise our skills base and to boost productivity. Over recent years we have widened participation and increased achievements while maintaining retention rates. We have also seen significant improvements in performance and a reduction in variations in quality across the sector. Nevertheless, we have ambitions to achieve more. We have significantly increased the Standards Fund, to support raising standards in colleges, and we are spending £100 million over the next three years to develop Centres of Vocational Excellence in the sector.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of staff morale in the further education sector; and if she will make a statement. [2992]

John Healey *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The assessment of staff morale is a matter for colleges, as independent employers, to address in consultation with the relevant unions, just as the terms and conditions for staff are a matter for colleges to determine in discussion with relevant unions. We acknowledge that colleges need help to ensure that they have the right arrangements to recruit, reward and retain excellent teachers. Starting this year, significant extra resources amounting to an additional £300 million over the next three years have been made available to the further education sector to reward high calibre staff through our Teaching Pay Initiative, £44 million of which will be shared by sixth-form colleges. The total figure is over and above the annual pay round. In addition, we plan to implement arrangements for FE teachers of shortage subjects to benefit from 'golden hellos' comparable to those already in schools and from arrangements we are piloting to help new entrants to the profession to pay off their student loans.

Sure Start

Joan Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to authorise a further round of local sure start programmes. [3705]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and I have today invited the following 105 districts in England to set up 177 new sure start programmes:

District	*Number of programmes*
Amber Valley	1
Arun	1
Ashford	1
Barking and Dagenham	1
Barnsley	2
Barrow-in-Furness	1
Birmingham	6
Blackburn with Darwen	2
Blackpool	1
Bolton	2
Bradford	3
Brent	1
Bristol	1
Burnley	1
Calderdale	1
Cambridge	1
Camden	2
Cheltenham	1
Colchester	1
Coventry	1
Crawley	1
Crewe and Nantwich	1
Darlington 1	1
Dartford	1
Derby	2
Doncaster	3
Durham	1
Easington	1
Eastbourne	1
Erewash	1
Gateshead	2
Gedling	1
Gosport	1
Gravesham	1
Great Yarmouth	1
Greenwich	2
Hackney	3
Halton	2
Hammersmith and Fulham	1
Haringey	3
Hartlepool	1
Hastings	1
Hyndburn	1
Islington	3
Kensington and Chelsea	1
Kettering	1
Kingston upon Hull	3
Kirklees	2
Knowsley	2
Lambeth	3
Leeds	2
Leicester	3
Lewisham	2
Lincoln	1
Liverpool	4
Manchester	4
Mansfield	1
Merton	1
Middlesbrough	2
Newcastle upon Tyne	3
Newham	4
North Cornwall	1
North East Lincolnshire	2
North Tyneside	1
Norwich	1
Nottingham	3
Oldham	2
Pendle	1
Penwith	1
Peterborough	1
Plymouth	2
Preston	2
Redcar and Cleveland	2
Rochdale	2
Rother	1
Rotherham	1
Salford	2
Sandwell	3
Sefton	2
Sheffield	3
South Tyneside	2
Southampton	1
Southwark	3
St. Helens	2
Stockton-on-Tees	2
Stoke-on-Trent	3
Sunderland	3
Tameside	1
Taunton Deane	1
Teignbridge	1
Thanet	1
Torbay	1
Torridge	1
Tower Hamlets	3
Wakefield	1
Walsall	2
Waltham Forest	1
Wansbeck	1
Wear Valley	1
Wellingborough	1
Westminster	1
Wirral	1
Wolverhampton	2
Worcester	1
York	1

We have placed a copy of the guidance for this fifth wave of programmes in the Library.

These new programmes are an addition to the 260 programmes which are already delivering services to young children and their families in disadvantaged areas or developing their plans for delivery from the autumn. This announcement brings the total number of sure start programmes so far announced to 437. They will become operational from summer 2002 when we will be well on schedule to meet the Public Service Agreement target of 500 programmes operating by 2004, reaching one third of all poor children aged under four and their families in England. This will be a significant contribution to the Government's aim of eradicating child poverty by 2020.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Extraditions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals have been extradited from the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [2528]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No record is kept of the nationalities of those extradited from the United Kingdom. Total numbers extradited from the United Kingdom in each of the last five years are as follows:

Year	*Total*
2000	[1]47
1999	38
1998	45
1997	43
1996	35

[1] The figure for 2000 does not include one further fugitive who was delivered to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

The figures relate to extraditions under the Extradition Act 1989 and do not include cases governed by the provisions of the Backing of Warrants (Republic of Ireland) Act 1965. The latter are not collected centrally.

Economic Crime

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to combat economic crime; and if he will make a statement. [2687]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government fully recognise the harm which economic crime inflicts on its victims, not only in terms of the financial loss but in terms of the frustration and inconvenience caused. Living off the proceeds of crime cannot be tolerated in a fair and just society, and the Government are determined that crime should not pay.

The Proceeds of Crime Bill, which was announced in the Queen's Speech, will attack the profit motive which drives organised criminals. The Bill will contain measures to deprive people of money and property which they have obtained through criminal activity. These measures include reforming confiscation procedures and modernising the criminal law on money laundering and the creation of a new agency, the National Confiscation Agency (NCA), which will co-ordinate the activity of the police, Customs, the Inland Revenue and prosecutors to remove assets obtained illegally and to encourage international co-operation in this. Removing illegal gains from criminals not only acts as a deterrent but reduces their ability to fund further crime.

A large proportion of economic crime involves credit card fraud. The Home Office is currently working closely with the financial institutions and the retail sector to reduce credit card fraud by the introduction of chip cards and personal identification numbers as security safeguards. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State responsible for policing of crime and community safety will be chairing a meeting with senior members of these industries to discuss credit card fraud issues later this month.

In addition to this, a working group led by the Serious Fraud Office has been formed to investigate how we can improve the overall response to fraud. The group will be reporting to Ministers later in the year.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made for the cost of *(a)* credit card fraud, *(b)* other fraud and *(c)* all economic crime in each of the last six years. [2686]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information is as follows:

(a) The banking industry (the Association of Payment Clearing Services) estimated that the cost of total reported losses due to credit card fraud in each of the last six years was:

	£ million
1995	83.3
1996	97.1
1997	122.0
1998	135.0
1999	188.4
2000	292.6

(b) A report commissioned by the Home Office and the Serious Fraud Office entitled 'The Economic Cost of Fraud' (copies of which have been placed in the Library) was published in March 2000 by National Economic Research Associates. This report recognised that the available data were patchy and infrequently gathered, but offered a low estimate of £6.6 billion and a high estimate of £13.6 billion for the total economic cost of other fraud (excluding credit card fraud) for the year ending 1999. These estimates include amounts defrauded, investigation and deterrence costs.

(c) There is no accepted definition of "economic crime". However, Home Office Research Study no. 217 "The economic and social cost of crime" (copies of which have been placed in the Library) estimated that in total, fraud, commercial and public sector victimisation and property crimes against households and individuals cost around £32 billion in 1999–2000. Estimates have not been made for previous years.

Privacy Screens

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide finance for privacy screens in cells which are used for eating, sleeping and integral sanitation. [2842]

Beverley Hughes: In June this year the Prison Service approved funding of £1 million for a programme to install privacy screening in 6,500 or so cells across its estate currently without such provision. Arrangements are in hand to manufacture the screens to the newly approved standard. A programme of installation is expected to begin in this financial year and take about 12 months to complete.

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations giving immigration advice for profit are registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner; and how many such organisations are in the process of registering with the OISC; [3299]

(2) what the planned total expenditure budget is of the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner in 2001–02; [3301]

(3) what the projected total income budgets of the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner are for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; [3302]

(4) how many complaints against an immigration adviser have been *(a)* received and *(b)* determined by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner since 30 April; [3303]

(5) if he will provide a breakdown of the staff complement of the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner. [3300]

Angela Eagle: I understand that, as of 10 July 2001, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) had received 150 registration applications from immigration advisers in business for profit. Of these, 94 were from sole practitioners, of which 55 are now registered, and 56 were from organisations comprising two or more practitioners, of which 43 are now registered. Forty-nine applications are still under consideration; three have been withdrawn.

The OISC total expenditure budget for the current financial year awaits approval by the relevant Minister of State. I will write to the hon. Member.

As of 10 July, the OISC had received 56 complaints since 30 April, of which five have been determined.

In addition to the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, the OISC currently employs 46 people, broken down as follows:

	Number
Casework	21
Complaints	9
Registry	4
Support	12
Total	46

Based on the number of registration applications received so far, it is expected that total income from registration fees this financial year will be around £400,000. This may increase, depending on how many more registration applications are received. Registration fee income is expected to be broadly similar in 2002–03 but this will be augmented by fees from designated professional bodies, which are to be set by the Secretary of State after the first full year of the OISC's operation.

Anti-drugs Co-ordinator

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the future role of the UK Anti-drugs Co-ordinator and his deputy. [193]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* We are currently in the process of re-appointing Keith Hellawell to a part-time role assisting with the investigation of, and advice on, international drug-related issues. Mike Trace, the former Deputy Co-ordinator, has taken a short-term appointment with the National Treatment Agency and will also continue to provide advice on relevant issues.

Feltham Young Offenders Prison

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed at Feltham Young Offenders Prison in each of the last five years. [3128]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is set out in the table.

	Full-time equivalents
	Number of staff in post at 31 March
1997	523.7
1998	538.7
1999	518.4
2000	622.6
2001	627.8

Natural Cannabis

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to re-schedule natural cannabis for medicinal use. [2371]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* We have no plans at present. The Government have made it clear that they would be willing to amend the misuse of drugs legislation, to allow the prescribing of a cannabis-based medicine, if current clinical trials into the therapeutic benefits of cannabis are scientifically established and lead to a medical preparation which is approved by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA).

It would be premature to amend the legislation unless and until the quality, safety and efficacy of such a medicine have been demonstrated and a marketing authorisation has been issued for it by the MCA.

Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines and procedures govern the ability to hold an inquest in respect of *(a)* military aircraft accidents and *(b)* civil aircraft accidents (i) in advance of and (ii) following an air accident inquiry report. [3176]

Beverley Hughes: It is a matter for the coroner to decide on the conduct of his or her investigations and to proceed to an inquest. Where a death arises from a civil aircraft accident, the coroner will generally seek to ensure that inquiries are informed by any relevant reports or written statements from other agencies, including the Air Accidents Investigation Branch and, in relation to military aircraft, any reports produced by a Ministry of Defence Board of Inquiry.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

3. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of antisocial behaviour orders that have been successfully sought since their introduction. [612]

Mr. Blunkett *[pursuant to his reply, 2 July 2001, c.7]:* The figures for antisocial behaviour orders issued between 1 April 1999 and 31 March 2001 have been revised from 214 to 215 and the number of police force areas where such orders have been issued now stands at 34 not 33.

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay before Parliament the annual report for the Forensic Science Service. [4240]

Mr. Denham: Copies of the Forensic Science Service's Annual Report and Accounts for 2000–01 have today been laid before Parliament.

Performance against Agency Targets 2000–01:

The Forensic Science Service had eight targets in 2000–01, of which seven were met.

Financial targets:

An 11 per cent. return on capital employed was produced against a target of 10–15 per cent.

A three-year rolling efficiency gain of 9 per cent. was achieved against a target of 10 per cent. However, there has been a 10 per cent. improvement in efficiency gain in the last two years since Trading Fund.

Timeliness targets:

An average turnaround time of 26 days was achieved against a target of 27 days; this target was rebased from the original target of 24 days to take account of the change in mix of business and work content per job.

93 per cent. of agreed delivery dates were achieved against a target of 90 per cent.

A feasibility study on a target to achieve 99 per cent. agreed delivery dates on cases classified as urgent or critical was successfully piloted. As a result, an agreement was reached with the Association of Chief Police Officers on the definition of critical cases and procedures implemented to ensure cases submitted are correctly prioritised.

Service level target:

Three service level agreements, three best value agreements and 27 drugs best value agreements have been put in place with police forces.

Customer satisfaction target:

Improvements in customer satisfaction have been shown in a pilot of a transactional-based approach. This will be introduced as an Agency Target next year.

Quality targets:

External quality accreditation has been achieved and extended, including achieving the Investors in People award.

Agency Targets for 2001–02:

The targets for 2001–02, the agency's third year of trading fund, are as follows:

Financial targets:

Achieve a 10 per cent. return on capital employed.

Achieve a 3-year rolling target of a minimum 10 per cent. efficiency gain.

Timeliness targets:

Achieve a 26 day average turnaround time.

Meet agreed delivery dates in 97 per cent. urgent and critical, 100 per cent. of Persistent Young Offenders.

Achieve 93 per cent. of agreed delivery dates in all categories.

Service level targets:

Put in place agreements on levels of service with 90 per cent. of police forces.

Customer Satisfaction targets:

Establish a baseline overall measure putting into place routine and robust customer satisfaction measurement processes based on transactional approach, and for demonstrating year on year improvements in police (customer) satisfaction.

Conduct a biennial customer satisfaction survey.

Quality targets:

Maintain external quality accreditation to International Standards Organisation (ISO) standards.

Achieve 50 per cent. accreditation to the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners in areas which it is registering people.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Communications White Paper

14. **Mr. Mark Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she plans to introduce legislation to implement the reforms to the regulatory structure proposed in the communications White Paper. [2045]

Mr. Alexander: I am pleased to announce that this afternoon the Government will introduce in another place the Office of Communications Bill. This Bill will be a paving measure related to the draft Communications Bill that was announced in the Queen's speech. The Communications Bill itself will be published in draft later this session.

Manufacturing Industry

15. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken by her Department to support manufacturing industry. [2047]

34. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken by her Department to support manufacturing industry. [2068]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The platform of economic stability the Government have established, together with our policies to foster enterprise and help firms to innovate and grow, are the best way to secure the long-term success of UK manufacturing industry.

Industrial Diseases (Compensation)

16. **Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress on the settlement of claims for compensation for chronic bronchitis, emphysema and vibration white finger. [2048]

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy has recently visited the respiratory disease testing centres in Newport and Ayr, as well as the Department's claims handling agents in Sheffield, to meet some of the 1,000 medical and claims processing staff employed by our contractors in the settlement of these claims and to discuss the progress that has been made over the last six months.

In total we have now paid out nearly £470 million in compensation for respiratory and vibration related diseases, with over £33 million being paid in Scotland alone.

Offshore Oil and Gas Production

17. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the level of new capital investment in UK offshore oil and gas production to date this year. [2050]

Mr. Alexander: The latest figures provided by the industry show capital investment in UK oil and gas production at some £860 million for the first quarter of 2001. This is 37 per cent. higher than investment in the first quarter of 2000, giving encouragement that the efforts of the Government/industry PILOT initiative are bearing fruit.

Women (Public Life)

18. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ensure Government Departments encourage more women to participate in public life. [2052]

Ms Hewitt: We are determined to achieve more equal representation of men and women in public appointments. Each Government Department has an action plan containing clear goals and objectives to help them achieve this aim. I will be encouraging my ministerial colleagues throughout Government to ensure that their Departments meets its goals.

We are also committed to preparing legislation to enable political parties to make positive moves to increase the representation of women in public life.

Energy Supply

19. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on long-term changes in sources of UK energy supply. [2053]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 18W, that he has asked the performance and innovation unit to undertake a review of the options for meeting our long-term energy objectives. A key issue will be ensuring continued security and diversity of energy supplies over the long term, while addressing the challenge of climate change. I shall be chairing an Advisory Group for the project which will report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the end of the year.

It would therefore be premature for me to make a statement on the long-term changes in sources of UK energy supply now.

Renewable Energy

20. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on support for the renewables energy industries. [2054]

Mr. Wilson: The Renewables Obligation on licensed electricity suppliers will provide a strong regulatory and financial incentive to the renewable energy industries. An order setting up the Obligation will be placed before Parliament later this year.

The Government have exempted electricity from renewable energy from the climate change levy and are also providing over £260 million of direct financial support over the next three years for research, development and deployment of renewable energy technologies.

Broadband Telecommunications (Rural Areas)

21. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the availability of broadband telecommunications in rural areas. [2055]

Mr. Alexander: The Government have made a commitment to work to ensure that broadband is accessible in all parts of the country. In May, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a major new project to determine how to speed up the roll-out of broadband services to individuals and businesses in rural and other areas that individual suppliers currently see as uncommercial. The project will establish how, by aggregating the public sector's demand for broadband services, we can best encourage telecoms companies to roll out broadband infrastructure to these "hard to reach" areas.

Parliamentary Candidates (Women)

22. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to increase the number of women candidates for Parliament. [2056]

Ms Hewitt: We have a made a commitment to prepare legislation to enable political parties to make positive moves to increase the representation of women in public life.

Minimum Wage (Wales)

23. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of how the national minimum wage is benefiting people in Wales. [2057]

Alan Johnson: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that 100,000 workers in Wales became entitled to a higher rate of pay when the national minimum wage (NMW) was introduced on 1 April 1999. The ONS estimates that around 90,000 workers in Wales will benefit from the increases in the NMW main rate and development rate to £4.10 and hour and £3.50 respectively on 1 October 2001.

Miners' Compensation

24. **Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to speed up coal-related compensation payments in the former east Kent coalfield area. [2058]

Mr. Wilson: As my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), informed my hon. Friend at the end of last year, we recognise that the start-up of the respiratory disease scheme was too slow. We took a number of initiatives to tackle this and get money out more quickly.

Significant progress is now being made, and since the beginning of the year the number of medical assessments GB-wide has risen to around 830 a week, with the total number increasing from 8,500 in January to over 24,000 now.

In the south of England alone we paid out nearly £7 million in compensation for respiratory and vibration related diseases.

Scientific Research Councils

25. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the joint workings of the scientific Research Councils. [2059]

Ms Hewitt: A quinquennial review of the six grant-awarding Research Councils was announced by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 82–83W. This review is in progress, and expects to report in the early autumn. The councils are being reviewed together as a group. One of the issues under consideration is how to encourage joint working among the councils, both at a strategic and operational level.

Retail Businesses (Town Centres)

26. **Clive Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to encourage new retail businesses to start up in town centres. [2060]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service, through the networks of 45 Business Links, encourages entrepreneurship across society and is placing particular emphasis on start-ups and micro-businesses. Business Link advisers are actively involved in helping such start-ups, including new retail businesses and in so doing address various factors, including finding a suitable location. This is often done in partnership with local authorities, who will have a detailed knowledge of town centre sites.

Consumer Protection

27. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps her Department is taking to protect the interests of consumers. [2061]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Enterprise Bill will promote the interests of consumers through creating a more enterprising economy, taking swift action against rogue traders and clamping down on anti-competitive practices.

Coal Industry

28. **Jon Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of UK deep-mined coal in the context of competitive energy markets. [2062]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 18W, that he has asked the Performance and Innovation Unit to undertake a review of the options for meeting our long-term energy objectives. We will examine all aspects of energy policy, including the role of coal in our future energy balance. I shall be chairing an Advisory Group for the project which will report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the end of the year. It would therefore be premature for me to make a statement on the future of UK deep-mined coal now.

Hat Industry

29. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the UK hat industry about its prospects. [2063]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not yet had an opportunity to discuss competitiveness issues with representatives of the UK hat industry but I can confirm that the Chairman of the British Hat Guild wrote to my right hon. Friend on the 19 June informing her of the problems facing the industry and seeking financial support.

Officials in the Department's Consumer Goods and Services Directorate have been in dialogue with the Guild and as part of that process had a meeting with the Guild earlier this year. Officials are currently updating a competitiveness analysis of the sector with a view to identifying appropriate project opportunities for the Guild to develop. The letter from the Guild Chairman contributes to developing and continuing this constructive dialogue.

Climate Change Levy

30. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from business about the impact of the climate change levy on business. [2064]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given earlier today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for E-Commerce and Competitiveness to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), *Official Report*, column 914.

Mobile Telephones

31. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with Oftel concerning the cost of landline to mobile telephone connections. [2065]

Mr. Alexander: Oftel and DTI Ministers regularly discuss their respective responsibilities for telecommunications. In this context, the Director General of Telecommunications has briefed me on current Oftel issues. These include Oftel's mobile market review and calls to mobile review. Landline to mobile telephone connections costs are covered in the latter. A decision on this issue is solely a matter for Oftel.

Gas Prices

32. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of increased non-domestic gas prices upon UK manufacturing. [2066]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are very much aware that, despite the recent easing of wholesale gas prices, many manufacturing companies have seen a substantial increase in their gas bills over the past year. We consider that the main reason behind this price increase is arbitrage across the UK-Belgian interconnector with high oil related gas prices in Europe. This has been made worse by the lack of liberalisation in Europe and the consequent absence of competition between gas suppliers.

The Government are pressing a three-point strategy to address this issue—working for greater liberalisation in Europe, improving the GB market, and taking action against any anti-competitive behaviour.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

33. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to provide support to small and medium-sized enterprises. [2067]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government's support for small and medium enterprises is delivered through the Small Business Service, which was created in April 2000 to act as the focal point within Government for all small business issues and services. During its first year, it has developed a number of new services in areas such as venture capital, support for farmers and services to tackle social exclusion and encourage enterprise. It has restructured the local Business Link network and developed a national Business Link network and developed a national Business Link contact centre and website. It has also ensured that the concerns of small firms are understood and promoted within Government. It will be further developing and extending these services in the current year.

Trade Unions

35. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met representatives of the TUC to discuss trade unions. [2070]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met Mr. John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC, on Monday 11 June.

Huntingdon Life Sciences

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to publish details of her Department's financial support for Huntingdon Life Sciences; what precedent she intends her support to set; and if she will make a statement. [2322]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has undertaken to operate banking facilities for Huntingdon Life Sciences, which—owing to intimidation of bank staff by animal rights extremists—has been unable to find commercial facilities in the UK, while negotiations with banks continue. It is not giving overdraft facilities or other financial support to Huntingdon Life Sciences. My Department will be recovering the direct costs of providing this service from the company.

My Department is operating the banking facilities in particularly unusual circumstances. The intimidation and harassment of providers of financial services to a particular company carrying out a legitimate and strictly regulated business is, the Government believe, unique. It is not intended that Government should become a "supplier of last resort" for any company that experiences temporary difficulties. However, the Government as a whole are determined that vital research and safety testing should not be disrupted and legitimate businesses should not be forced out of business by the criminal activities of animal extremists.

Petrol Retailing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent analysis she has made of the state of competitiveness within the petrol retailing sector. [2049]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under UK Competition legislation, the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti-competitive behaviour.

The DGFT has investigated the petrol retail industry a number of times in recent years and has found it to be competitive. He has said that he will continue to monitor the market very closely.

Compulsory Share Purchase

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is her estimate of the value of shares which privatised companies were given the power to obtain compulsorily but which the shareholder refused to sell since 1991; what has happened to those shares and what the arrangements are under which they are held; what plans the Government have to end this compulsion element; and if she will make a statement. [2721]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No figures relating to the value of shares in privatised companies which have been compulsorily purchased under the terms of the Companies Act 1985 are readily available and any estimate of the value could only be ascertained at disproportionate cost. Shareholders who have refused to sell shares which have been subject to a compulsory purchase notice will have had their shares transferred to the purchaser and the money to buy the shares held in trust until it is paid over to them.

The compulsory purchase of shares has been considered by the Company Law Review. The Review's conclusions will be set out in its final report which is due to be published in the summer.

Consumers' Rights

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to promote consumers' rights. [2042]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Enterprise Bill will promote the interests of consumers through creating a more enterprising economy, taking swift action against rogue traders and clamping down on anti-competitive practices.

Retail Code of Practice

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to implement a retail code of practice; and if she will make a statement. [2945]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* In its October 2000 report on the supply of groceries, the Competition Commission recommended that a code of practice be established governing the way leading supermarkets treated their suppliers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry asked the Director General of Fair Trading to agree a code with the relevant supermarkets. He has recently submitted his advice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Cheque Shops

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has for monitoring the operations of cheque shops. [3061]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* This is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

Money Lenders

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about extortionate credit; and if she will make a statement on her policy in this area. [3057]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* My Department has received many representations on this issue, mainly from consumer groups. I recognise that it is vital that consumers are protected against exploitative lending practices and I am now considering what action the Government can take to ensure this.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Working Families Tax Credit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many Housing Benefit recipients are in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit; [1564]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on the estimated number of Housing Benefit claimants also in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit, if the Working Families Tax Credit threshold was increased to *(a)* £120, *(b)* £150 and *(c)* £200. [1565]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the number of people claiming the Working Families Tax Credit who also receive Housing Benefit will be included in the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Annual Summary Statistics May 2000. These will be published on 26 July 2001 and a copy will be placed in the Library.

These figures will be the first drawn from actual claims data. Any estimates made in advance of their publication will be substantially less accurate.

Estimates of the change in numbers of Housing Benefit recipients also in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit caused by hypothetical changes to the Working Families Tax Credit threshold can be derived from the Department's Policy Simulation Model (2001–02). This information is in the table.

Estimated number of recipients of both Housing Benefit and Working Families Tax Credit

Working Families Tax Credit threshold	*Number*
£120	30,000
£150	50,000
£200	70,000

Notes:

1. The estimated number of Housing Benefit and Working Families Tax Credit recipients is rounded to the nearest 10,000.
2. The estimates calibrate survey totals using the numbers of non-Income Support working age families [with earnings] receiving Housing Benefit picked up on the Policy Simulation Model compared to administrative data, as a proxy for the Working Families Tax Credit and Housing Benefit group.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the estimates of Housing Benefit fraud detected, expressed as a proportion of Housing Benefit expenditure for each local authority for 1999–2000, will be released. [2261]

Malcolm Wicks: The weekly benefit savings scheme provides a measure of benefit fraud detected by local authorities. A table providing the information requested expressed in terms of weekly benefit savings for the year 1999–2000 has been placed in the Library.

We have announced that the weekly benefit savings scheme is to be replaced by a new, more comprehensive anti-fraud incentive scheme which aims to provide greater financial rewards to authorities which uncover more fraud and prosecute fraudsters. The new incentive scheme will also make extra provision for those local authorities who operate the Department's Verification Framework. 63 local authorities have adopted the new scheme from April 2001 with the remaining local authorities switching to the new scheme from April 2002.

New Deal

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those aged over 50 years in each region and nation of the UK have returned to work with the support of the New Deal for the over-50s programme. [3091]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table:

Results of the New Deal 50+ programme (April 2000-May 2001)

Region	*Number returning to work*
Northern	2,300
North West	4,700
Yorkshire and the Humber	4,300
West Midlands	3,700
East Midlands and Eastern	4,300
South West	4,000
London and the South East	7,700
Scotland	4,900
Wales	2,900
Northern Ireland	800

Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest hundred
2. The Department for Work and Pensions is not responsible for the operation of the New Deal 50+ in Northern Ireland

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage and how many Incapacity Benefit claimants were re-tested after *(a)* six months, *(b)* 12 months, *(c)* 18 months, *(d)* two years and *(e)* three years in the period April 1995 to June 2001. [3157]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* Information on the number of people claiming Incapacity Benefit who are re-tested is not collected separately.

ELTEC

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the assets and financial surpluses that were transferred from ELTEC to the Learning and Skills Council for Lancashire. [3441]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

East Lancashire TEC (ELTEC) has transferred £7,000 worth of its computers and other equipment to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for Lancashire as well as providing similar support to the new Business Link in Lancashire. The transfer of any cash surpluses will be finalised after the TEC has completed its statutory accounts for the year ended March 2001 and appointed a liquidator to wind up the company.

Current estimates suggest that some £1.4 million will be made available to the Lancashire LSC to take forward local initiatives in east Lancashire and a further £1.3 million will go to support Individual Learning Accounts for local people.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sheep Quota

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her European counterparts regarding the possibility of buying up sheep quota. [1714]

Mr. Morley: We have had no discussions with the Commission on buying up sheep quotas. We will be discussing more generally with the Commission the problems of the sheep market as a result of foot and mouth disease.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 9 April on behalf of his constituent Ms Halford. [3566]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the letter from the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire on 10 July 2001.

Fur Farming

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will issue the order that will specify the deadline for the end of fur farming. [3143]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The Government anticipate that the commencement order setting the date of the ban on fur farming under the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000 will be made at the same time as the order setting out the details of the compensation scheme. This is expected to be later this year, following consultation on the compensation scheme during the summer.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fur farms are *(a)* licensed and *(b)* currently operating in England and Wales; and if he will list their locations by county. [3144]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* As at 9 July 2001, there were the following mink farms in England:

County	*Number of licensed mink farms*	*Number of licensed mink farms currently operating*
Cornwall	1	—
Dorset	1	—
Hampshire	1	1
Isle of Wight	1	—
Lancashire	5	4
Northumberland	1	—
Staffordshire	1	—
West Yorkshire	1	1
Total	12	6

The number of fur farms in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. However, I understand that there are currently no licensed fur farms in Wales.

Departmental Title Change Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the total cost of *(a)* design, *(b)* stationery, *(c)* new name plaques and *(d)* other costs of the naming of her Department; and if she will make a statement. [3032]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* Our records currently show the following expenditure as being related to the naming of the New Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

		£
(a) Design	Conceptual design and graphics	4,200
(b) Stationery	Print-related expenditure	21,804
(c) New name plaques	New name plaques	4,763
(d) Miscellaneous	Production, installation of signage and photographic charges	1,977
	Forms control costs (including software)	950
	The preparation of designs, graphics manufacture and the production of signage with alternative departmental names, which were not chosen.	14,798

Note:
All expenditure is in sterling and exclusive of VAT.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will make a statement on the causes and transmission of the foot and mouth epidemic. [1668]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The current epidemic has been caused by a specific strain of the foot and mouth virus (PanAsian Strain O) which has occurred in a number of countries around the world. The precise means of the introduction of the virus into Great Britain is unknown and the subject of continuing investigations, but is most likely to have been introduced in imported meat or meat products. The virus was primarily transmitted throughout a large proportion of the susceptible farm livestock population of Great Britain via sales of subclinically infected sheep through markets, via dealers and local sales between farms before 23 February when all animal movements were banned. The specific means of transmission between herds and flocks has been the subject of detailed epidemiological investigations of each infected premises. The results of these investigations are summarised in the following table.

	Number of cases	*Percentage of cases*
Airborne[1]	7	[3]1
Dairy tanker	5	[3]1
Infected animals	84	5
Local spread	1,381	81
Other fomite[2]	9	1
Person	60	4
Truck	18	1
Under investigation	142	8
Total	1,706	100

[1] Cases infected by windborne spread from infected pigs

[2] A fomite is defined as any inanimate object capable of carrying the virus

[3] Less than

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the proposal to prevent the movement of new animals from a farm for 20 days during the short market season, on farmers owning rams and breeding sheep; and if she will make a statement. [2670]

Mr. Morley: A standstill would have slowed down the rapid livestock movements that helped spread foot and mouth disease. The Government are reviewing their proposals in the light of responses to the consultation exercise; they have decided to make this issue part of a total approach to future disease control, which will also include biosecurity, animal identification and licensing. This will allow fuller veterinary and economic assessments to be carried out. In the meantime, current movement licensing controls will continue.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the verification procedures used in countries with foot and mouth disease to ensure that meat exported to the United Kingdom from the non-infected part of the country is not contaminated. [2748]

Mr. Morley: Community law requires any member state that has an outbreak of foot and mouth disease not to export fresh meat from within an infected area to any other member state. Responsibility for ensuring compliance lies with the competent authority of the affected member state. For third countries, EC rules require exports of all foot and mouth disease susceptible products to be accompanied by veterinary health certification that guarantees that the meat does not come from a region infected with foot and mouth disease. All imports from third countries of foot and mouth disease susceptible products must enter through UK Border Inspection Posts where they undergo checks to verify they comply with Community import conditions. It is the responsibility of the Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission by means of inspection visits to ensure that member states are complying with Community law and that third countries have in place appropriate disease control measures to ensure they meet Community import conditions.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what inspections her officials have made of countries with foot and mouth disease which are exporting meat and meat products to the United Kingdom; and if she will place the inspector's report in the Library. [2749]

Mr. Morley: The responsibility for animal and public health inspections of member states and third countries which export meat and meat products to the EU lies with the Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission. The report of their inspections, which may include countries which have foot and mouth disease are available from the Commission's website at the following address: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/vi/reports/index_en.html.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the countries which have had foot and mouth disease in the last six months from which Britain is importing meat or meat products. [2747]

Mr. Morley: The following countries have had outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in the six-month period from 1 January 2001 and may export meat and meat products into the European Community including Great Britain:

Brazil
Uruguay
South Africa
France
The Netherlands
Republic of Ireland.

"Vipers"

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library the report entitled "Vipers", which was presented to the EU in August 2000. [2770]

Mr. Morley: My officials would be happy to assist the right hon. Member but it is regretted that a thorough search has been found no trace of a report entitled "Vipers" presented to the EU in August 2000. If the right hon. Member could provide further information my officials would be happy to look into this matter.

Petrol Safety

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many underground storage tanks are considered to be at risk of leakage in the UK. [1580]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The Environment Agency estimates that there are approximately 14,000 petrol stations in England and Wales with some 60,000–70,000 underground storage tanks. The risk of leakage at these facilities arises not only from the storage tanks but also pipework and pump delivery systems, including delivery of fuel to the site. HSE does not have information on the number of underground storage tanks at risk of leakage in the UK. However, local authority petroleum enforcement officers issue licences under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 to retail petrol outlets to ensure the safe storage of petrol. Conditions attached to these licences specify arrangements to prevent and detect leaks.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to introduce a new licensing agreement for petrol retailers using underground storage tanks. [1590]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE has no plans to establish new licensing arrangements but this topic will form part of the review currently being conducted into modernising petrol legislation.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many leakages from underground storage tanks have been reported in each of the past five years; how many have resulted in prosecution; how many have caused environmental damage; and if she will make a statement. [1583]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE does not collect statistics on how many leakages from underground storage tanks have been reported. The Environment Agency's prosecution database runs only from January 1999 and does not provide narrative in respect of prosecutions. The failure to report leakage or the fact of such leakage from a storage tank would not therefore be specifically identified and case-by-case information would be disproportionately expensive to obtain. If leakage from a petrol tank occurred a prosecution would be likely to be based on the leakage itself and the resulting pollution or a breach of a licence condition.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to commission a full condition audit of underground storage tanks in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [1578]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE and the Environment Agency have no plans to commission a full condition audit of all underground storage tanks in the UK. There are a number of Environment Agency initiatives aimed at preventing pollution from such tanks and associated facilities. In general, these approaches focus on factors such as the condition of the facility, their age and environmental sensitivity, and the potential consequences of leakage in Environment Agency groundwater protection zones. In addition, local authority petroleum enforcement officers issue licences under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 to retail petrol outlets to ensure the safe storage of petrol. Conditions attached to these licences specify arrangements to prevent and detect leaks.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many field visits and inspections were made by environmental health officers to petrol retail outlets using underground storage tanks during each of the past five years. [1581]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE does not collect statistics on the number of field visits and inspections made by environmental health officers to petrol retail outlets using underground storage tanks. Local authority petroleum officers issue licences under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 to petrol retail outlets to ensure the safe storage of petrol.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will establish a new petroleum authority *(a)* to regulate and *(b)* license companies providing offsite wetstock monitoring to ensure they have adequate professional indemnity insurance. [1576]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE has no plans to establish new petroleum authorities but this topic will form part of the review currently being conducted into modernising petrol legislation.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received proposing the introduction of a regulatory regime for underground storage tanks used by petrol retailers; and if she will make a statement. [1589]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

HSE has not received any representations about the introduction of a regulatory regime for underground storage tanks but this topic will form part of the review currently being conducted into modernising petrol legislation.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial aid is available to small independent petrol retailers to help upgrade underground storage tanks and pipes to avoid future leakages; and if she will make a statement. [1579]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

There is no financial help available in England and Wales. The Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise do offer assistance through the Rural Petrol Stations Grant Scheme, which is aimed at improving the environmental performance of such sites, by replacement and upgrade. Grants are available up to 50 per cent. of the cost of work. They are able to do this because Environmental protection is a devolved power (to Scotland).

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will issue a code of practice for petrol retailers using underground storage tanks from which site managers can benchmark their performance. [1972]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

DEFRA is currently preparing a Code of Practice, with a view to public consultation, which should help petrol retailers comply with the requirements of the groundwater regulations as they impact on the storage of petrol in underground tanks. It is intended that the Code of Practice will be issued in due course. In addition, there is substantial guidance material available in the Institute of Petroleum/Association for Petrol and Explosive Administrators' document "Guidance for the Design, Construction, Modification and Maintenance of Petrol Filling Stations".

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made by Railtrack in the creation of an in-house comparator for engineering work. [1021]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack has acknowledged that changes are needed to its relationship with its contractors as part of its new approach to infrastructure engineering. I understand that the company is undertaking a full review of this contractual interface, to establish what changes are needed to clarify responsibilities for safe and effective delivery, which asset management activities Railtrack should continue to outsource, and which can be managed more effectively by bringing them in-house.

A565

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to maintain the A565 between Bootle and the Seaforth flyover. [3250]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Curtis-Thomas, dated 12 July 2001:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent question about plans to maintain the A565 trunk road between Bootle and the Seaforth Flyover.

I am aware of your previous concerns about the appearance of the A565—which is currently a trunk road maintained by this Agency. As you may know, we have announced proposals to "detrunk" this section of the A565 and it is planned that ownership and management responsibility for the road will transfer to the Local Authority, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, by June 2003. Until then we will continue to maintain the road through our Managing Agent, Lancashire County Council's Highways Consultancy.

In my letter of 6 February (copy enclosed) I said that we intended to work with Sefton's Cleaning Services Manager to improve the standard of street sweeping and litter removal. Unfortunately, progress on improving the appearance of the Bootle to Seaforth Flyover section of the road has not been as swift as I would have liked, for which I apologise. We have inspected this stretch of road on several occasions since I wrote to you. The only significant issue concerns the ongoing problems with the standard of sweeping and cleaning of the road provided by Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council. As a result, we have, as an extra measure, instructed our Term Maintenance Contractor, Edmund Nuttall Ltd., to remove all weeds by hand and to clear the detritus within the next fortnight. In addition to this, we are in discussion with the Council's Cleaning Services Manager with regards to road sweeping and cleaning. Regular cleaning is important to inhibit weed growth, preventing the build up of material that allows them to grow, and increasing the effectiveness of spraying them. We expect to see improvements to the road's appearance as a result of these measures in the near future.

If you would like any further information about this matter, you may wish to contact the Agency's Project Sponsor for this section of route, Alex Miller, as Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester, M1 4BE (telephone 0161 930 5627).

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress concerning the revision of planning rules and guidelines for mobile phone masts. [3150]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 17W.

Farm Diversification

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if *(a)* car boot sales, *(b)* the use of existing farm buildings for commercial or residential purposes and *(c)* the development of small-scale residential buildings on existing farmland fall within his definition of farm diversification projects. [3174]

Ms Keeble: National planning policy for the diversification of farm business into non-agricultural activities is contained in Planning Policy Guidance note 7 (PPG7): *Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development.* PPG7 does not include a definition of farm diversification, although Annex C to the guidance includes a non-exclusive list of examples of potential farm diversification. PPG7 was amended on 21 March to encourage local planning

authorities to be more supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are consistent in their scale with their rural location. Local planning authorities should set out in their development plans the criteria to be applied to planning applications for farm diversification projects. It is a matter in the first instance for local planning authorities to consider each application on its own merits, taking into account their development plan policies and national guidance.

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (GPDO) grants a general planning permission for the temporary use of land for up to 28 days in any calendar year, subject to a number of restrictions and conditions. From car boot sales, the permitted use is limited to 14 days.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 3 July 2001 *Official Report*, column 140W, on the dome, what recommendations have been made by the Health and Safety Executive regarding public access to the dome building. [3202]

Ms Keeble: No recommendations have been made by the Health and Safety Executive in this regard. While decommissioning works are taking place at the dome, it is covered by the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994, which relate to the execution of works and management of the site. As a result, there is currently no public access to the dome site.

London Underground

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the preferred bidders for the London Underground will be handed operational control of their franchises. [3545]

Mr. Jamieson: The private sector will not be handed operational control of the Underground. London Underground will continue to own and run the Underground. The successful bidders for three infrastructure contracts will work for London Underground, bringing their construction and project management expertise to achieve the modernisation and maintenance of the Underground, on time and on budget. The Government want to see London Underground complete its work to finalise the contracts as quickly as possible so that work can start soon to deliver a 21st Century Tube.

Transport Direct

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to introduce the transport direct booking and information system. [3456]

Mr. Jamieson: Transport Direct is designed for people to plan their journeys and to compare routes and prices. It will cover all types of transport within the UK—air, rail, coach, bus and car.

Transport Direct will do three things:

tell the traveller what choices they have when they are planning their journey;

allow the traveller to book and pay for their journey at the time of making their inquiry, and receive their travel authority/ticket(s); and

advise the traveller about how their chosen travel option is performing in real-time before they set off.

Transport Direct will be delivered in phases over a number of years. By 2003 we expect it to include:

real-time train operating information (that is actual rather than timetabled);

real-time information on many local bus services;

internet travel information, covering road journeys as well as all forms of public transport at a single point of contact;

internet booking of long-distance journeys involving different forms of transport; and

development of internet-based maps that allow travellers to examine public transport options both for visiting a specific venue and for general travel around an area.

Traveline, the national public transport information system and a precursor to Transport Direct, is now available throughout Great Britain. It provides route and timetable information for bus, coach, tram, underground, train, ferry and metro through a national-rate call to a single telephone number—0870 608 2 608.

Bus Services

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what actions his Department has taken in the past 12 months to improve bus frequencies and enhance off-peak and night bus services. [3544]

Ms Keeble: Outside London, it is primarily for local authorities to secure any necessary bus services not provided commercially. We are assisting by providing additional funding for buses through the continuation of the rural bus grant and challenge schemes—with 20 per cent. of the former now available to support existing services rather than entirely new ones—and the launch this year of the urban bus challenge scheme. These schemes help authorities to secure additional services where they are most needed. In London, responsibility rests with the Mayor.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 1 June on behalf of his constituent Mr. Ogles. [3563]

Mr. Spellar: I have now replied to the right hon. Member.

Multi-modal Studies

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the multi-modal study programme. [4026]

Mr. Byers: The Multi-Modal Studies are looking at some of the most severe transport problems around the country. They are considering the contribution all modes of transport can make to solving these problems. They are also looking at the contribution existing, previously considered and new transport infrastructure can make.

The key objective is to give decision makers the information needed to identify tailored, integrated and sustainable transport solutions. The studies will drive major investment decisions over the period covered by our 10-Year Plan for Transport.

The studies are founded on our New Approach To Appraisal, launched in 1998 in our Integrated Transport White Paper. They weigh strategies and their component projects according to their economic, environmental, safety, accessibility and integration impacts. This ensures that costs and benefits are fully explored and understood before decisions are taken. This new approach to decision making is an important step forward. We will consider the contribution all types of transport can make to solving problems, not just roads.

Each study is addressing very different problems so the strategies and the decisions that emerge will be unique. The impact on the environment must be a key consideration and in each case we will have to weigh up the benefits of a particular road or rail link and balance it against the environmental impact. The conclusion will vary in each case. No individual decision will set a precedent for others to follow.

Decisions will be taken through the new arrangements for the development of Regional Transport Strategies within Regional Planning Guidance. Ministers need not accept all recommendations from Regional Planning Bodies. There may be instances where strategies or individual projects raise issues of national importance. Where this is the case my priority will be to ensure that final decisions reflect, and are properly co-ordinated with, our wider national policy objectives.

South Coast Corridor Multi-modal Study

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Isle of Wight is covered by the terms of reference of the South Coast Corridor Multi-modal Study; and for what reason no representative of the Isle of Wight is a member of the steering group of the study. [3701]

Mr. Jamieson: The overall aim of the study is to investigate congestion, safety and environmental problems of transport on the south coast between Southampton and Thanet. The Isle of Wight is not included in the core study area but is included in the study's "Area of Influence" to enable assessment of the effects that any proposed schemes might have on the wider area. Although no representatives from the Isle of Wight are present on the study's Steering Group there is a wide-ranging consultation exercise currently being undertaken which enables input from all interested parties. A number of representatives from the Isle of Wight were invited to a consultative working group in Fareham on 29 June and there is an opportunity to feed into the process via newsletters, and a website. In addition a briefing meeting for local MPs has been arranged for 17 July: the Member has been invited.

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has considered the recommendations of the South East England Regional Assembly following completion of the Access to Hastings multi-modal study; and if he will make a statement. [4025]

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State has today replied to the Chairman of the South East England Regional Assembly, and I am placing a copy of his letter in the House of Commons Library.

Multi-modal studies represent a wholly new approach to the consideration of transport provision. The Access to Hastings Study is the first of these multi-modal studies to have been completed, and I am grateful to all who have contributed to it.

The study contains a large number of recommendations designed to relieve congestion and safety problems in Kent and East Sussex and to contribute to the regeneration of the economy in the area around Hastings and Bexhill. I have considered the study's recommendations in light of the guidance for handling multi-modal studies outlined in the Secretary of State's parliamentary answer of today. I am able to accept most of these recommendations, although in some areas further work is required to develop proposals before any finding commitments can be given.

The study has shown a wide measure of agreement that, in place of the proposed six lane off-line scheme on the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury, the Highways Agency should consider the feasibility of a four lane on-line scheme. I have asked the Agency to progress that work. There is also broad consensus that the proposed A259 Pevensey to Bexhill scheme may now be dropped, given the safety improvements which have now been put in place. I have asked the Highways Agency to continue to monitor safety on this stretch of road.

I have also asked the Agency to prepare a draft programme of work to identify possible further measures on the A21 South of Pembury. I have stressed, however, that this work will need to bear in mind the environmental sensitivity of the area.

The study has demonstrated the potential merits of public transport investment in bus and rail. GoVia has agreed to the electrification of the Ashford to Hastings rail route and to looking at the scope for further improvements. As a result of this study, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) have also agreed to look at improvements to the service between Wadhurst and Tonbridge and investigate what further measures are required on the route to provide faster, better quality of service. I have asked the SRA to work with the local councils to consider proposals for a new station at Glyne Gap and proposals for Ore-Bexhill metro rail service.

I am also inviting East Sussex county council to come forward with well thought out proposals for improving bus services in Hastings to tackle regeneration. They are now reviewing their Local Transport Plan and I look forward to considering their proposals.

Although I recognise the strong views held by the Regional Assembly and others in favour of the proposed A259 Western and Eastern bypasses, I have decided not to proceed with these schemes. The study did not build a convincing regeneration case for the by-passes—it concluded that although the by-passes could possibly help to generate employment in the area this would not necessarily help those in most need. There would be reduced congestion in some areas of the town but the position would get worse in other areas. Against these rather weak arguments we had to place the evidently severe implications for the environment—two Sites of

Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and an internationally recognised wetland surround Hastings.

I believe, therefore, we must look for alternative means to prevent the further decline of the area and to optimise its economic potential. Regeneration is an important priority for the Government—some wards in Hastings suffer from some of the most severe deprivation in England—but we do not believe the by-passes are the solution. A regeneration strategy for Hastings needs to be developed which shows clearly how transport and other measures may be implemented to ensure a sustainable economic future of the area. I have asked my officials to work closely with the South East England Development Agency and local partners on that.

Representation of the People Regulations

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to lay the draft Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations. [4024]

Mr. Raynsford: The consultation on the draft regulations, which ended last month, has shown that there remain widespread and often conflicting concerns about the proposals. The Government, therefore, do not consider it right to proceed now with the proposed draft, and as discussed with the Electoral Commission intend to consult further with interested parties with a view, subject to parliamentary approval, of making regulations in the autumn which will provide for a full and edited electoral register with effect from the 2002 canvass. The Government believe that this will allow an orderly and well-planned introduction of the new arrangements.

To allow this year's electoral registration canvass to take place on the existing basis, we intend to make as soon as possible, subject to parliamentary approval of a draft, regulations prescribing for this canvass a registration form in the traditional format.

Affordable Housing

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if local authorities can use Major Repairs Allowance to fund new affordable housing. [4104]

Ms Keeble: I refer to the answer that I gave in the Housing (London) debate on 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 21WH, which is unfortunately incorrect—the reference to:

"extra money through the new Major Repairs Allowance (MRA)"

should have referred to the overall increase in resources available for housing investment. Where resources are made available for the provision of additional housing by RSLs this must come from authorities' Housing Investment Programme allocations or their own resources. The MRA is being provided to meet the on-going capital costs of maintaining council housing and is essential to delivery of the target to bring all council housing up to a decent standard by 2010.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Annual Report

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister for what reasons the Government have chosen to stop publishing its annual report. [3483]

The Prime Minister: The Government will continue to report to Parliament and the public on their performance through a variety of means such as reports, statistical bulletins, ministerial statements and parliamentary questions. The information in the annual report was in any event a collation of existing, publicly available material.

Echelon Communications Group

Paul Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if the United Kingdom is a member of the Echelon communications group. [3472]

The Prime Minister: It is long-standing Government policy not to comment on these matters.

Engagements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates he visited the United States of America in an official capacity since 1 January 2000; and on which of these occasions he met the President of the United States of America. [3401]

The Prime Minister: I have visited the United States on two occasions since 1 January 2000. I attended the UN Millennium Summit in New York from 5 to 7 September 2000. On that occasion I met President Clinton for bilateral talks on 6 to 7 September 2000.

I also visited the United States from 22 to 24 February this year and met President Bush for bilateral talks at Camp David during that time.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

"Mein Kampf"

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will review the availability of "Mein Kampf" in public libraries; and if she will make a statement. [58]

Tessa Jowell: I have responsibility under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to ensure that library authorities in England meet their statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" public library service, but the day-to-day management of public library services remains for library authorities, who must make their own decisions about the detailed nature of the library service they provide, based on local resources and priorities. Decisions on book selection are, therefore, entirely for each library authority, provided that their selections keep within the law.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has

received regarding an independent public inquiry into the impact of foot and mouth disease on the tourism industry; and if she will make a statement. [2414]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* I have received no representations specifically regarding an independent public inquiry into the impact of foot and mouth disease on the tourism industry. The Prime Minister has said there will be a proper inquiry into the outbreak once it is over. I am sure this will consider the implications for tourism.

William Roberts

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she is taking to safeguard the contents of the house of the late William Roberts R.A. for public display. [2413]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 5 July 2001]:* Since John Roberts' death in 1995 the works of art of the late William Roberts R.A. have been stored free of charge by the Tate, a national gallery funded by my Department. The William Roberts Society is negotiating to purchase William Roberts' house from Treasury Solicitors, the administrators of the estate, with a view to establishing a museum to display his art. The Tate Gallery also has indicated its interest in acquiring some of the works of art. The Treasury Solicitors Department have given both these parties first refusal on purchasing the house and works of art respectively with a deadline set for proposals to be submitted. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts has urged the William Roberts Society to obtain professional advice to help them with their proposal to turn the house into a museum.

National Museums and Galleries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many overseas visitors there were to each of the national museums and galleries in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion this represented of visitors in each case. [2693]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The estimated numbers and proportions of overseas visitors to each of the national museums and galleries sponsored by my Department in 1999–2000 are contained in the table.

Estimate of overseas visitors to national museums and galleries sponsored by DCMS 1999–2000

Museum/Gallery	*Overseas visitor numbers (thousands)*	*As a percentage of total visitors*
British Museum	4,204	77
Natural History Museum	638	38
Imperial War Museum	526	39
National Gallery	2,500	50
National Maritime Museum	391	46
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	41	6
National Portrait Gallery	110	11
National Museum of Science and Industry	400	14
Tate Gallery	850	34
Victoria and Albert Museum	611	48
Wallace Collection	73	40
Royal Armouries	11	5
Total	10,354	43

Note:
These figures are based on visitor surveys.

Swimming Pools

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent representations her Department has received about the state of repair of swimming pools; [3484]

(2) what steps she is taking to improve levels of access to swimming pools for young people. [3486]

Mr. Caborn: Since my appointment, the Department has received nine representations regarding the provision of swimming pools, although none of these has concerned their current state of repair. The Amateur Swimming Association and the Amateur Swimming Federation of Great Britain have, in conjunction with Sport England, produced a National Facilities Strategy which is due to be published shortly. The aim of this strategy will be to increase participation in swimming through the provision of swimming pools that meets the needs of the population, and will address the need for a network of teaching pools throughout the country.

The Department for Education and Skills has established a Swimming Advisory Group, involving representatives from my Department, the swimming associations, Ofsted and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to discuss what more can be done to create even more opportunities for children to swim. Proposals will be announced by the end of the year.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Royal Sign Manual Procedure

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the cancer research rota used in deciding how to distribute funds under the Royal Sign manual procedure. [4241]

The Solicitor-General: The Royal Sign manual procedure is used where a testator makes a bequest in his or her will to charity but the charity is unnamed or unclear. In the circumstances, the Attorney-General, on behalf of the Queen, exercises the Royal Prerogative to direct that the bequest be made to a specific charity, which most nearly represents the testator's intention. A common bequest is for the purposes of "cancer research" but there are several charities which carry out this object. In the absence of any indications of the particular charity, the Treasury Solicitor's Department who administer the scheme has established a rota so that each one of our chosen cancer research charities receive approximately the same amount in any given year. This rota has now been running for almost 20 years, and the Attorney-General and I are seeking the views of the public on its composition. I have today placed a paper describing the issues in detail in the Library. It will be sent to all the registered cancer research and relief charities for their observations and comments.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Business Regulations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to simplify and reduce the number and cost of regulations on business. [2069]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are taking a number of measures to control the regulatory burden.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment is required for each new proposal for regulation affecting business to ensure it is necessary and not cumbersome. The Panel for Regulatory Accountability, now given Cabinet Committee status, meets monthly to discuss regulatory performance with departmental Ministers.

At European level we are working closely with other member states and the Commission to build on the real progress my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reported to the House on 26 March following the Stockholm European Council.

The Regulatory Reform Act 2001 now provides a new and powerful tool for reforming over-burdensome, over-complex and outdated primary legislation. We have identified over 50 examples of reforms that could be delivered by the order-making power in the Act and already issued seven consultation documents on prospective RROs, with more to follow shortly.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* budgets and *(b)* administrative costs were for each of the Government offices for the Regions for each financial year since their establishment; and what their planned budgets and administrative costs are for the next two years. [1435]

Mrs. Roche: The Government offices for the English regions were established in 1994 and their work was originally overseen by the Government Office Management Board (GOMB). Following the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Reaching Out", published in February 2000, the role of the Government Office Management Board passed to the Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU).

The administrative running costs for each Government office and for RCU/GOMB for the period 1995–96 until 2000–01 are detailed in the table. The table also shows the administrative running cost allocations, including a very small allocation for capital expenditure, for the current financial year. Since 1 April this year, the RCU has managed a single running cost budget for itself and the nine Government offices. This funding is transferred from sponsor Government Departments to cover the running costs of the Government offices for the work that the latter undertake on behalf of sponsor Departments. As at 1 April this year the sponsor Departments were DETR (as was), DfEE (as was), DTI and MAFF (as was). From 1 April 2002, Home Office and DCMS are expected to become sponsor Departments.

The total indicative administrative running cost budget for the RCU and the Government offices for financial year 2002–03 is £98.63 million and £95.66 million for the 2003–04 financial year. There will be a resource planning exercise that will precede each of these financial years, and this will allocate these figures between individual Government offices and the RCU.

Programme budgets administered by the Government offices are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for the relevant sponsor Departments.

Government office administrative running costs

£ million

GO	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]	*Total*
North East	8.843	8.687	8.617	8.619	8.312	8.222	9.016	60.316
North West	9.984	9.839	9.443	13.690	13.049	13.398	14.562	83.965
Merseyside	4.754	4.350	4.200	0.012	—	—	—	13.316
Total NW/M	14.738	14.189	13.643	13.702	13.049	13.398	14.562	97.281
Yorkshire and Humberside	9.061	8.765	8.475	8.684	8.889	9.184	9.966	63.024
West Midlands	10.436	10.040	9.758	9.474	9.330	9.794	9.693	68.525
East Midlands	7.117	6.617	6.436	6.754	6.951	7.177	7.726	48.778
East England	6.123	6.169	6.271	6.269	7.005	7.391	8.514	47.742
South West	7.574	7.141	6.826	6.985	7.797	8.227	10.069	54.619
South East	8.331	8.406	8.545	8.561	8.659	8.953	9.748	61.203
London	11.106	14.106	13.459	13.238	13.716	13.747	12.617	91.989
RCU	1.137	1.696	4.356	3.095	3.703	3.130	9.717	26.834
Total	84.466	85.816	86.386	85.381	87.411	89.223	101.628	620.311

[1] Allocations for 2001–02

Note:
GO-North West and GO-Merseyside merged during 1998–99

Energy Policy

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the policy and innovation unit review of energy policy will examine the options for demand management. [1971]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

The role of demand side management and energy efficiency in reducing energy use in Great Britain will form a key part of the Energy Review, which will develop a strategy for achieving greater energy efficiency.

TREASURY

Financial Services and Markets Act

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to bring into force the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. [3804]

Ruth Kelly: My predecessor announced in March that "N2", the date for commencing the main provisions of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, would be no later than the end of November 2001. I can now confirm that, in lay terms, the new regime will come into effect at midnight on 30 November. For legal reasons, the date named in the Commencement Order will be 1 December. Naming this day will have the effect of commencing the main provisions of the Act from the beginning of that day, which complies with the timescale set by my predecessor.

So far, the Government have secured Parliament's approval for seven statutory instruments subject to affirmative resolution, and made a further 27 statutory instruments subject to the negative resolution procedure.

We will shortly be making other statutory instruments with a view to enabling the FSA Board to make further provisions of its rulebook at its Board Meeting on 19 July. The key provisions of the rulebook, of course, were made by the FSA at its Board Meeting on 21 June.

It particular, we expect shortly to make the statutory instrument that provides mechanisms by which firms having authority under old law to do financial services business will be "grandfathered" across into permissions to do equivalent business once FSMA commences. The FSA will then be responsible for letting individual firms know their grandfathered permissions.

From Monday 3 September, we will commence FSA powers to consider applications from financial services firms to modify their grandfathered permissions or the grant of new permissions. Monday 3 September will also be the date from which the Financial Services and Markets Tribunal will consider appeals on decisions taken by the FSA in respect of those applications.

By the summer recess, therefore, the task of implementing the Act will pass substantially to the financial services firms. They will need:

to become familiar with the secondary legislation passed by Government;

to absorb the provisions of the rule book made by the FSA;

to analyse their grandfathered N2 permissions, and consider whether to seek modifications to those permissions;

to adapt their procedures; and

to train their staff.

The date set for N2 ensures that the new regime for financial regulation starts after the close of business on the day, week and month, and should further assist financial services firms in making their adjustment.

Statistics

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the categories of information and statistics sought by the ONS from businesses and individuals by way of requests for information. [2512]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 12 July 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the categories of information and statistics sought by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) from businesses and individuals by way of requests for information. (2512)

Statistical and Registration inquiries conducted by the ONS for its own purposes are listed in the attached table. The table shows three main types of information; economic, collected from businesses, social, collected from individuals and socio-economic collected from both businesses and individuals.

The table also includes inquiries conducted on behalf of other Departments and Agencies, but excludes statistical information derived as a by-product of administrative systems.

Source information sought by the Office for National Statistics

Title of source	*Business/ individual*	*Frequency*
Economic		
Annual Business Inquiry (Distribution and Services)	Business	Annually
Annual Business Inquiry (Production and Construction)-UK	Business	Annually
Annual Survey of Financial Assets and Liabilities	Business	Annually
Asset Finance Annual Income and Expenditure Inquiry	Business	Annually
Asset Finance Quarterly Balance Sheet and Transactions Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Building Societies Inquiry	Business	Monthly and quarterly
Business Enterprise Research and Development Survey-UK	Business	Annually
Central Government Net Cash Requirement-UK	Business	Monthly
Construction Inventories-UK	Business	Quarterly
Consumer Prices Collection-UK	Business	Monthly
Earnings of UK Insurance Brokers in overseas currencies	Business	Quarterly
Exported Producer Price Indices	Business	Monthly
Family Expenditure Survey-UK	Business	Continuously
Finance Houses and Consumer Credit Grantors (Outside the Monetary Sector) and Specialist Finance Leasing Companies and Partnerships Quarterly Inquiry into Capital Expenditure	Business	Quarterly
Foreign Direct Investment Inquiries	Business	Quarterly
Fund Managers and certain other members of IMRO	Business	Annually
GB Cinema Exhibitors Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Government Research and Development Survey-UK	Business	Annually
Gross Trading Surplus of Local Authority Trading Enterprises-UK	Business	Quarterly
Imported Producer Price Indices	Business	Monthly
Index of Production-UK	Business	Monthly
Insurance Companies Balance Sheet Annual Inquiry	Business	Annually

Source information sought by the Office for National Statistics

Title of source	*Business/ individual*	*Frequency*
Insurance Companies Income and Expenditure-Quarterly Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Insurance Companies Income and Expenditure Annual Inquiry	Business	Annual
Insurance Companies Transactions in Financial Assets Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
International Trade in Services	Business	Annually and Quarterly
International Transactions of the Film and Television Industries	Business	Annually
Investment by other financial intermediaries	Business	Quarterly
Investment by UK Monetary Financial Institution	Business	Quarterly
Investment Trusts Annual Return of Liabilities and Assets	Business	Annual
Investment Trusts Quarterly Return of Transactions Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Local Authority net Cash Requirement-UK	Business	Monthly
Monthly Inquiries into the Distribution and Services Sector	Business	Monthly
Monthly Inquiry to Credit Grantors	Business	Monthly
Monthly Sales Inquiries-UK	Business	Monthly
Monthly Short-term Turnover and Employment Survey-Production Industries	Business	Monthly
Motor Traders' Inventories-UK	Business	Quarterly
Motor Vehicle Production Inquiry-UK	Business	Monthly
Overseas Direct Investment	Business	Annually and Quarterly
Pension Fund Annual Balance Sheet Inquiry	Business	Annually
Pension Fund Quarterly Income and Expenditure Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Pension Fund Quarterly Transactions Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Pension Funds Quarterly Income and Expenditure Inquiry	Business	Annually
Producer Price Indices-Inquiries	Business	Monthly
Production Inventories-UK	Business	Quarterly
PRODucts of the European COMmunity (PRODCOM INQUIRY)	Business	Annually and Quarterly
Property Unit Trusts Annual Return of Liabilities and Assets	Business	Annual
Property Unit Trusts Quarterly Return of Transactions Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Public Corporations Net Cash Requirement-UK	Business	Monthly
Quarterly Capital Expenditure Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Credit Grantors Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Inquiries into the Distributive and Service Sector-GB	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Inquiry into Companies, GB Operating Profits	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Inventory (Stocks) Inquiries	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Short-term Turnover and Employment Survey-Service Sector	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Survey of Financial Assets and Liabilities	Business	Quarterly
Retail Sales Inquiry-GB	Business	Monthly
Retailers' Inventories-UK	Business	Quarterly
Securities Dealers Quarterly Income and Expenditure Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Securities Dealers Quarterly Return of Liabilities and Assets and of Transactions in Securities	Business	Quarterly
Specialist Finance Leasing Companies and Partnerships Annual Income and Expenditure Inquiry	Business	Annually
Specialist Finance Leasing Companies and Partnerships Quarterly Balance Sheet	Business	Quarterly
Unit Trusts Annual Return of Liabilities and Assets	Business	Annual
Unit Trusts Quarterly Return of Transactions Inquiry	Business	Quarterly
Wholesalers' and Dealers' Stocks-UK	Business	Quarterly
Socio-Economic		
Annual Employment Survey-Great Britain	Business	Annually
Average Earnings Index-GB	Business	Monthly
Census of Employment	Business	Biennial
Centralised Returns	Business	Monthly and Quarterly
Labour Disputes Statistics	Business	Monthly
Labour Force Survey	Individual	Continuously
New Earnings Survey-GB	Business	Annual
New Earnings Survey Panel Dataset (NESPD)	Business	Annually
Pay and Working Time-Collective Agreements for Manual Staff	Business	Monthly amendments
Workforce and Employee Jobs	Business	Quarterly
Social		
Census of Population and Housing-United Kingdom 2001	Individual	Decennially
General Household Survey-GB	Individual	Continuously
International Passenger Survey-UK	Individual	Continuously
Survey of Student Achievement	Individual	Triennially
The ONS Omnibus Survey-GB	Individual	Monthly
Expenditure and Food Survey	Individual	Continuously
Registration of Births-England and Wales	Individual	Continuously
Registration of Births-England and Wales	Individual	Continuously
Registration of Births-England and Wales	Individual	Continuously
Inquiries Conducted on behalf of other Departments and Agencies		
Social		
Family Resources Survey	Individual	Continuously
National Travel Survey	Individual	Continuously
Local LFS	Individual	Continuously

Source information sought by the Office for National Statistics

Title of source	*Business/ individual*	*Frequency*
Economic		
Bricks-GB	Business	Monthly
Concrete Blocks-GB	Business	Monthly
Concrete Roofing Tiles-GB	Business	Quarterly
Quarterly Inquiry into Oil and Natural Gas-UK	Business	Quarterly
Retail Turnover Statistical Inquiry	Business	Biennially

Census Results

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what powers he has to sell the results of the census to private companies. [3315]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Ms Julia Drown, dated 12 July 2001:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what powers there are to sell Census results to private companies (3315).

Under the provisions of Section 4(1) of the Census Act 1920, the Registrar General is required, as soon as may be after the census, to prepare reports on the Census returns and to present such reports to Parliament. Copies of all such reports from previous censuses have been published and made publicly available either through the Stationery Office or from the Census Office by delegated authority.

Access to census results will mainly be through free access to information on the National Statistics website, with additional information being provided on a cost recovery basis.

Additionally, under the provisions of Section 4(2) of the Act, the Registrar General may, at the request and cost of any local authority or person, prepare abstracts containing any such statistical information not contained in the reports to Parliament, which, in his opinion, it is reasonable for that authority or person to require. It is under this provision that most small area statistics or specially commissioned output from the census are made available to private companies and other customers either directly from the Census Office or from other agencies licensed to sell census information to third parties.

For both free and cost recovery services, the same measures are applied to all such statistical results to ensure that there is no disclosure of information relating to identified individuals or households. No information is available on an exclusive basis, and repeated requests for information that has yet to be published are likely to lead to that information being placed on the National Statistics website.

Endowment Policies

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will encourage the Financial Services Authority to inform those with endowment mortgages that are at risk of not growing sufficiently to pay off their mortgages of the methods of seeking help from the Ombudsman and gaining compensation. [3471]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA has been active in informing those with endowment mortgages of the methods of seeking help and, if required, how to make a complaint. The FSA fact-sheet, "Your endowment mortgage—what you need to know"—sent to all affected mortgage endowment holders in January 2000—set out what advice consumers should have been given when they were sold their endowment policy as well as how to complain. In addition, the FSA's consumer information has evolved in the light of developments and further fact-sheets have been published as follows:

December 1999—Is an endowment mortgage right for you?

April 2000—Guide to repaying your mortgage

October 2000—Endowment Mortgage complaints

January 2001—Guide to making a complaint

June 2001—Is an endowment mortgage right for you? (Revised)

July 2001—Guide to mortgages

July 2001—Your endowment mortgage—time to decide.

All these fact-sheets are available free from the FSA Consumer help-line on 0845 606 1234.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 9 May to the Chairman of HM Customs and Excise on behalf of his constituent Mr. Wilson. [3569]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that the Chairman of HM Customs and Excise replied to the right hon. Gentleman on 11 January.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply (1) to his letter of 26 March on behalf of his constituent Mrs. Hall; [3565]

(2) to his letter of 30 May on behalf of his constituent Mrs. Murray. [3564]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury has no record of having received these letters. If the right hon. Gentleman would send copies to me, they will be answered as quickly as possible.

Petrol Duty

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income the Government have received from petrol duty in each of the last three years. [3211]

Mr. Boateng: The amount of income the Government have received from duty on petrol in each of the last three years can be found in the HM Customs and Excise's "Hydrocarbon Oils Factsheet", a copy of which is in the Library.

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 67W, how long he estimates it will take to complete the preliminary technical work relating to an

assessment of the five economic tests; if he will list the Treasury officials involved in this work; and if he will make a statement. [3011]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 67W. A wide range of officials will be contributing.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from small firms about the administrative arrangements for the Working Families Tax Credit. [2046]

Dawn Primarolo: Payment of tax credits by employers plays an important part in reinforcing the link between tax credits and the rewards of work.

The Inland Revenue is in continuous consultation with employers' representatives, and has been since 1998, to ensure any extra administration because of the tax credits is kept to a minimum and, where possible, reduced. The Inland Revenue is continually monitoring and assessing the tax credits scheme and involving employers' representatives at all stages.

Tax Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each tax credit those other *(a)* benefits and *(b)* concessions for which the tax credit is a passport. [3624]

Dawn Primarolo: The decision as to which benefits or concessions Working Families Tax Credit recipients are passported is not a matter for the Inland Revenue, but lies with those responsible for the individual benefits or concessions. Working Families Tax Credit, like its predecessor Family Credit, may be used as an indicator of entitlement to certain benefits or concessions by central Government, the devolved executives, local government and voluntary organisations. In this way, families entitled to other help can be identified without them having to make a full application. The major central Government passports for many Working Families Tax Credit recipients are helped with NHS costs such as prescription charges, dental treatment, sight tests and hearing aids and Social Fund payments to help with maternity costs or funeral expenses.

Bank Accounts

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of households do not have access to a bank account; and how this varies in the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. [3055]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* Various surveys indicate that the percentage of adults who do not have either a current account or a savings account is in the range 6 to 10 per cent. A breakdown of these data can be found in the Financial Services Authority's report, "In or Out? Financial Exclusion: a literature and research review", a copy of which is in the Library.

Euro Assets (Purchase Costs)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason he will not publish the numbers and the cost of the euros which have been purchased by the Bank of England in consequence of gold sales. [3233]

Ruth Kelly: The purchase of euros assets with proceeds from the gold sales programme forms only part of the restructuring of the United Kingdom's foreign currency reserves. As the National Audit Office Report on "The Sale of Part of the UK Gold Reserves", published on 12 January 2001, states

> "a meaningful value for money assessment of the financial benefits to sell gold could only be undertaken over the medium to long-term, since a misleading impression of the benefit, or otherwise, of the restructuring may arise if too short a period is used. Over the short-term, temporary fluctuations in assets prices may tend to impact".

However to give an indication of the change in the value of the UK's foreign currency reserves as a result of the gold sales, the National Audit Office Report provides a snapshot figure as at 18 December 2000 of a gain to the reserves of US$34 million (around £23 million).

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Damages

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations he had prior to the setting of the rate of return under section 1 of the Damages Act 1996 with *(a)* the Government Actuary, *(b)* the Treasury, *(c)* organisations representing claimants and *(d)* organisations representing insurers; and if he will make a statement. [2837]

Mr. Wills: The Treasury and the Government Actuary were consulted in accordance with section 1(4) of the Damages Act 1996.

Of the other responses to the Consultation Paper, "Damages: The Discount Rate and Alternatives to Lump Sum Payments", three were received from organisations representing claimants: the Personal Injury Bar Association, the TUC, and the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers. One was received from an organisation representing insurers: the Association of British Insurers; and one from an organisation representing insurance lawyers: the Forum of Insurance Lawyers.

Of the remaining 77 responses, some were from insurers and it is likely that many were from organisations or individuals who normally represent claimants or insurers. But as the Consultation Paper did not seek this information, it is not possible to provide a complete breakdown.

Conditional Fees

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Lord Chancellor has to extend the operation of conditional fees to cases based on the Human Rights Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [3149]

Mr. Wills: None. Conditional fee agreements have been available for all forms of civil business other than family proceedings since 1998. Thus conditional fee agreements are already available for civil cases concerning human rights.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton will receive a reply to the letter he sent to the Lord Chancellor on 21 May with regard to Miss Anthea Gordon. [3151]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has replied to my right hon. Friend in a letter dated 9 July.

Transsexual People

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he proposes to take in response to the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. [3155]

Mr. Wills: The report is being carefully considered within Government and by other interested groups. The Government are sympathetic to the issues raised in the report and will be considering further how to take the matter forward.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 13 July 2001

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Southern Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to visit southern Sudan; and if she will make a statement. [2284]

Clare Short: I continue to keep under review the possibility of a visit to north and south Sudan. Our priority for Sudan is to encourage a just peace. We continue to provide relief to alleviate the suffering caused by the war.

Digital Divide

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what polices she is pursuing to tackle the problem of the digital divide in developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [1808]

Clare Short: Our recent White Paper outlines the threat the digital divide provides to the prospects of poor countries. Our policy is to maximise the benefits to the poor by integrating the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) into our existing development activities aimed at achieving the international development targets. For example effective use of ICT can help improve governance and accountability, improve access to services such as education and health, and boost economic growth.

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 41W, on Belize, if KPMG passed to her Department copies of the three letters from Carlisle Holdings during its study to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes. [3372]

Clare Short: Yes.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 42W, on Belize, on what date her Department was informed that KPMG were the external auditors of the Belize bank. [3373]

Clare Short: On 25 August 2000.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what dates KPMG received letters from the Public Investment Company, Sonisa, during its study to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; if she will place copies of these letters in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [3374]

Clare Short: My Department is not aware of any such correspondence.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of the amount of tax not paid since 1990 by the two public investment companies with regard to the study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; if she will place a copy of these calculations in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [3375]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 531W, concerning the confidentiality of the KPMG report.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department asked *(a)* KPMG and *(b)* the Belize Government to calculate the amount of tax not paid since 1990 by the two public investment companies during its study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; and if she will make a statement. [3378]

Clare Short: KPMG was asked to estimate the scale of the possible loss of tax revenue as a result of PICs (Public Investment Companies). I refer the hon. Member to my answer to question uin3375.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much debt owed by Belize has been written off by the British Government under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative in each year since 1997; how much debt owed by Belize is planned to be written off by the Government over the next decade; and if she will make a statement. [3377]

Clare Short: £1.146 million in debt relief was granted to Belize in 1998 covering repayments due on past UK aid loans from April to October 1998. Bilateral aid amounting to £1.771 million for poverty-focused projects was agreed in 1999—equivalent to the repayments due between December 1998 and March 2000. This was provided so that the newly elected Government did not lose out on the value of the debt relief but was given time to decide whether it wished to qualify for the benefits of the Commonwealth Debt Initiative. The remaining outstanding debt on past UK aid loans to Belize amounts to £10.470 million, covering a repayment period which lasts until 2008.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what dates KPMG visited Belize while conducting the study commissioned by her Department to review the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes. [3379]

Clare Short: 18 July to 1 August 2000.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the basis was for commencing a hard strip of the Dome. [3101]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The hard strip was suspended while market testing of future Dome use options was begun. Independent professional advice has since been received that completing the hard strip offers maximum flexibility for any future use and does not prejudice the chances of the Dome being used for any particular use. Carrying out the hard strip enhances the prospects of finding a long term sustainable use, and therefore the work is proceeding.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money has been spent from 1 January to 30 June on the care and maintenance of the Millennium Dome; and what his estimate is of the total figure for 2001. [2347]

Ms Keeble: Between 1 January and 30 June 2001 expenditure by the New Millennium Experience Company in relation to care and maintenance of the Millennium Dome was:

January—£600,000

February—£646,000

March—627,000

April—£609,000

May—£632,000

June—£224,000.

The company received a rates rebate in June of £838,000 for the same six-month period, thereby reducing the care and maintenance cost by that amount. The figures listed do not include expenditure incurred on decommissioning, or any costs relevant to the company's on-going wind-down and liquidation activities.

London Transport

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the actual figures for the amounts the private sector is investing in London Transport under existing contracts. [2729]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table shows estimates of the value of investment in London Transport through the existing London Underground Private Finance Initiative contracts.

£

Contract name/Investment coverage	*Investment value*[1]
British Transport Police	
New HQ and BTP police station at Tottenham Court Road and a new BTP station at West Ham	10
Connect	
New stations and trains radio systems and communications infrastructure	350
Northern Line Trains	
Provision of new Northern Line train fleet	400
Power	
Network of substations and power distribution cables	100
Prestige	
Ticketing service infrastructure	150
Total investment value (£ billion)	1.01

[1] The investment value is not the actual amount the private sector is investing in London Transport. Instead it is London Transport's estimate of what investment in PFI projects would have cost had they done the investment themselves.

Cycling

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will set out the key components of cycling strategies; and what plans he has to monitor their implementation; [3199]

(2) if he will make a statement regarding local authorities which have failed to produce a cycling strategy. [3198]

Mr. Spellar: Our guidance to local authorities on full local transport plans (LTPs), published in March 2000, set out both the minimum requirements of a cycling strategy and the characteristics expected in a good LTP as follows:

Minimum requirements

A discrete strategy for encouraging cycling, which establishes a clear target that contributes to the national targets for increasing cycle use

Evidence that cyclists have been given a high priority

Evidence that encouraging cycling is part of all transport policies, including road safety strategies

Evidence of interaction with local planning authority to ensure that land use and development planning allows and encourages people to cycle

Evidence that there has been a review of the road network, to establish where improvements to assist cyclists are needed

Assessment of the quality of existing cycle networks, to identify where improvements are necessary

Programme of measures to improve safety of cyclists and reduce conflicts with other traffic, including pedestrians

Characteristic of a Good LTP

Adopts a formal order in which planners consider the needs of different user types, placing cyclists near the top

Partnerships for action with health, education, commercial and voluntary bodies

Plans for improvement of physical provision to be based on methodical application of cycle review guidelines (published by IHT)

Cycle audit all road and traffic schemes

Aims to improve interchanges, and increase opportunities for combined cycle and public transport journeys

Encourages cycling through Travelwise, Green Commuter Plans, Local Agenda 21 and School Transport Plans

Minimises conflict between pedestrians and cyclists.

Progress on the outcomes and targets established in LTPs, including those in the cycling strategies, will be monitored through a system of annual progress reports (APRs). Guidance to authorities on the production of APRs was published in March 2001. Copies were placed in the Library of the House. Authorities are required to submit their first APR by 31 August 2001.

In notifying authorities of their capital allocations for 2001–02 in December 2000, our decision letters provided detailed feedback on the degree to which the LTPs had fulfilled the criteria for each element of the plan, including those set out for cycling strategies. We also identified, where appropriate, any specific areas in which authorities needed to improve their LTP. Our guidance on APRs makes clear that the annual reports should summarise actions taken to address these identified areas and to provide evidence of improvement.

Housing

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of *(a)* local authority and *(b)* registered social landlord rents in Hammersmith and Fulham he estimates will be in excess of £100 per week in (i) 2002, (ii) 2005 and (iii) 2010. [2987]

Ms Keeble: Estimates will be available only when the landlords have completed their rent plans, which are due by April 2002. However, later this summer the results will be available from the case study research into the practical issues arising from the rent reforms in west London. These will include initial estimates of the effects of the reforms on the rents of properties owned by London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and Notting Hill Housing Trust.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what consultation his Department has carried out to date over his policy on rent restructuring with *(a)* local authority tenants, *(b)* registered social landlord tenants, *(c)* local authorities and *(d)* registered social landlords; [3002]

(2) what plans his Department has to consult the representatives of local authority and registered social landlord tenants over his plans for rent restructuring; and if he will make a statement. [3000]

Ms Keeble: My Department's approach to bring a fairer and more coherent structure to social rents is set out in the December 2000 policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—the way forward for housing". This drew on response to the April 2000 Green Paper "Quality and Choice: a decent home for all" which almost universally agreed on the need to bring more coherence into the structure of social rents. The Green Paper was sent to all local authorities, registered social landlords and national tenant groups.

We are now in the implementation stage. The Housing Corporation is considering the results to its March 2000 consultation paper on its proposals for implementing the rent restructuring framework among registered social landlords and will shortly be publishing interim guidance. It plans to issue final guidance in the autumn.

In the local authority sector, a consultation paper is being published on changes to the housing revenue account subsidy system to support rent restructuring.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's most recent estimate is of the average increase of housing association tenants' rents in the next 10 years in real terms *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Hammersmith and Fulham. [3003]

Ms Keeble: The December 2000 policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—the way forward for housing" stated that from 2002–03 the rents of registered social landlords (RSLs) should, on average, rise by 0.5 per cent. above inflation (RPI + 0.5 per cent.) per annum. Over a 10-year period this will result in average RSL rents rising by around 6 per cent. in real terms. Estimates for housing association tenants' rents in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham will only be available once their landlords have completed their rent plans. However, later this summer the results will be available from the case study research into the practical issues arising from the rent reforms in west London.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discretion in percentage terms his Department intends to give to local authorities in respect of the overall level of rents. [2986]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities will continue to be free to set rents at whatever level they consider appropriate. However the approach to social rent reforms set out in the December 2000 policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—the way forward for housing" encourages social landlords to set rents on individual properties which are normally within a band of up to 5 per cent. higher or lower those indicated by the new rents formula.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department expects to publish the consultation document on restructuring the housing revenue account subsidy system; and if he will make a statement. [3067]

Ms Keeble: We published this consultation paper on 13 July. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. The closing date for comments on our proposals is 8 October.

We have announced a policy for achieving fair and affordable rents in the social rented sector. As part of this we have set out a common basis on which all rents in the social sector should be set and announced a 10-year transitional period in which the changes should as far as possible be made.

The housing revenue account (HRA) subsidy system needs to be changed so that it supports rent restructuring. At the same time the opportunity can be taken to relieve stresses in the system that have become apparent as a result of the way in which rent rebate subsidy limitation was introduced in 1996–97.

Trans-Pennine Rail Franchise

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to make a decision on the Trans-Pennine rail franchise; and if the franchise will be determined on the basis of the guidelines to be issued on 16 July. [3014]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* A decision on whether to make a direction under section 26 of the Railways Act 1993—that would allow the Strategic Rail Authority to proceed to the next stage of the franchising process for its proposed Trans-Pennine franchise—will be made in due course.

We will make clear the scope and application of the franchising policy statement when it is published, shortly. It will not apply to replacement franchises for which the SRA has already invited best and final offers. This consultative statement will complement our draft directions and guidance to the authority and will also set out the Secretary of State's policy with regard to his powers under section 26.

Air Traffic Control

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his latest estimate is of the income to be generated by the sale of a 46 per cent. stake in NATS to the Airline Consortium. [3693]

Mr. Jamieson: Completion of this Public Private Partnership is subject to the satisfaction of a number of conditions. In finalising these, the Government will ensure that the deal continues to deliver real value to the Government and to taxpayers.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his progress in appointing Government nominees as directors of the company formed to provide air traffic control services following the sale of NATS to the Airline Consortium. [3694]

Mr. Jamieson: I hope to be able to make an announcement about the Government directors shortly.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the sale of National Air Traffic Services to the Airline Consortium will be completed. [3695]

Mr. Jamieson: Completion of the Public Private Partnership for National Air Traffic Services is subject to the satisfaction of certain conditions. We are working with the Airline Group to ensure that these conditions are satisfied at the earliest opportunity.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the opening date for the air traffic control centre at Swanwick, Hampshire. [3692]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS have advised the Government that the new En Route Air Traffic Control Centre (NERC) at Swanwick is still on course to come into operation on 27 January 2002.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees have been sought by the Airline Consortium purchasing National Air Traffic Services with regard to the opening of the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick, Hampshire. [3697]

Mr. Jamieson: No guarantees have been given to the Airline Group in connection with the Swanwick centre. However, the Airline Group will be under a contractual obligation to complete and operate the new centre.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timetable for the introduction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. [3554]

Mr. Jamieson: I am pleased to report that CTRL Section 1 (Channel Tunnel to Fawkham Junction in north Kent) is on schedule and on budget for completion in October 2003. Construction of CTRL Section 2 (Southfleet to St. Pancras) started on 2 July 2001, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2006.

DEFENCE

Live Ammunition

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library information about the percentage of all ammunition fired by the British Army in training that does not detonate. [2782]

Mr. Ingram: The document that contains statistical data on performance failures is classified and therefore withheld in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Altcar Training Camp

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his future plans for the Altcar training camp. [3249]

Mr. Ingram: The facilities at the Altcar training camp play an important role in meeting the training needs of the Regular forces, reserves, and cadets from all three services. The Ministry of Defence is considering proposals for the modernisation of the facilities at the camp, specifically the upgrading of targetry and associated range control features.

Multi-engine Aircraft Pilots

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what multi-engine pilot shortfalls were predicted at the 22 November 2000 meeting of the multi-engine aircrew Training Steering Committee. [2696]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* An unspecified pilot shortfall was predicted to cover within the next two to three years.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what target the Training Group Defence Agency set for into productive service multi-engine pilots for 2001; and how many went into service in 2000–01. [2698]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* Against an Into Productive Service target of 55 for multi-engine pilots in the RAF, a total of 57 entered service in 2000–01.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the lack of RAF flying personnel staying on past the 38/16 point will have on the supply of pilots for multi-engine aircraft in each year up to 2012. [2700]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The number of pilots trained to fly multi-engine aircraft who leave the RAF at the age 38/16 years of service point is small. Last year 16 pilots (1.9 per cent. of trained strength on 1 April 2000) left the service at that point and although a small increase is forecast over the next five to six years, the rate is expected to return to current levels by 2007–08.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he last made of the likelihood of a shortage of junior officer multi-engine aircraft pilots in the RAF from the end of 2001. [2699]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The current assessment is as follows:

RAF multi-engine aircraft—junior officer pilot forecast shortfall

	Requirement	Forecast strength	Forecast surplus/ shortfall
2001–02	568	586	+18
2002–03	571	580	+9
2003–04	580	575	–5
2004–05	593	563	–30
2005–06	603	552	–51
2006–07	600	543	–57
2007–08	608	538	–70
2008–09	586	539	–47
2009–10	585	542	–43
2010–11	574	549	–25
2011–12	571	555	–16

Addressing pilot shortfalls is a key priority for the Government and RAF and a number of initiatives are being undertaken to address this problem. These include the introduction of an in-service degree scheme to attract aircrew at a younger age, fully manning the RAF training systems, and the introduction of targeted financial incentives and the Linkup scheme to help improve retention. A comprehensive review of aircrew retention measures across the armed forces is also being undertaken and will report later this year, hopefully in time to influence the Armed Forces Pay Review Body's deliberations for their 2002 report.

STANOC Centre

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which military unit the STANOC Centre is attached; for what reason it was transferred from HQ Director Royal Artillery; what the annual cost or saving resulting from the move is; and how many personnel were employed in the centre in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [3016]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Night Observation and Counter-surveillance (STANOC) centre is currently part of the Royal Artillery Trials and Development Unit, which is an element of Headquarters Director Royal Artillery based at Larkhill in Wiltshire. As a result of the General Staff Review and a further study into Army Trials and Development Units, it has been decided that the STANOC centre's outputs would most effectively be provided in the future by disaggregating its prime responsibilities to the Land Warfare Training Centre (LWTC) and Infantry Trials and Development Unit (ITDU), both of which are based at Warminster. The current annual cost of the STANOC centre is £242,878. The provision of new infrastructure at Warminster is currently estimated at £65,000. Six military personnel were employed at the STANOC centre in 2000, and from 1 September 2001 three of these posts will be transferred to the LWTC and ITDU at Warminster and the remaining three posts will be redeployed elsewhere in the Field Army. Therefore, there will be no overall saving to the defence budget.

Tritium

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the availability of tritium for Britain's military defence programme following the accident at the Chapelcross reactor Number 3 this month. [3721]

Mr. Hoon: The incident at Chapelcross had no impact upon the availability of tritium for Britain's military defence programme.

National Missile Defence

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution he is making to President Bush's deliberations over the sort of missile defence system the United States will deploy. [3706]

Mr. Hoon: We continue to discuss missile defence and related issues regularly with the United States. We have consistently made it clear that we share US concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and that we will continue to work together to tackle the potential threat with a comprehensive strategy. And we welcome the fact that they are consulting with Allies, Russia and others on this important issue. But it is ultimately a matter for the US Administration to decide what sort of missile defences they will seek to deploy. They have not yet done so, and nor have they made any request for the use of facilities in the UK for missile defence purposes.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of communications from the Medical Research Council to his Department outlining the reasons why they believed an epidemiological study of the Porton Down volunteers is feasible. [3408]

Dr. Moonie: There are no such communications. The feasibility of an epidemiological study was discussed formally at a meeting on 5 April 2001. Notes of that meeting are contained in the briefing pack for research teams wishing to undertake the study. A copy of the pack has been placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library (1) a copy of the information pack which is being sent to academic researchers who submit an expression of interest in carrying out an epidemiological study of service volunteers who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down; [3410]

(2) a copy of the protocol drawn up by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, to carry out the experiment in 1983 in which service personnel were exposed to sarin nerve gas and involved the technique of single fibre electromyography. [3399]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Liquidated Damages

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department invites bidders to offer liquidated damages as a standard percentage of their tendered price with a standard time limit on their application; and how he

ensures that contractors do not include the value of potential liquidated damages payments in their tendered prices; [3881]

(2) what role liquidated damages indemnities play in securing the FASTER element of his Department's smart procurement initiative; [3716]

(3) what procedures his Department follows to establish the level of likely damage on which to base liquidated damages indemnities; and to establish an upper limit of liquidated damages in each case. [3880]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Japanese Internees

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what definition of British nationality is used to establish the entitlement of Japanese internees to compensation. [4276]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 11 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 517W.

TREASURY

EU Funding

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the United Kingdom's contribution to the EU was calculated to come from Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [3397]

Ruth Kelly: Contributions are made for the United Kingdom as a whole and no such estimates are therefore available.

Hidden Economy

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the loss in tax revenue to his Department in the last year from people operating in the hidden economy for each of the regions in the United Kingdom. [3715]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No such estimates have been made.

Equitable Life

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the review of the events leading up to Equitable Life's decision to close to new business and the role of the Financial Services Authority will be published; and if he will make a statement. [4584]

Ruth Kelly: I understand from the Financial Services Authority that the review team is not yet in a position to complete its report. I can confirm that it remains our intention to publish the report as soon as it is practicable.

HEALTH

NHS (West Sussex)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NHS structures in west Sussex. [2095]

Ms Blears: West Sussex health authority is committed to working in an integrated way with the whole of the national health service, stakeholders and local social services. The introduction of primary care trusts will further enable the health authority to work towards improved quality of services along with better value for money. Any substantive changes to NHS structures in west Sussex will be subject to full statutory consultation.

"Information for Health"

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost of implementing "Information for Health"; from which budgets that cost will be funded; and if he will make a statement. [1968]

Mr. Hutton: "Information for Health" is an ambitious and far-reaching strategy for information technology investment in the national health service and investment in IT for the national health service is expected to grow by around £1.6 billion over the lifetime of the strategy up to 31 March 2004.

This figure reflects national estimates of the sum of investment needed to deliver "Information for Health" and the IT components of the NHS plan. The majority of this investment will be made available to local health communities through health authority allocations. The allocations are intended as a guide for local health communities in ensuring that their own plans will meet the targets and milestones for implementing the NHS plan.

Hospices

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many beds in hospices are available to the national health service; and what the figures were for each of the last 10 years; [1057]

(2) what level of financial support is given per bed to hospices; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the national health service per bed of providing the same level of service itself; [1058]

(3) what proportion of the costs of running hospices is met by *(a)* grants from the national health service and *(b)* charitable giving; and what the figures were in each of the past 10 years; [1059]

(4) what guidelines he gives to NHS funding bodies about the level of support that should be given to hospices; [1060]

(5) what plans he has to review policy on the relationship between the NHS and the hospice movement. [1061]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* The total number of beds separated into national health service specialist palliative care units and voluntary hospices for each of the past 10 years for the United Kingdom is shown in the table. All hospice beds are available to NHS patients.

Date	NHS units	Beds	Voluntary hospices	Beds	Total units	Beds
January 1991	41	525	110	2,037	151	2,562
January 1992	43	522	127	2,236	170	2,758
January 1993	50	573	134	2,286	184	2,859
January 1994	50	573	143	2,399	193	2,972
January 1995	46	533	149	2,485	195	3,018
January 1996	50	557	150	2,468	200	3,025
January 1997	56	595	147	2,458	203	3,053
January 1998	59	605	146	2,474	205	3,079
January 1999	61	622	145	2,445	206	3,067
January 2000	56	600	146	2,469	202	3,069
January 2001	57	607	152	2,480	209	3,087

Source:
Hospice Information Service

In addition, the NHS collects information on the number of beds also provided by NHS trusts in wards classified as being for patients who are terminally ill or in need of palliative care in the annual publication 'Bed availability and occupancy—England', copies of which are available in the Library.

It is for the NHS locally to make arrangements for financial support for hospices, given the extent of local diversity both of the services provided and of alternative sources of local support. Accordingly we have issued no guidance specifying a set percentage of revenue costs that individual health authorities and primary care organisations should meet. Successive guidance to health authorities has made clear their responsibilities for developing palliative care strategies based on the assessed health needs of the resident population.

The National Council for Hospices and Specialist Palliative Care Services has estimated that total expenditure on hospice and specialist palliative care for adults is £300 million. Of this, £170 million is provided by the voluntary sector and £130 million through the NHS. Information on the NHS contribution to hospices over the past 10 years is not available.

The NHS cancer plan set out our commitment to increase NHS investment in specialist palliative care by £50 million by 2004. This will mean that for the first time ever NHS investment in specialist palliative care services will match that of the voluntary sector. Health authority allocations in 2001–02 included a total of £255 million to support the first year of local implementation of the NHS cancer plan. Priorities for this year include the development of costed strategic plans for palliative care.

Cancer networks are currently developing detailed service delivery plans, which will identify current position and set out action plans for further development across all services including palliative care. These will be completed by the autumn.

Electricity Pylons and Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the possible health effects on people who live near (i) electricity pylons and (ii) telecommunications masts; and if he will make a statement. [1858]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* The Department obtains advice on potential health effects risks associated with electromagnetic fields (EMF), such as those from power lines or mobile phone masts, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB).

Power line EMF has been reviewed in a report published on 6 March by the NRPB's Advisory Group on non-ionising radiation and provides an assessment of the potential risks of cancer. (Documents of the NRPB Vol. 12, No 1, 2001). Copies have been placed in the Library. The board of the NRPB also published a response statement which can be found on the NRPB website www.nrpb.org.uk. The report states that any possible risk of childhood leukaemia relates to those exposed at relatively high levels of domestic magnetic field exposure but that these are not necessarily associated with proximity to pylons or overhead power transmission lines. The conclusions indicate that the question of whether exposure to electromagnetic fields can influence the development of cancer cannot at present be completely resolved.

Mobile phone base stations (transmission masts) emit radio waves at very different frequencies to those fields generated by power lines. They are therefore being dealt with as a separate issue. The possible public health implications of mobile phone technology has been investigated by the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (the Stewart group). Its report, published in May 2000 concluded that:

> "the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines."

It also included a recommendation for a substantial research programme to be set up to investigate the possible effects of mobile phone technology more generally. A three year programme, jointly funded by Government and industry, has now been launched and has invited proposals relating to all aspects of mobile phone technology including telecommunications masts and handsets. The research is being undertaken under the direction of an independent programme management committee. Details can be found on the Department website www.doh.gov.uk/mobilephones.

The Department is also continuing to provide financial support for the World Health Organisation International Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) Project which is comprehensively reviewing EMF effects, including those of power frequency fields and radio waves.

Preston, Chorley and South Ribble Hospital Trust

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what salary the new chief executive of Preston, Chorley and South Ribble Hospital Trust will receive; [2476]

(2) who has been appointed chief executive of Preston, Chorley and South Ribble Hospital Trust; and if the post of Chief Executive was advertised; [2774]

(3) how many meetings of the appointment panel took place before the decision was made to appoint a new chief executive of Preston, Chorley and South Ribble Hospital Trust. [2475]

Mr. Hutton: At their next public meetings in late July, the boards of Chorley, South Ribble and Preston Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trusts are expected to consider seeking ministerial approval to consult on a possible merger. There has been no formal approach to Ministers, or the Department. A paper, to be taken in public session, will also include a proposed job description for the proposed new joint chief executive.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the level of access to NHS dentistry by September. [2539]

Ms Blears: In September 1999 my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised that within two years everyone will be able to access national health service dentistry if and when they want it via NHS Direct. All health authorities now have in place dentistry action plans to ensure that everyone in the local area can access NHS dentistry if they want it within a reasonable time and distance.

Waiting Lists

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of patients waiting for in-patient treatment have been waiting for more than one year *(a)* at the latest date available and *(b)* in May 1997 in each health authority. [2834]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. Waiting time information was not collected on a monthly basis in 1997 and so we have provided figures for the nearest date for which we have data.

In 1997 we promised to reduce waiting lists by 100,000. We have done this and today there are 125,000 fewer patients waiting for in-patient treatment than when we came into power. We are going to build on this. As part of our NHS Plan the National Health Service is working to reduce the maximum waiting time for admission to hospital from 18 months today to six months by the end of 2005. By the same date the maximum waiting time for an out-patient appointment will be reduced from over six months today to three months.

	May 2001		*June 1997*	
Health authority	*Number of over 12 month waiters*	*Percentage of over 12 month waiters*	*Number of over 12 month waiters*	*Percentage of over 12 month waiters*
Hillingdon	250	6.0	313	5.9
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	99	2.2	134	2.6
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	811	8.0	1,288	9.1
Bedfordshire	725	7.0	293	2.6
Berkshire	516	3.6	542	3.7
Buckinghamshire	777	5.7	701	4.9
Croydon	606	8.8	292	3.4
East Kent	1,122	6.8	41	0.3
West Kent	1,551	6.6	799	3.1
Kingston and Richmond	448	6.2	442	5.4
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,603	9.9	2,301	11.4
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	594	5.9	503	4.1
East Surrey	754	8.6	417	4.1
West Surrey	1,522	10.5	1,452	8.9
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	1,160	6.1	650	3.2
West Sussex	1,816	9.7	1,672	7.8
Barking and Havering	521	5.1	460	4.0
Brent and Harrow	439	5.3	717	6.3
Camden and Islington	263	4.4	221	2.5
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	726	5.3	1,549	9.9
East London and the City	536	4.5	691	4.9
North Essex	1,331	6.4	1,010	4.1
South Essex	493	2.9	202	1.1
South Lancashire	258	3.2	432	4.4
Liverpool	504	4.7	683	5.3
Manchester	697	6.1	891	7.2
Morecambe Bay	183	2.7	101	1.4
St. Helens and Knowsley	319	3.4	345	3.5
Salford and Trafford	849	6.7	763	5.6
Sefton	287	3.9	521	5.7
Stockport	248	3.5	264	3.6
West Pennine	285	2.3	235	1.7
Northamptonshire	623	4.5	460	3.1
Oxfordshire	487	4.5	842	7.3
Suffolk	617	4.0	618	3.7
Barnsley	18	0.4	104	2.1

Health authority	May 2001 Number of over 12 month waiters	May 2001 Percentage of over 12 month waiters	June 1997 Number of over 12 month waiters	June 1997 Percentage of over 12 month waiters
North Derbyshire	55	0.7	1,204	11.0
Southern Derbyshire	212	1.7	663	5.3
Doncaster	9	0.2	47	0.8
Leicestershire	364	2.3	371	2.2
Lincolnshire	561	3.6	1,767	8.7
North Nottinghamshire	60	0.8	269	2.9
Nottingham	195	1.8	1,122	8.1
Rotherham	8	0.2	119	2.4
Sheffield	60	0.6	724	6.1
Bury and Rochdale	258	2.8	162	1.6
North Cheshire	717	8.2	269	2.9
South Cheshire	622	4.4	978	5.6
East Lancashire	154	1.2	109	0.8
North West Lancashire	171	1.5	262	2.0
North and Mid Hampshire	530	5.0	402	3.7
Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,011	7.3	1,252	7.7
Somerset	357	3.1	91	0.8
South and West Devon	783	5.8	101	0.7
Wiltshire	745	6.0	779	5.5
Avon	1,436	6.8	1,689	7.1
Birmingham	238	1.6	55	0.3
Wigan and Bolton	484	3.6	378	2.3
Wirral	128	2.5	89	1.5
Bradford	88	0.8	564	5.0
County Durham and Darlington	94	0.8	66	0.5
East Riding and Hull	321	2.8	475	3.7
Gateshead and South Tyneside	43	0.6	138	1.5
Leeds	367	2.6	249	1.7
Newcastle and North Tyneside	112	1.5	207	2.2
North Cumbria	188	2.6	312	3.5
South Humber	37	0.5	893	9.1
Northumberland	56	1.1	65	1.1
Sunderland	38	0.6	29	0.4
Tees	104	1.0	17	0.1
Wakefield	173	2.5	220	2.7
North Yorkshire	168	1.3	170	1.1
Calderdale and Kirklees	148	1.3	142	1.2
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	685	5.4	200	1.6
Dorset	12	0.1	4	0.0
North and East Devon	689	6.2	425	3.5
Gloucestershire	131	1.6	45	0.5
Coventry	77	1.6	10	0.2
Dudley	80	1.6	16	0.3
Herefordshire	107	3.8	85	2.7
Sandwell	28	0.6	3	0.1
Shropshire	280	3.8	19	0.3
Solihull	21	0.6	8	0.3
North Staffordshire	225	4.0	200	2.9
South Staffordshire	721	5.8	64	0.5
Walsall	27	1.0	7	0.2
Warwickshire	73	0.7	21	0.2
Wolverhampton	43	1.2	92	1.8
Worcestershire	414	4.3	111	1.2
Cambridgeshire	603	4.2	[1]—	[1]—
Norfolk	994	5.3	[1]—	[1]—
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	1,040	7.0	[1]—	[1]—
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	1,040	6.7	[1]—	[1]—
Hertfordshire	1,353	6.5	[1]—	[1]—
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	839	6.2	[1]—	[1]—

[1] These health authorities did not exist in 1997

Source:
QF01 quarterly returns

Hip and Knee Replacements

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hip replacement and *(b)* knee replacement operations required revision operations in each of the past 10 years. [2375]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The table shows the data for in-patient episodes for hip and knee revisions in national health service hospitals in England, from 1989–90 to 1999–2000, the latest year for which figures are available.

Year	All hip	Hip revision	Percentage revision	All knee	Knee revision	Percentage revision
1990–91	49,659	5,336	10.7	14,150	701	5.0
1991–92	55,396	5,602	10.1	17,348	780	4.5
1992–93	57,377	5,628	9.8	19,999	971	4.9
1993–94	58,643	5,256	9.0	22,669	988	4.4
1994–95	62,511	5,662	9.1	25,342	1,202	4.7
1995–96	65,636	6,436	9.8	29,550	1,298	4.4
1996–97	63,527	6,416	10.1	26,877	1,390	5.2
1997–98	62,394	6,273	10.1	27,410	1,439	5.2
1998–99	68,025	6,853	10.1	31,919	1,573	4.9
1999–2000	68,920	6,350	9.2	33,007	1,557	4.7

Tinnitus

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been allocated to research into the *(a)* causes, *(b)* symptoms, *(c)* detection and *(d)* treatments of tinnitus in each of the last five years. [2864]

Mr. Hutton: The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The Department also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the Medical Research Council and charities that takes place in the NHS. The Department has provided or is providing such funding for five ongoing projects relating to tinnitus and 21 completed projects. Details of these projects can be found on the National Research Register which is available in the Library on CD Rom, or via the internet at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr/htm.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for diseases is the MRC which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC spent £755,000 specifically on tinnitus research in 1996–97 and £875,000 in 1997–98. In 1998–99 the MRC spent £3.49 million on hearing research in general and £3.34 million in 1999–2000, some of which would be relevant to tinnitus.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, consequent on his letter dated 6 June to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (1) with regard to Mr. Stephen Holden, if he will now obtain for the right hon. Member the promised reply from the chairman of the Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust; [3152]

(2) with regard to Mr. Robert McDonald, if he will obtain for the right hon. Member the promised response from the chairman of the Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust. [3153]

Ms Blears: I understand that Mr. Peter Mount, chairman of the Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals National Health Service Trust wrote to my right hon. Friend on 21 June and 6 July in respect of his constituents Mr. Stephen Holden and Mr. Robert McDonald.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford can expect a reply to his letter of 9 April relating to his constituent Mr. P. Arnill of Lavender House, Dragon road, Great Leighs; and if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the delay in replying. [3571]

Ms Blears: The Department has not received a copy of the hon. Member's letter of the 9 April relating to his constituent Mr. P. Arnill.

Core Targets

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to notify NHS trusts of the traffic light indicators for core targets against which their performance will be judged in the financial year 2001–02. [3221]

Mr. Hutton: National health service trusts will be advised of the specific targets that will be used to traffic light 2001–02 performance later this year.

Ritalin

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department has *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* commissioned on the impact of Ritalin on the long-term health of children. [3018]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 July 2001]:* The Department funded a research project entitled "Working memory in children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): the impact of methylphenidate (Ritalin)", by Dr. Kim Cornish of the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Nottingham, at a cost of £26,585. The final report was received by the Department in April 2001 and has been submitted by Dr. Cornish to journals for publication.

The Department funds research to support policy development in health and social care, and to support effective practice in the national health service. The Department also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and by charities where this takes place in the NHS. The Department has provided or is providing such funding for six other recently completed projects and five other ongoing projects relating to Ritalin. Details of these projects can be found on the National Research Register which is available in the Library on CD Rom, and on the internet via http:\\www/doh.gov.uk/research.

As with all medicines, the safety of Ritalin is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency and by the Committee on Safety of Medicines, an independent expert advisory body.

The MRC is the main agency through which we fund research on the causes and treatment of disease. The MRC receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, via the Office of Science and Technology. The MRC funds projects on ADHD but is not funding currently any

research specifically into Ritalin. The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for research into any aspect of human health and these are judged in competition with other demands for funding. Awards are made according to the scientific quality and importance to health of the applications.

Cancer Drugs

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the clinical implication of a delay in Herceptin treatment of women with breast cancer who over express the HER 2 marker. [3266]

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the clinical implication of a delay in the use of Irinotecan, Oxaliplatin and Raltitrexed in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer, at *(a)* first-line and *(b)* second-line; [3286]

(2) what assessment he has made of the clinical implication of a delay in the use of Rituximab for the treatment of follicular lymphoma. [3276]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) has been asked to evaluate each of these drugs, and to assess their clinical and cost-effectiveness in the treatment of advanced breast cancer, advanced colorectal cancer and follicular lymphoma.

NICE will base its recommendations on the evidence of clinical benefits—including the impact on the quality of life as well as the likely effects on mortality, and estimates of the associated costs.

It will consider which, if any, of those patients diagnosed with these particular cancers will benefit from these new drugs. The publication dates for guidance on all of these drugs are to be confirmed. If NICE makes a positive recommendation all health authorities will be expected to fund these treatments from the additional £255 million available to them for cancer services in 2001–02.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people with follicular lymphoma that are being denied Rituximab for the treatment of their disease. [3278]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* Follicular lymphoma is one of a diverse group of cancers known as non-Hodgkins lymphomas (NHLs). NHLs account for about 2 per cent. of all cancers. There are about 9,000 people diagnosed with NHLs in the United Kingdom each year.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is evaluating and assessing the clinical and cost-effectiveness of Rituximab in the treatment of follicular lymphoma. If they recommend its use the guidance will make clear which of those patients diagnosed with follicular lymphoma should benefit from it.

Nurses

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses employed in the NHS for the first time in each of the past 12 months have *(a)* had a contract with an employment agency and *(b)* been other nurses. [3849]

Mr. Hutton: Figures from the Department for the expenditure on agency nurses in 1999–2000 are available in the Library. Information on the number of nurses employed in the national health service for the first time are not held centrally but may be available from individual NHS employers.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the potential increase in the market for gas arising from the expansion of the gas network. [2299]

Mr. Wilson: Approximately 20 per cent. of households do not have access to gas. The Government, Ofgem and the industry are currently working to facilitate the extension of the network. It is not yet clear how many households will be able to benefit from this work. However the Government hope that as many as possible will have access to the gas network.

Energy Policy Review

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the detailed terms of reference of the Government's review of energy policy. [2352]

Mr. Wilson: The Performance and Innovation Unit has posted a note of the scope of the project on its website, which can be found at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she proposes to evaluate and measure the benefits of security of supply in the Government's energy review. [2354]

Mr. Wilson: Security of supply is a key element of the energy review currently being undertaken by the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU). The PIU has published a note of the scope of the review on its website and will be publishing further papers as its work develops.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the assessment of nuclear power in the Government's energy review will incorporate the full life cycle costs of decommissioning and waste disposal. [2353]

Mr. Wilson: The review of energy policy will be considering what role, if any, the nuclear industry should play in meeting longer term environmental and security of supply objectives. As with other energy sources, the review will take into account all costs which are relevant to these longer-term questions.

Industrial Diseases

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many interim payments were offered in respect of claims for chronic bronchitis and emphysema by area and by month since 1999. [2778]

Mr. Wilson: The number of interim payments made to chronic bronchitis and emphysema claimants since 1 January 1999, broken down by area, are as follows.

Date	England	Wales	Scotland	Total
Pre-December 1998	6,739	2,809	972	10,520
1999				
January	483	87	65	635
February	170	53	31	254
March	556	102	31	689
April	360	95	15	470
May	396	76	33	505
June	320	76	13	409
July	312	94	44	450
August	254	68	7	329
September	257	143	0	400
October	293	146	6	445
November	260	139	11	410
December	379	119	2	500
2000				
January	404	166	8	578
February	411	216	40	667
March	526	172	20	718
April	418	103	44	565
May	425	71	61	557
June	361	158	60	579
July	541	150	49	740
August	461	137	42	640
September	486	111	44	641
October	434	156	90	680
November	406	177	64	647
December	762	337	77	1,176
2001				
January	568	263	92	923
February	593	236	155	984
March	762	290	124	1,176
April	718	247	149	1,114
May	1,600	562	174	2,336
June	2,271	800	145	3,216
Total	22,926	8,359	2,668	33,953

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many widows' claims are outstanding in respect of their late husbands' claims for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, broken down by area and month since 1999. [2773]

Mr. Wilson: I regret that IRISC, the Department's handler, is unable to provide figures as to the number of widow's claims outstanding by region and by month since 1999 in the time given.

However, I can confirm the IRISC has registered 54,938 claims in respect of miners' widows and families, to date. Of these, so far the Department has paid almost 6,000 bereavement and loss of society awards.

In May 2001, an initiative was agreed to make an interim payment of £2,000 to widows who have received a bereavement award, subject to certain conditions. The Department has, to date, made 1,932 of these awards.

In total, 13,600 interims and final settlements have been paid to miners' families, amounting to £65.8 million.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the time which will be taken to settle all claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger. [2776]

Mr. Wilson: It is difficult to say when all compensation claims for both respiratory disease and vibration white finger, VWF will be settled, not least because new claims are still being received.

With regard to respiratory disease, there are currently 153,200 claims registered and 900 new claims continue to be initiated each week. To date, almost 124,000 claims for VWF have been registered, with an approximate weekly increase of 330 claims per week. While the number of claims continue to increase, the Department is unable to provide, with accuracy, an estimate of the time taken to settle claims.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the average length of time taken from an interim payment in respect of a claim for chronic bronchitis and emphysema being offered to payment being received, broken down by area in each of the last three years. [2779]

Mr. Wilson: Under the respiratory disease handling agreement signed between the Department and the claimants' solicitors, the Department makes the following interim payment:

1. an interim payment of £2,000 is made upon provision by a claimant to IRISC of verification of receipt of the Industrial Injuries Benefit, PD D12, subject to confirmation of the number of years of underground work as set out in the handling agreement;

2. a bereavement award is payable to the widow upon production of a death certificate for their husband citing one of eight descriptors;

3. when a claimant has attended an appointment to undergo the medical assessment process, MAP, and the report has shown that the claimant is exhibiting symptoms of injuries British Coal is liable for the IRISC, the Department's claims handler, is unable to make an offer in full and final settlement, an interim will be made;

4. interim payments are made upon completion of screening spirometry with a tariff agreed with the claimants' solicitors in accordance with the criteria set out in the handling agreement.

The majority of these are made directly by issuing a cheque rather than making an offer and waiting for acceptance. The only interim where there is a prior offer stage is the one in respect of an initiative agreed in May 2001 to make a £2,000 interim to widows in receipt of a bereavement award. The payment of this award is dependent on a response from the claimant and subject to certain criteria. The payment of this interim is also dependent on IRISC, the Department's claims handler, being in receipt from the claimants' solicitors of the requisite documents to ensure that payment is made to the right individual, as determined by the grant of probate. I regret that the Department is unable to provide figures for the turnaround time of these interims broken down by area. This depends, among other things, on the time of responses from the claimant. However, I can confirm that once IRISC is in receipt of the necessary documents, the average length of time taken to making a payment is 1.5 weeks.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to improve the

process for claimants suffering from chronic bronchitis and emphysema and who have made a claim for compensation in the north-east area. [2777]

Mr. Wilson: The key to speeding up the compensation process in the north-east lies in the recruitment of more respiratory specialists.

Healthcall, the company contracted to deliver the medical assessment, will move resources to areas where the rate of MAP assessments is unsatisfactory, such as the north-east. Recently, a specialist has been employed in a full time capacity in the north-east and a further specialist has been identified who is prepared to travel from Scotland to work in the Newcastle and Durham area.

Healthcall are also installing extra long function testing equipment at the centre in Durham to increase the rate of assessments still further. The use of one or both of the mobile testing centres in the area is also being investigated.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on phasing out nuclear power stations. [2788]

Mr. Wilson: As with other electricity generation options, decisions on station lifetimes are a commercial matter for the generating companies subject to the necessary authorisation by NII. It is expected that existing nuclear stations will continue to contribute to the country's energy requirements and to the reduction of CO_2 emissions for as long as the companies consider it economic for them to do so and provided they meet the high safety and environmental standards required.

Solar Power

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the contribution that solar power can make to meeting the United Kingdom's energy needs. [2538]

Mr. Wilson: Solar power is a technology with significant longer-term potential in helping to meet the UK's energy needs.

With a view to bringing forward this technology's potential, we are supporting a range of initiatives such as domestic and large-scale commercial field trials plus the first phase of a major PV roofs programme aimed, in time, at matching those in Germany and Japan.

Weights and Measures Act

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she proposes to introduce the changes outlined in the public consultation paper on proposed legislative changes under the Weights and Measures Act 1985 issued in December 2000. [2822]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* The responses to the consultation document are under consideration.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lord Ashcroft

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date his Department received a request for documents under the Data Protection Act 1998 from Lord Ashcroft; and on what date his Department replied to the request. [1000]

Mr. MacShane: Under the non-disclosure provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 it is not appropriate to disclose personal data except to the data subject concerned.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made regarding the decision by the Zimbabwean authorities not to extend the work permit of the reporter David Blair. [2716]

Mr. Bradshaw: In his statement of 27 June, the Foreign Secretary expressed concern at the Zimbabwe Government's decision not to renew David Blair's work permit and expressed his hope that the Government of Zimbabwe would reconsider their decision.

Turkey

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of Turkey's ban of the Virtue Party on Turkey's prospects of joining the EU; and if he will make a statement. [2982]

Peter Hain: We are concerned at the Turkish Constitutional Court's decision to order the closure of Fazilet. The decision has worrying implications for democratic pluralism and freedom of expression in Turkey. The EU statement of 25 June (available on the internet at http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/main.cfm?LANG=1) expressed this concern. Turkey (like all other candidates) must meet the Copenhagen political criteria before beginning negotiations to join the European Union.

Diplomatic Missions

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom that owed more than £10,000 at 4 April in respect of national non-domestic rates for office premises. [4525]

Mr. Straw: Most diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom meet their obligations and pay the national non-domestic rates requested from them. However, as at 4 April 2001 the following missions owed over £10,000 in respect of national non-domestic rates (NNDR):

Country	£
Nigeria	339,925.44
Iran	105,827.16
Sierra Leone	66,246.88
Yugoslavia	46,638.87
Algeria	39,844.82
Ivory Coast	33,303.54
Mozambique	30,564.99
Jordan	29,048.13

Country	£
Cameroon	24,583.30
Egypt	23,925.02
Uganda	21,985.39
Libya	21,358.92
Bangladesh	16,131.99
Democratic Republic of Congo	15,765.48
Senegal	12,253.02
Total	827,402.95

Eight additional diplomatic missions who owe £10,000 more in respect of national non-domestic rates have made arrangements with the Valuation Office Agency to clear their outstanding debts and have not been included in this list. The total amount outstanding from all missions, including these additional diplomatic missions, is approximately £1,480,218.62.

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many outstanding parking and other minor traffic violation fines were incurred by diplomatic missions and international organisations in the United Kingdom during the year ending 31 December 2000. [4526]

Mr. Straw: At the end of 2000, unpaid fines in respect of parking and other minor traffic violations incurred by diplomatic missions and international organisations in the United Kingdom totalled 5,889. In May this year the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wrote to all diplomatic missions and international organisations in the United Kingdom giving them the opportunity to either pay their outstanding fines or appeal against them if they considered that they had been issued incorrectly. As a result payments totalling £81,120.00 were received, leaving a total of 3,936 unpaid fines for 2000. The table details those diplomatic missions and international organisations that have more than 10 fines outstanding.

Unpaid parking and minor traffic violation fines—2000—diplomatic vehicles

Position/diplomatic mission/international organisation	Number of fines outstanding
1. Nigeria	1,084
2. United Arab Emirates	272
3. Egypt	148
4. Qatar	145
5. Iran	114
6. Ghana	104
7. Turkey	96
8. Saudi Arabia	82
9. Ethiopia	74
10. France	69
10. Oman	69
10. Ukraine	69
11. Greece	68
12. Algeria	59
13. China	57
14. Cyprus	55
14. Jordan	55
14. Mongolia	55
14. Morocco	55
15. Hungary	48
15. Malaysia	48
16. Mozambique	47
17. Georgia	45
18. Russia	44
18. United States of America	44
19. Poland	41

Unpaid parking and minor traffic violation fines—2000—diplomatic vehicles

Position/diplomatic mission/international organisation	Number of fines outstanding
20. Kenya	40
21. Cuba	38
22. Kazakhstan	34
23. Tunisia	33
24. Brunei	32
25. Uganda	29
26. Indonesia	26
26. Zambia	26
26. Zimbabwe	26
27. Romania	25
28. Albania	24
28. Yemen	24
29. Pakistan	23
29. Commonwealth Secretariat	23
30. Bangladesh	22
30. Philippines	22
31. Afghanistan	21
31. Namibia	21
32. Lithuania	18
33. Cote D'Ivoire	16
34. Peru	15
34. Sudan	15
35. Cameroon	14
35. Italy	14
36. Portugal	13
36. Uzbekistan	13
37. Bahrain	12
37. Germany	12
	3,678

Libya (Export Licence)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the issuing of an export licence in September 2000 for a military-listed chemical to Libya. [4585]

Mr. Bradshaw: In September 2000 the Government inadvertently issued a licence for a small quantity of military listed chemical to Libya. This was technically in breach of the UK interpretation of the EU arms embargo on Libya. The chemical was for use in the laboratory analysis of water and sewage samples. The goods have now been exported and the licence has been returned as exhausted. As a result of the error we have revised assessment procedures of export licence applications to embargoed destinations. The Government continue to support the EU arms embargo on Libya.

Malaysia

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the arrest under the Internal Security Act of the President of the Student Council, University of Malaysia, Mohamad Fuad Mohd Ikhwan. [3746]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mohamad Fuad Mohd Ikhwan was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) on 6 July. We are concerned at the recent use of this Act, which provides for detention without trial. We hope that all those detained under the ISA will be either charged or released. We and our EU partners continue to monitor the developments closely and take up the issue with the Malaysian authorities on suitable occasions.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Members' Salaries

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the President of the Council which grades of staff receive a salary broadly equivalent to that of an hon. Member in *(a)* the medical profession in hospitals, *(b)* general practice, *(c)* teaching, *(d)* local government, *(e)* civil service and *(f)* the armed forces. [3743]

Mr. Robin Cook: Details of salary comparisons with other public sector groups are illustrated in Volume 2 of the Senior Salaries Review Body's report on parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 4997). Copies of the Report are available in both the House of Commons Library and Vote Office.

The salary recommendation of the review body sought to ensure a broad equivalence to salaries for a major director in a district general hospital, a head of a large secondary school, a director in a district council or assistant director in a large unitary or county council, lower graded members of the Senior Civil Service and battalion commanders.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Connexions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if the Connexions Service will offer a personal adviser to young people with learning disabilities, and what arrangements will be in place to ensure that the Connexions Service provides support to young people with mental and physical disabilities; [3126]

(2) what the upper age limit is at which a young person can be in receipt of the services of a personal adviser under the Connexions Service; and if this limit will also apply to young people with learning disabilities. [3127]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The Connexions Service will provide access to a personal adviser to all young people aged 13–19, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The personal adviser will provide advice, guidance, support and personal development opportunities based on each individual young person's needs, drawing on specialist services as necessary.

The Connexions Service will be required to arrange assessments for those with statements of special educational needs in the last year of compulsory schooling who intend to leave school, but continue in learning. The service will also have the power to arrange for assessments in other circumstances where they feel it would be beneficial, eg for young people with SEN, but without statements. These responsibilities are designed to ensure more effective transitions for young people with SEN on leaving school and moving through post-16 learning.

To build on this, the Connexions Service will, in partnership with local agencies, continue to support young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to their 25th birthday if they are not ready to access the adult services provided locally.

Asset Management Plans

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the results of the asset management plans will be published. [3361]

Mr. Timms: The Department has been validating local education authorities' asset management plan information and intends to publish analyses of the data in the autumn. This will include information on authorities' repair and maintenance needs.

Further Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he last met representatives of further education colleges to discuss their funding and staffing situation; and if he will make a statement. [3190]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 July 2001]:* The Secretary of State has not met representatives of further education colleges as yet but my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning met with Mr. David Gibson from the Association of Colleges on 25 June, and I met Mr. Gibson on 12 July.

Swimming

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to ensure that all school children have access to a swimming pool on a weekly basis. [3485]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 12 July 2001]:* Swimming is a compulsory part of the National Curriculum for Physical Education at Key Stage 2, unless pupils have met the full Key Stage 2 requirements during Key Stage 1. After Key Stage 2 it remains one of six areas of physical activity. The Ofsted report on swimming at Key Stage 2, published in November 2000, showed that well over four out of five schools inspected provided adequate time for swimming and four out of five children are able to swim 25m at the end of Key Stage 2. We acknowledge, however, that we need to work more with schools to make even more opportunities available for more children to be able to swim 25m by the time they reach secondary school.

Swimming and water safety are important life skills. We are investing heavily in school sport and swimming will benefit. The Government's commitment includes £581 million in England (out of a total of £750 million in the UK) from the New Opportunities Fund for school sport facilities.

We have established a Swimming Advisory Group, involving, as well as my Department, representatives of the swimming associations, Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to discuss what more can be done to create even more opportunities for children to swim and announce proposals by the end of the year.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the foot and mouth contingency plan which was deposited with the EU and OIE. [789]

Mr. Morley: The contingency plan for Great Britain was submitted to the EU for approval in 1991 and approved in 1993. An updated version was sent to the EU in July 2000. This plan is very much an outline strategy which in turn is supported by detailed veterinary instructions and regional contingency plans.

A copy of the July 2000 version of the GB contingency plan was placed in the Libraries of the House on 14 May 2001 and it will also shortly be available on the DEFRA foot and mouth disease website http://www.defra.gov.uk/, omitting names and personal telephone numbers on the grounds of confidentiality.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms in Cumbria have had sheep slaughtered in the voluntary cull; and how many sheep were slaughtered. [795]

Mr. Morley: Livestock in Cumbria were culled only where, in the opinion of the Chief Veterinary Officer, the animals had been exposed to the foot and mouth virus. Computer records show that in the cull of animals within 3 km of infected premises in Cumbria, 503,545 sheep were slaughtered on 1,732 farms.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals on infected and contiguous premises have been culled in the Ribble Valley as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. [1078]

Mr. Morley: The information is not available in the format requested. The Settle associated cluster includes the Ribble Valley and an additional area to the east currently extending as far as Ilkley. To subdivide the area as requested would incur disproportionate cost.

The table shows the number of animals slaughtered on infected and contiguous premises in the Settle associated cluster.

Numbers of animals slaughtered in the Settle associated cluster (as at 9 July)

	Infected premises	*Contiguous premises*	*Total*
Cattle	12,664	24,727	37,391
Pigs	56	89	145
Sheep	54,020	154,213	208,233
Goats	8	61	69
Total	66,748	179,090	245,838

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criterion she uses to determine the areas of infection covered by the declaratory orders for foot and mouth. [1488]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2001]:* When a case of foot and mouth disease is confirmed, an infected area with boundaries which are at least 10 km from the infected place has to be designated by a declaratory order. The boundaries may extend beyond the statutory minimum for disease control purposes and because, in order to simplify identification, they are determined by clear geographical features, such as roads or railway lines. Declaratory orders for England and Wales are made by my Department and a map depicting the infected area may be inspected in the DEFRA office at 1A Page street, London between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday. The maps are also reproduced on the DEFRA website.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much it cost to dispose of slaughtered animals in the eradication of foot and mouth disease, broken down by *(a)* veterinary bills, *(b)* transport, *(c)* accommodation, *(d)* fuel and materials for pyres, *(e)* land access for burial, *(f)* contractors and slaughtermen, *(g)* machinery hire, *(h)* wagon transport, *(i)* consumables and *(j)* rendering. [2193]

Mr. Morley: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows costs to date and estimated costs (as at 9 July) for the categories that most closely correspond to those about which the right hon. Member has asked.

£ million

	Cost to date	*Estimated total cost*
Temporary Veterinary Inspectors and Local Veterinary Inspectors (ie not full time employees of the Department)	4.8	22.0
Disposal/haulage (incl. rendering and pyres)	104.6	172.6
Carcase disposal sites	4.2	8.5
Travel and subsistence (incl. accommodation and mileage)	8.4	9.0
Slaughtermen	9.7	10.7
Reinstatement and cleansing and disinfection (incl. contractors)	57.9	863.0
Protective clothing and other consumables	7.5	8.0
	197.1	1,093.8

Note:
Taken from FMD estimated costs, 9 July 2001

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what biosecurity measures were implemented during farm to farm milk tanker collections affected by foot and mouth restrictions. [2173]

Mr. Morley: The Code of Practice for Hauliers and Buyers of Milk (drawn up under the Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 and revised in March 2001) lays down the measures that must be followed by milk hauliers and dairy personnel who are involved in the collection and

transport of untreated milk originating from dairy farms in a foot and mouth disease infected area or from other farms known to be at risk of foot and mouth disease infection.

The Code can be found on the DEFRA website at: http://defraweb/footandmouth/disease/restrictions/nonanimal/milks.asp.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what precautions have been in place during the foot and mouth crisis to help prevent the disease being carried across the English channel by ferry and channel tunnel passengers; and if she will make a statement. [1857]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Details of precautionary measures are available from the DEFRA website at http://defraweb/footandmouth/about/index.htm. This includes guidance on taking vehicles abroad, imports and exports and trade issues.

Anyone who intends to import or export products of animal origin should check that they comply fully with the appropriate legal requirements which are in place to prevent the spread of diseases such as foot and mouth.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on slurry lagoons on farms affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. [1669]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* Slurry and liquid manure are normally treated by adding chemicals to raise or lower the pH so as to inactivate any foot and mouth disease virus that may be present. However, on many large farms the volume of slurry involved may make pH adjustment practically difficult and inordinately expensive. Moreover, the ground state may now allow the application of treated slurry. In such circumstances slurry and liquid manure may well be kept in lagoons or holding tanks until it can be applied to the land.

Environment Agency authorisation is always sought about the construction and location of lagoons. Local animal health offices have cleansing and disinfecting teams who can give advice on handling large amounts of slurry and liquid manure. This advice will include the ease with which particular amounts might be treated and the preferred disposal methods taking into account the local ground conditions and the relevant environmental considerations.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the total cost of the recent foot and mouth crisis to date to the Exchequer; and if she will make a statement. [1500]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* Our current estimate (as at 9 July) of the direct cost of the outbreak to the Exchequer is around £2.2 billion. Among other things, this includes the cost of disinfection and cleansing as well as compensation for compulsory slaughter of affected livestock.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of those recommendations contained in the 1969 Committee of Inquiry report into the 1967 foot and mouth outbreak were acted upon during the Government's handling of the 2001 epidemic; and if she will make a statement. [1792]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The recommendations in "The Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Foot-and-Mouth Disease", parts 1 and 2, published 7 March 1969 and 3 November 1969 (the Northumberland report), form the basis of the Government's policy for keeping the disease out of the country, and of our contingency plans for fighting an outbreak of foot and mouth. Other reports also contributed to the lessons learned from the 1967–68 epidemic, such as the "Origins of the 1967–68 Foot-and-Mouth Disease Epidemic", by John Reid (Chief Veterinary Officer), 7 February 1968; and the internal Ministry of Defence report on the foot and mouth outbreak 1967–68 in Western Command.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the details of every foot and mouth disease pyre and burial site in Cumbria. [2752]

Mr. Morley: Information on pyre and burial sites in Cumbria is being collected as part of a wider exercise relating to the whole of Great Britain. The location of all of these sites will be published once the information has been collated, cross-checked and validated.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations the Government have received regarding the efficacy of vaccination in efforts to eradicate foot and mouth disease. [2580]

Mr. Morley: The Government and the Department have received representations from a broad cross-section of interested parties, both for and against vaccination, all of which have been carefully considered. The Government have made clear that they consider vaccination to be an option to keep under review as the outbreak develops.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many foot and mouth blood samples are awaiting processing at Pirbright; and what is the time from submission from the farm to confirmed result. [2738]

Mr. Morley: As of Friday 6 July 2001 there were approximately 30,000 sera awaiting test. The time between the receipt of samples at the Pirbright laboratory and the submission of confirmed results to DEFRA depends upon the initial result and whether secondary testing is required. Over 40 per cent. of samples were being reported within seven days of receipt.

Testing is also taking place at the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research at Porton Down and the VLA laboratory at Penrith.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of ring vaccination as an eradication policy for foot and mouth disease. [2575]

Mr. Morley: Vaccination against foot and mouth disease remains an option that is kept under continuous review. Ring vaccination is one possible approach, which aims to control the spread of infection within and outside an infected area. It reduces the amount of virus circulating in the area, as the vaccinated animals will be less infectious.

We did not ring vaccinate at the start of the outbreak because it was apparent that the virus had potentially been spread across a wide area, due to the large number of movements that had taken place before the first case of foot and mouth disease was identified. This made ring vaccination an impractical option.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many premises that were confirmed as being infected with foot and mouth have subsequently received negative results from blood tests. [2568]

Mr. Morley: As at 8 July, 382 infected premises in Great Britain gave a negative result when tested for foot and mouth disease in the laboratory. A negative test result does not necessarily mean that the premises was free from the disease. For instance, if the disease is old the virus may not be present in the sample collected, and blood tests from newly infected animals may not give a positive reaction to the laboratory test as antibodies may not yet be present.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many farms in *(a)* England and *(b)* Cumbria livestock have been slaughtered as a result of classification as (i) infected premises (ii) dangerous contacts, (iii) slaughter on suspicion and (iv) contiguous. [2565]

Mr. Morley: As at 5 July the numbers of premises where livestock had been slaughtered are detailed in the table.

Premises status	*England (inc. Cumbria)*	*Cumbria*
Infected Premises	1,527	772
Dangerous Contact—Contiguous Premises	2,209	415
Dangerous Contact—Non Contiguous Premises	1,898	[1]1,005
Slaughter on Suspicion	169	30
Total	5,803	2,222

[1] Includes premises slaughtered out as part of the 3 km cull

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many infected premises in each county of *(a)* England and *(b)* Scotland tested negative in the laboratory. [2803]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the number of infected premises (IPs) in each county of England and Scotland which gave negative laboratory test results.

County	*Total*
Avon	4
Cheshire	9
Cleveland	1
Cornwall	1
Cumbria	76
Derbyshire	1
Devonshire	44
Dumfriesshire	39
Durham	20
Essex	1
Gloucestershire	33
Hereford and Worcester	34
Kent	3
Kircudbright	7
Lancashire	7
Leicestershire	2
North Yorkshire	7
Northumberland	14
Roxburgh	2
Shropshire	3
Somerset	2
Staffordshire	19
Tyne and Wear	1
Wigtown	11
Wiltshire	1
Grand Total	342

A negative test result does not necessarily mean that the premises was free from disease. For instance, if the disease is old the virus may not be present in the sample collected, and blood tests from newly infected animals may not give a positive reaction to the laboratory test as antibodies may not yet be present.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to allow vaccination, rather than slaughter, where farmers and stockholders request it for those animals suspected of suffering from foot and mouth disease. [3082]

Mr. Morley: Our priority is to eradicate the disease and so policy decisions will be based on the expert veterinary and scientific advice on the best way to achieve this. Vaccination protects animals from infection, and so would not be used for animals that are already infected with foot and mouth disease. The policy remains to slaughter animals which are infected, suspected of being infected or which have been exposed to infection.

Any steps to vaccinate need to be undertaken with full consideration of all the implications for the disease, the handling and control of vaccinated animals and products, and wide implications for the EU's 'foot and mouth disease-free, without vaccination' status. A decision to vaccinate against foot and mouth disease must, therefore, be taken at national level and take into account the views and wishes of all interested parties that would be affected by a vaccination programme.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of ring vaccination for animals suspected of suffering from foot and mouth disease. [3075]

Mr. Morley: We would not vaccinate an animal against foot and mouth disease if it were suspected to be already carrying the virus.

Ring vaccination is best deployed where one is confident that the size of an infected area is relatively small and the virus has not already spread beyond it, since the aim of ring vaccination is to control the spread of infection within and outside the infected area. We did not ring vaccinate at the start of the outbreak because it was apparent that the virus had potentially been spread across a wide area, due to the large number of movements that had taken place before the first case of foot and mouth disease was identified. This made ring vaccination an impractical option.

Vaccination remains an option, and is being continuously reassessed against changing circumstances and knowledge about the current outbreak.

Throckmorton Airfield

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the risk assessment made prior to the establishment of a mass burial site at Throckmorton airfield in Worcestershire; and what amendments have since been made to that assessment. [2002]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2001]:* The Environment Agency conducted a preliminary desktop study of Throckmorton airfield in order to assess its suitability as a burial site for animal carcases. The study included a risk assessment of the geological, hydrogeological and hydrological conditions at the airfield. This assessment was followed up by a full quantitative risk assessment by the agency using site-specific data gained from the site construction phase. The site was shown to be acceptable using the approved methodology.

The contractors, Halcrows, are currently doing additional site investigation and monitoring, and they will further update the risk assessment following this work. Both the qualitative desktop study and quantitative risk assessment are held on the public register at the district Environment Agency office in Riversmeet, Tewkesbury, together with a note referring to the additional work.

Hall Burn

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the purpose of the building being erected at the Hall Burn site at Longtown, Cumbria. [2754]

Mr. Morley: No permanent buildings are being erected at the Hall Burn site although a number of temporary modular buildings (i.e. portacabins) were erected on the site before May. These are used for office accommodation, crew rooms, toilets, and showers.

Green Ministers

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to monitor *(a)* the role of Green Ministers and *(b)* integration of the environment and sustainable development; and if she will make a statement. [4003]

Mr. Meacher: As chair of the Cabinet Sub-Committee of Green Ministers, I will monitor the role of Green Ministers and integration of the environment and sustainable development. The Committee will report to ENV as necessary. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is a member of ENV.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs where responsibility lies for co-ordination of the role of Green Ministers; and if she will make a statement. [4002]

Mr. Meacher: As a Cabinet Sub-Committee the terms of reference for ENV(G) are set by the Prime Minister and it is for me to co-ordinate the role including a work programme.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date a Green Minister was first appointed in her Department; when subsequent appointments were made; and if she will make a statement. [3974]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to answer this question on behalf of the Government. The Green Ministers Committee has undergone three phases since its inception. A Green Minister in every Government Department was first appointed following the 'This Common Inheritance' White Paper in 1990.

Following the recent establishment of the Green Ministers Committee as a Cabinet Sub-Committee, ENV(G), its membership is as follows:

Minister of State (Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Chair)

Solicitor-General

Financial Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Minister of State (Rural Affairs), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Minister of State, Scotland Office

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Wales Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the terms of reference for the role of the Green Minister in *(a)* her own Department and *(b)* in other Departments; and if she will make a statement. [3985]

Mr. Meacher: In this Parliament the Green Ministers Committee has been reconstituted as the Cabinet Sub-Committee of Green Ministers, ENV(G). It is for the Prime Minister to set the terms of reference for Cabinet Committees. ENV(G)'s terms of reference are:

"to consider the impact on sustainable development of government policies; to improve the performance of Departments in contributing to sustainable development; and to report as necessary to ENV Committee".

WORK AND PENSIONS

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer, net

of savings on means-tested benefits, of increasing the rate of Invalid Care Allowance to the level of the basic State Pension. [1460]

Maria Eagle: The estimated additional cost of this change would be £650 million in 2001–02 (cost net of savings on Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit would be £340 million). However, this change would only benefit carers not in receipt of Income Support (IS) or where the increase is greater than the current value of their IS. 230,000 people would see an increase in their net income.

In April 2001 the Carer Premium paid through Income Related Benefits was increased by an extra £10 per week and the Invalid Care Allowance (ICA) Earnings Limit was increased by £22 per week. We intend to legislate to extend ICA to people aged 65 or over and to enable ICA to continue for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for. These changes will help an estimated 300,000 carers at a cost of more than £500 million over three years.

Notes:

1. Estimate is rounded to the nearest £10 million

2. The gross ICA cost is based on the forecast ICA caseload for 2001–02.

3. The income-related benefit offsets have been calculated from data taken from the November 2000 5 per cent. scan of the Income Support computer system, and the May 1999 1 per cent. sample of HB/CTB claims. These offsets have been applied to the 2001–02 ICA forecast to obtain the savings in the income-related benefits.

4. The estimate assumes that the basic rate of ICA will be increased to the level of the category A Retirement Pension, and that there would be no changes made to the dependency increases in ICA.

5. The costing allows for the £5 increase in Retirement Pension in 2001–02.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the last Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2000 was paid. [2265]

Mr. McCartney: This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. David Willetts, dated 11 July 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when the last winter fuel payment for Winter 2000 was paid.

Our records show that the vast majority of Winter 2000 payments were paid automatically before Christmas 2000. However, to allow for payments to be made to customers claiming up to 31 March 2001, the last main tranche of payments for Winter 2000 was processed between 15 and 23 June. These customers should have received their payment within two weeks of processing.

Winter fuel payments for Winter 2000 continue to be processed for late claims, appeals and cases with other outstanding issues. Payments will be ongoing until these claims are cleared.

BASIS

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff the Benefits Agency Security Investigations Service has employed in each area for each of the past 12 months; what is the full complement of staff at each BASIS office; how many of these posts are vacant; and how many staff at each area office have been with BASIS for 12 months or more. [2260]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the tables.

The Counter Fraud Investigation Branch is committed to bringing staffing up to full strength in the next quarter and is currently recruiting.

BASIS staff employed in each area for the past 12 months

	2000								2001				
Teams	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*
Hinchley Wood	60	60	58	58	58	55	55	53	52	53	53	53	56
Canons Park	44	45	46	47	47	49	48	48	50	50	50	46	45
Birmingham	19	21	20	19	20	20	19	19	22	19	20	20	20
Nottingham	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	18	18	18	18	18
Leeds	19	19	19	18	18	20	20	21	21	21	21	21	22
Manchester	18	18	18	17	21	19	19	20	20	20	20	21	21
Cardiff	15	15	16	15	15	15	16	17	17	18	17	15	15
Liverpool	17	17	18	18	18	18	19	19	20	20	20	20	20
Newcastle	17	17	17	19	19	19	19	19	19	21	21	22	21
Glasgow	21	21	18	18	18	21	19	19	19	19	19	18	18
Total	247	250	247	246	251	253	251	252	258	259	259	254	256

Complement of BASIS staff at each office and vacant posts

BASIS teams	*Complement of staff*	*Vacancies declared*
Hinchley Wood	69	13
Canons Park	69	24
Birmingham	21	1
Nottingham	21	3
Leeds	21	0
Manchester	21	0
Cardiff	21	6
Liverpool	21	1
Newcastle	21	0
Glasgow	21	3

Number of staff employed within BASIS for 12 months or more

BASIS teams	*Number of staff*
Hinchley Wood	42
Canons Park	34
Birmingham	14
Nottingham	18
Leeds	18
Manchester	14
Cardiff	12
Liverpool	14
Newcastle	12
Glasgow	14

Notes:

1. These figures include both administrative and investigative staff employed by BASIS.
2. Figures above as of May 2001.

New Deal

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Dudley, North are in the New Deal programme; and how many had been placed in employment under the new deal up to the end of June. [2564]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

	Numbers currently on new deals as at April 2001	*Jobs gained to April 2001*
New Deal for Young People	197	547
New Deal for Long Term Unemployed aged 25+	275	148
New Deal for Lone Parents	119	153
New Deal 50+: Employment Credit	31	85

Notes:

1. Figures related to Dudley, North parliamentary constituency.
2. Latest figures relate to the period ending April 2001 which were reported in the June Statistical Release for New Deal for Young People/25+ and July Statistical Release for New Deal for Lone Parents.
3. New Deal 50+ figures related to clients claiming for employment credit only. Figures relating to the numbers on the New Deal 50+ case load are not available.
4. Jobs gained includes those who gain a job while accessing new deal or as an immediate destination on leaving the programme.
5. Detailed constituency figures for the New Deal for Young People are available monthly from the Library.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Uxbridge constituency are in the New Deal programme; and how many had been placed in employment by the end of March. [2825]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

	Numbers currently on new deals as at end April 2001	*Jobs gained to April 2001*
New Deal for Young People	35	170
New Deal for Long Term Unemployed aged 25+	36	46
New Deal for Lone Parents	95	104
New Deal 50+: Employment Credit	10	12

Notes:

1. Figures relate to Uxbridge parliamentary constituency.
2. Latest figures relate to the period ending April 2001 which were reported in the June Statistical Release for New Deal for Young People/25+ and July Statistical Release for New Deal for Lone Parents.
3. New Deal 50+ figures relate to clients claiming for employment credit only. Figures relating to the numbers on the New Deal 50+ case load are not available.
4. Jobs gained includes those who gain a job while accessing new deal or as an immediate destination on leaving the programme.
5. Detailed constituency figures for the New Deal for Young People are available monthly from the Library.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Pension Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate, on the basis of the proposals and assumptions in the pension credit consultation paper, how many claimants of pension credit there will be in each region and nation; what proportion of the total number of pensioners the beneficiaries are likely to be; and how many are likely to be claimants of housing benefit and/or council tax benefit; [3625]

(2) to which other benefits the proposed pension credit will be a passport. [3626]

Mr. McCartney: The pension credit forms a key part of the Government's overall strategy for tackling pensioner poverty.

We are completing the design of the pension credit and will publish details of our proposals when the Bill is introduced.

Household Incomes

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the latest figures on Households Below Average Incomes to be published; and if he will make a statement. [4583]

Mr. Darling: Today I have published Households Below Average Income for 1994–95 to 1999–2000. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The report shows the position during the financial year 1999–2000. Consequently, it does not reflect the full impact of all policies or the changes introduced since—for instance the significant increases made to Working Families Tax Credit and Income Support child rates in Budget 2000, the Children's Tax Credit or enhancements to the Minimum Income Guarantee.

However the report shows encouraging signs that Government anti-poverty measures are beginning to work. There is a real downward trend in child poverty with 300,000 fewer children living in income poverty in 1999–2000 compared with 1996–97 and there are encouraging signs of improvement in pensioner incomes with the figures suggesting 100,000 fewer in poverty.

It shows that all groups have shared a significant growth in income, there has been a large fall in the numbers below absolute low-income thresholds and the tide has been turned in the long-term trend of rising relative income poverty for children.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism (Foot and Mouth)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received and what measures she has taken to ensure that the tourist coach industry is compensated following the effects of foot and mouth disease on the tourist industry; and if she will make a statement. [29]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has received representations from the chairman of the Coach Tourism Council and a managing director of a north-east of England coach company. It is

the long-standing policy of successive Governments not to offer compensation for consequential losses associated with animal disease outbreaks. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is closely monitoring the effectiveness of the financial assistance measures made available by Government to rural businesses, which is worth over £250 million. This package includes £50 million allocated to the Rural Business Recovery Fund, substantial hardship rate relief and £120 million available in loans under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme. Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue will also agree to the deferral of tax or national insurance contributions where a business is in serious financial difficulty. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has provided an additional £3.8 million to the English Tourism Council to get the message across that there is plenty for the public to do in the countryside, and £14.2 million to the British Tourist Authority to rebuild confidence in Britain as a tourism destination in our key overseas markets.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the economic impact of foot and mouth disease on the tourist industry in each of the Regional Tourist Board areas. [2096]

Tessa Jowell: Our best estimate to date is that the loss of revenue in 2001–02 by the English tourist industry is likely to be around £120 million per week averaged over the eight-month tourism season. We are currently updating the assessment on which this is based in the light of the latest available data, including regional estimates made by individual regional tourist boards (these are not prepared on a consistent basis and so cannot simply be aggregated). We have not attempted to apportion the overall estimates to the individual regional tourist board areas, since the available data do not enable this to be done with a sufficient degree of reliability.

The National Lottery

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the administrative costs as a percentage of National Lottery income for each of the National Lottery distributing bodies in the most recent year for which figures are available. [88]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* The following table shows administration costs as a percentage of income for the lottery distributing bodies in 1999–2000, the most recent year for which published accounts are available.

Distributing body	*Administration costs as a percentage of income*
Arts Council of England	11.43
Scottish Arts Council	8.07
Arts Council of Wales	10.17
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	7.43
Sport England	7.40
Sportscotland	8.09
Sports Council for Wales	5.56
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	8.98
UK Sport	4.39
Heritage Lottery Fund	4.84
Community Fund	9.46
Millennium Commission	3.92
New Opportunities Fund	4.53

British Archaeology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the implications of article 3 of the Treaty of Valetta for British archaeology, following the UK becoming a signatory to the treaty. [2221]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 July 2001]:* It is for each Government to apply the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (known as the Valetta Convention) in ways that fit in with national practice and legislation. In broad terms, current measures in place in the UK already meet the convention's requirements. The Government do not believe that additional legislation, requiring a licensing system, is necessary to fulfil article 3. Much archaeological work is already controlled through existing mechanisms. There may be scope for developing a voluntary code of conduct for those who wish to undertake archaeological work outside the existing systems of control.

Football World Cup

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to ensure that every match in the football World Cup finals in 2002 is available for live free-to-air transmission. [3633]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 July 2001]:* The whole of the World Cup finals tournament is a listed event under part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. Under that legislation, the Independent Television Commission will ensure that a non-free-to-air broadcaster—or a free-to-air broadcaster which covers less than 95 per cent. of the population—can show any part of the tournament live only if a free-to-air broadcaster with at least 95 per cent. coverage has either acquired similar rights, or been given the opportunity to do so on fair and reasonable terms.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she plans to hold with her counterparts in the Council of Ministers about the Kirsch 2002 football World Cup contract. [3634]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 July 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no current plans to discuss this matter with her counterparts in the Council of Ministers.

Digital Radio (BBC)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to refuse applications for new BBC digital radio channels unless they are based on formats clearly distinct from existing digital radio channels. [3568]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 July 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will assess all the proposed new BBC digital radio services against the criteria set out in the public service approvals guidelines. These include the distinctiveness (in programming and content) of the proposed BBC service from those provided by other broadcasters.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the extent to which the BBC's application for a digital radio channel Network Z is based on a format clearly distinct from the existing channel, Oneword. [3570]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 July 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently assessing the BBC's application against the published public service approval guidelines. In reaching a decision she will take into account all the comments she has received during the consultation period, including those from Oneword.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she will make of *(a)* the intended target audience of and *(b)* the distinctiveness of programmes proposed by Network Z in reaching a decision on it. [3762]

Dr. Howells: The criteria against which the Secretary of State will make her decision on the BBC proposals for new digital services, including Network Z, are set out in the published public service approvals guidelines. In reaching a decision, she will consider all the comments made to her during the consultation period.

Indemnities (Art Collections)

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many indemnity undertakings were given under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980 for the six-month period ended 31 March; and what the value was of *(a)* any contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time under that section which remain outstanding as at 31 March, *(b)* non-statutory Government indemnities in respect of loans handled by the Government Art Collection which remain outstanding as at 31 March and *(c)* non-statutory undertakings to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection which remain outstanding at 31 March. [4527]

Tessa Jowell: The provision for the Government Indemnity Scheme is made by the National Heritage Act 1980. The scheme facilitates public access to loans of works of art and other objects for public display made to museums, galleries and other such institutions by private owners and non-national institutions. It does this by indemnifying lenders against loss or damage to their loan. Loans covered by the scheme must be for public benefit. The scheme also covers loans of such objects for study purposes within borrowing institutions where this would contribute materially to the public's understanding or appreciation of the loan. Examples of this are enhancing interpretation or explanation to the public of objects or bringing into the public domain, the conclusions of any study.

In the six-month period ended 31 March 2001, the following undertakings to indemnify were given under section 16 by the relevant Departments for objects on loan to national and non-national institutions:

	Number
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	647
Scottish Executive Education Department	178
The National Assembly for Wales	72

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of undertakings given at any time under section 16 and which remained outstanding as at 31 March is:

	£
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	2,041,341,918
Scottish Executive Education Department	444,818,689
The National Assembly for Wales	74,198,187

The value of non-statutory Government indemnities to cover loans handled by the Government Art Collection and which remained outstanding as at 31 March is:

Value: £6,475,000.

The value of non-statutory undertakings given to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection and which remained outstanding as at 31 March is:

Value: £180,225,170.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Performance Indicators

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for reviewing key performance indicators for policing following Merseyside police's reorganisation of neighbourhood policing; and if he will make a statement. [2116]

Mr. Denham: We are currently considering the views of the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Association of Police Authorities on possible changes to police best value performance indicators. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will then publish a consultation document on all best value performance indicators and the performance indicators for 2002–03 will be set on the basis of that exercise. The suite of performance indicators for policing will be kept under review to ensure that it is consistent with the outcome of the police reform programme.

Prison Overcrowding

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners were held in overcrowded accommodation in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [2467]

Beverley Hughes: The number of prisoners held in overcrowded accommodation expressed as a percentage of the average population during 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is given in the table. There is no comparable overcrowding data for 1996–97.

Year	*Percentage of overcrowding*
1999–2000	20.0
2000–01	17.5

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce overcrowding in prisons; by what date he expects overcrowding to end; and if he will make a statement. [1512]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The prison population on 29 June 2001 was 66,736. This was 4,305 below the total certified operational capacity of 71,041 for the same day. The Government set no target for the prison population as it is for the courts to determine who is sent to prison. The Government will provide the places necessary to accommodate safely and securely those sentenced by the courts. New prison capacity is opening this year. Rye Hill, a 600 place prison near Rugby, opened in January 2001 and Dovegate, an

800 place prison in Staffordshire, will open on 9 July 2001. The 2000 spending review also provides funding to increase capacity by a further 2,660 by 2004.

London Underground

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last travelled on the London Underground in the course of his official duties. [3676]

Mr. Blunkett: I have not yet travelled on the London Underground for official duties in the five weeks that I have held the post of Home Secretary.

Drug Use

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his most recent estimate is of the progress made in achieving the illegal drugs use reduction targets in the Government's 10-year strategy. [2385]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 July 2001]:* The Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator's annual report for 1999–2000 shows that we are making progress towards achieving the challenging targets we have set as part of our 10-year anti-drugs strategy. Most of our annual targets were met in full. We are on track to deliver published targets for 2002. We recognise the particular importance of tackling the problem at the local level and that there is more to do.

Imutran Limited

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the review by the Chief Inspector of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate of Compliance by Imutran Limited with the authorities granted under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 for its xenotransplantation research; and if he will make a statement. [4420]

Angela Eagle: I have today published a report on the routine review of compliance with the authorities issued to Imutran Ltd. prepared by the Chief Inspector of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate and placed copies in the Library.

The Chief Inspector's findings confirm that the level of compliance was generally good. He has, however, also identified five instances of non-compliance. Three of these were already known to the Home Office and were dealt with in 1997.

One of the newly identified infringements was essentially technical and no unnecessary animal suffering resulted. In the other case there is evidence that animals experienced unnecessary suffering because of delay in implementing the agreed humane end-point for the procedure applied to them. In mitigation, the clinicians' decisions were based upon clinical judgment rather than undisputed or unambiguous facts and the Chief Inspector's view is that the decisions taken by those concerned do not indicate any fundamental disregard for the welfare of the animals. Both infringements will be dealt by means of letters of admonishment to those responsible, none of whom is currently resident or working in the United Kingdom.

The Imutran licences were revoked in July 2000 following a decision by its parent company to close Imutran Ltd. and transfer its technology to a new company in North America.